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I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Kristie Anne Kemper entitled "The Search for a Political Theory in the Fiction of Herman Melville." I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in English.

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THE SEARCH FOR A POLITICAL THEORY IN THE FICTION OF HERMAN MELVILLE

A Dissertation

Presented for the

Doctor of Philosophy

Degree

The University of Tennessee

Kristie Anne Kemper

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ABSTRACT

Throughout his fiction, from Typee to Billy Budd, Herman Melville examined various methods of political organization, searching always for the best form of government possible to man. Using the device of the ship microcosm, direct depiction of political issues, and allegory, Melville analyzed traditional monarchy and American democracy, and in Moby-Dick and Billy Budd he examined other forms political states might take in the modern world. Melville objectively explored the various features of the political systems he scrutinized, so that instead of projecting a formalized political philosophy, his fictional works suggest an ongoing exploration of political alternatives. But if the question of the best form of government is not resolved in Melville's fiction, its criteria are established since he judges every political system in terms of its effect on the life of the average man and with respect to the ideals of freedom and equality inherent in the American dream.

The real significance of an awareness of the political elements of Melville's fiction is the contribution such an awareness can make to a clearer understanding both of individual works and of their relation to each other. For example, a recognition that the circumstances on the Pequod greatly resemble the conditions found in a totalitarian political system leads to a fuller comprehension of Ahab and his actions and his relationship with the mates and crew in Moby-Dick. And while the political perspective is only one of the many valid approaches that can be taken to Melville's fiction--a comprehensive view of his work

necessarily involves a recognition of its complexity in several realms--Melville's search for the best political theory that can be instituted by man provides a unifying theme for his fictional works.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	INTRODUCTION	1
II.	MELVILLE AND POLITICS	10
III.	FROM THE BEGINNING TO MONARCHY: *TYPEE*, *OMOO*, *MARDI*, AND *WHITE-JACKET*	39
IV.	TOTALITARIANISM: *MOBY-DICK*	70
V.	AMERICAN DEMOCRACY: THE DREAM AND THE REALITY	93
	Mardi (1849)	99
	Redburn (1849)	110
	Pierre (1852)	119
	Israel Potter (1855)	131
	Stories (1853-1856)	140
	The Confidence-Man (1857)	181
	An Overview	193
VI.	POLITICAL STABILITY AND THE RIGHTS OF MAN, A FINAL VIEW: *BILLY BUDD, SAILOR*	194
VII.	CONCLUSION	206
BIBLIOGRAPHY		211
VITA		227

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

It is a common practice to describe the fiction (or at least the major works) of Herman Melville in terms of a search. This concept is used not only to refer to the quests of individual characters but also to describe the overall method and theme of Melville's writing. It is also widely admitted that much of the ambiguity that shrouds and enriches the meaning of the search results from Melville's willingness to look honestly and openly at alternative ideas. Although the object of the quest is most often assigned religious, psychological, or metaphysical significance, it can also be given a political interpretation. After all, Melville's search, however it has been specifically defined, is in the fullest sense a search for truth--and truth has many sides.

Lionel Trilling has remarked that there is an "inevitable intimate, if not always obvious, connection between literature and politics" and that the literature of "the last century and a half" has been "characteristically political."[1] It is true, of course, that every writer is influenced by the society in which he lives and, consequently, by the political and cultural aspects of that society. Regardless of whether a writer accepts and approves of the social and

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[1]Lionel Trilling, "Preface," The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society (New York: The Viking Press, 1950), p. xii.

political system in which he finds himself or whether he rebels against it, his thoughts are still affected by it and "it provides him with a framework of thought and beliefs."[2]

Melville's concern with different kinds of political systems appears as early as his first novel, Typee, and continues throughout his fiction. His intense interest in how men could best preserve their individual integrity and yet relate to the larger human community led him beyond casual political allusions to an extended analysis of American democracy and a critical consideration of a number of other forms of government. In Mardi he carries his central character on a tour of several political states, including, through allegory, those of the mid-nineteenth-century world. And he early began to develop the treatment of ships as microcosms that culminated in the depiction of political states in White-Jacket, Moby-Dick, The Confidence-Man, and Billy Budd.

There have been a number of attempts to deal with the political elements in Melville's writing and many of these efforts will be referred to later in this study. Unfortunately, many of the political readings of Melville have been weakened either by disproportionate emphasis on the political concerns in his works or by an interpretation of Melville's political philosophy that unjustly imposes circumstances of the critic's own era or personal political convictions upon Melville. Leon Howard has pointed out, for instance, that

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[2]W. Witte, "The Sociological Approach to Literature," Modern Language Review, 36 (1941), 87.

> during the period between [the] two world wars, practically all [Melville's] admirers assumed that he was a social rebel. Usually they created in his name an image of what they themselves wanted to be.[3]

Howard also observes that after the second World War the tendency to view Melville as a rebel was replaced by a tendency to see him as "an emblem of the search for security."[4] And this process continues today as Melville is labeled socialist, liberal, or nihilist.

Some of the more interesting ideas that have been suggested by general considerations of the political and social side of Melville's writing deal with the effect it had on his literary form and reputation. For example, Perry Miller proposes that Melville's loss of popularity after his early novels, which he sees as occasioned partly by Melville's inability to resolve the philosophical conflicts in his works, was the result of "confusions" in American culture. He suggests that Melville was caught up in the sense of "befuddlement" that America faced in its search for an identity and that this cultural instability kept him from presenting a positive view of life--from successfully completing the quest--and thereby offering his readers reassurance instead of ambiguity.[5] Taking a slightly different view, Tyrus Hillway describes part of the reason for Melville's failing popularity among his contemporaries by observing that

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[3]Leon Howard, Herman Melville: A Biography (Berkeley: Univ. of Calif. Press, 1951), p. 340.

[4]Howard, p. 341.

[5]Perry Miller, The Raven and the Whale: The War of Words and Wits in the Era of Poe and Melville (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1956), p. 4.

> engrossed in political and economic expansion, the American public almost angrily rejected any suggestion that it should examine rationally the relation of the individual to the universe, especially when such an examination might weaken some established institutions of considerable popular influence.[6]

This study of Melville's fiction will examine his concern for the effect the political situation has on man and Melville's continuing search, through an analysis of various systems of government, for the best practical form of political organization. It will be found that Melville was very much interested in the sources and forms of authority and in the way political authority maintains order. But as might be expected, he was primarily concerned with the effect of any political system on the men involved in it.

It is not the purpose of this study to reconstruct Melville's personal political philosophy from what is said in his writing or to attempt to establish his affinity with a particular body of political thought. The aim rather is to offer another perspective from which to view his works. This is primarily a literary study and while some consideration will be given to the overall implications of Melville's approach to political issues, the emphasis will be on the ways in which an awareness of the political element in his writing can aid in the interpretation of individual works and in the understanding of their relation to each other and to Melville's fiction in general. It has been found, for example, that some of the most elusive and diversely construed sections of Melville's writing become coherent and integral parts of a work when the political side of it is examined.

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[6] Tyrus Hillway, "A Preface to Moby-Dick," in Moby-Dick Centennial Essays, eds. Tyrus Hillway and Luther S. Mansfield (Dallas: Southern Methodist Univ. Press, 1953), pp. 27-28.

In addition, this study is neither a source hunt nor a discussion of all politically related historical and topical allusions in Melville's fiction. The main concern here is with what is actually depicted in the stories and novels, and only in special cases will attention be given to changes Melville may have made in his source material, whether personal or literary. It has been clearly established that Melville freely altered his sources to fit his artistic requirements so that what is left unchanged represents as significant a creative decision as what is altered. As William Gilman says, Melville "never lost the artistic habit of allowing his imagination free play with the materials that stimulated it and of representing truth without being harnessed to fact."[7] Historical allusions having a political basis and references to contemporary politics will be mentioned and explained only when they have a significant relation to the total meaning of a work or when they relate to Melville's search for the best political system possible.

Since this is a study of literature and not of historical or political phenomena except as they can illuminate literary concerns, the use of technical terms often found in descriptions of political systems will be kept to a minimum. In most cases the words used in discussing the political systems, such as "state," for example, will retain their customary layman's meanings; when it is necessary to use such words in a special sense or to use other technical terms, they will be defined. Because of the extensive use to be made of the terms

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[7]William H. Gilman, Melville's Early Life and Redburn (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1951), p. 115.

"political" and "social," it might be good to make an initial distinction between them here. In general "political" will be used to refer to the relationship between the individual and the state and its government and "social" to refer to the relationship of individuals to each other and to the community of which they are a part. Since decisions of a government, which are authoritative within the region of the sovereign state and may be legitimately carried out by force, apply universally to the entire population of a given society, the nature of individual relationships or community life in the social plane may be altered by political policy and social problems thus alleviated or made worse. Therefore a full analysis of any political system must include an examination of its effect on social conditions, and if the system being considered is a democratic republic which draws its authority from the people and is theoretically committed to improving the social opportunities of the individual, the interaction between the social and political realms is doubly significant.[8]

Ralph Henry Gabriel has observed that "every person faces as a condition of conscious life two questions: first, what is the desirable relation of the individual to the society of which he is a part; second, what is his relation to the mystery that envelops him."[9] Though this study will concentrate on Melville's response to the first question and on his interest in what political system is most capable

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[8]See Lindsay Rogers, "Politics," Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences (New York: Macmillan, 1934), p. 224; and "Social Systems," "Political System," and "Democracy," in Jack C. Plano et al, Political Science Dictionary (Hinsdale, Ill.: Dryden Press, 1973).

[9]Ralph Henry Gabriel, The Course of American Democratic Thought, 2nd ed. (New York: The Ronald Press Co., 1956), p. vi.

of bringing out the best in man, it should be remembered that this is only one element in the fabric of Melville's fiction. In fact, as Gabriel suggests, the attempt to understand man's place in a social or political system cannot be separated from "philosophical and religious attempts to explain the meaning and significance of life."[10] Man's view of his place in the universal scheme will always influence the values around which he organizes his temporal existence. On the other hand, a totally metaphysical view of life or literature ignores some of the most basic concerns of man. It is hoped that an examination of Melville's fiction from the political standpoint can help establish the full dimension of his work by identifying another strand of its complexity.

In his quest for the ideal order Melville was not alone. The Utopian communities established in the nineteenth century are well known, and A. N. Kaul has observed that American novelists "shared the general feeling that America was the land of social experimentation."[11] Since America was a relatively young nation, it was felt that major changes were still possible, and American writers were concerned with working out a system that would insure both individual rights and community brotherhood.[12] The conflict between real society and the social ideal was a source of tension in a number of novels as

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[10]Gabriel, p. vi.

[11]A. N. Kaul, The American Vision: Actual and Ideal Society in Nineteenth-Century Fiction (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1963), p. 5.

[12]Kaul, pp. 13-14.

the writers transcended existing systems in their search for a better way of life.[13] The novelists tended to think "in terms of radical substitutes rather than localized improvements," and their books contain both "ideas of total overhauling and intimations of ideal community life"; in this sense they were "visionaries rather than reformers."[14] Kaul comments that while Melville's work is usually not as obviously concerned with contemporary social issues as that of some writers, "it presents, perhaps for that very reason, subtler and more abiding exploration of the very basis of social life and values."[15]

Although Melville is not ordinarily considered a political novelist, since only in Mardi and Israel Potter were political figures and issues made conspicuously major concerns in his books, it is significant that the method of the political novelist is similar to that often perceived in Melville's works:

> Because it exposes the impersonal claims of ideology to the pressures of private emotion, the political novel must always be in a state of internal warfare, always on the verge of becoming something other than itself. The political novelist--the degree to which he is aware of this is another problem--establishes a complex system of intellectual movements, in which his own opinion is one of the most active yet not entirely dominating movers. Are we not close here to one of the "secrets" of the novel in general?--I mean the vast respect which the great novelist is ready to offer to the whole idea of opposition, the opposition he needs to allow for in his book against his own predispositions and yearnings and fantasies. He knows that his own momentum, his own intentions, can be set loose easily enough; but he senses, as well, that what matters most of all is to allow for those rocks against which his intentions may smash but, if he is lucky, they may merely bruise. Even as the great writer proudly affirms the autonomy of his imagination, even as he makes the most severe claims for his power of imposing his

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[13] Kaul, pp. 4-5, 311-12.

[14] Kaul, p. 53.

[15] Kaul, p. 1.

> will upon the unformed materials his imagination has brought up to him, he yet acknowledges that he must pit himself against the imperious presence of the necessary.[16]

It was along this rocky course of "the necessary" that Melville's search for the best political order made its way. And always as he examined nineteenth-century America or analyzed other ways the political state might be organized, Melville never forced an easy truth. As Hawthorne discovered, and as Melville's readers continue to discover from his books, Melville was too honest to stop searching and too courageous to ignore man's alternative choices.[17] The search for a political system is only one part of Melville's fictional concern, but it is a significant part. Richard Chase says, "Melville . . . . knew that moral truth must be sought in many ways."[18] The purpose of this study is to examine one of those ways.

Since an awareness of the external evidence of Melville's interest in politics and of his involvement with the contemporary political scene provides a useful perspective from which to begin the examination of his fictional treatment of political concerns, the biographical material available on this subject will be considered first.

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[16] Irving Howe, Politics and the Novel (1957; rpt. New York: The World Publishing Co., 1964), pp. 22-23.

[17] Nathaniel Hawthorne, The English Notebooks, ed. Randall Stewart (1941; reissued New York: Russell & Russell, Inc., 1962), pp. 432-33.

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

CHAPTER II

MELVILLE AND POLITICS

To an inquiry from Attorney General Caleb Cushing concerning Melville's suitability for a political appointment under the Pierce administration, Phineas Allen, Jr., publisher of the Pittsfield Sun,[1] replied:

> I would say . . . that Mr. Herman Melvill has not taken any part in politics since his residence in Pittsfield, and I believe has not attended the polls. I am not aware that he has made any public expression of his political opinions.[2]

Edwin L. Croswell, editor of the Albany Argus, countered by assuring Cushing that "Herman has always been a firm Democrat,"[3] and Melville's sister Augusta observed that while "Herman has never been a politician, ... he belongs to a Democratic family, & one which has done much for its party, & receive [sic] little from it."[4] In recalling the Pittsfield years, Colonel Richard Lathers wrote that he had often visited Melville and listened to "his highly individual views of society and politics."[5] Probably H. W. Bishop's assessment of Melville's political situation, in a letter recommending him for the consulate at Honolulu, came closest to an accurate appraisal:

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[1] Howard, p. 204.

[2] Jay Leyda, The Melville Log: A Documentary Life of Herman Melville, 1819-1891 (1951; rpt., with additional material, New York: Gordian Press, 1969), I, 471.

[3] Howard, p. 204.

[4] Leyda, II, 567-68.

[5] Raymond M. Weaver, Herman Melville: Mariner and Mystic (1921; rpt. New York: Cooper Square Publishers, Inc., 1968), p. 308.

> He belongs to one of the oldest and most distinguished democratic families of this state. With us the name of Melville is associated with early republicanism & Jeffersonian doctrines. What his political views now are, I hardly know. His literary tastes & habits have withdrawn him from party controversies.[6]

Melville, of course, was not a politician but an author, and, with a few notable exceptions, his concern with man's place in the universe and society transcended the strictly partisan level. There is, however, evidence that he was interested in contemporary political issues, and he was associated in various ways with political activity.

In the first place Melville was the descendant of patriots who had been connected with the affairs of the United States since its inception. Both his grandfathers were involved in the revolution, Thomas Melvill taking part in the Boston Tea Party and being commissioned a major in the war[7] and Colonel, later General, Peter Gansevoort receiving a letter of commendation from the Continental Congress in recognition of his role in keeping Burgoyne from being reinforced before the Battle of Saratoga.[8] Thomas Melvill was later made Fire Warden of Boston, and in 1789 he became Naval Officer of the port of Boston.[9] In addition Melville's great-uncle Leonard Gansevoort was a member of Congress from 1787 to 1788.[10] A slightly

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[6]Leyda, I, 473-74.

[7]Geoffrey Stone, Melville (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1949), p. 13; also see Howard, p. 4.

[8]Howard, p. 33.

[9]Stone, p. 13.

[10]Gilman, p. 177.

humorous example of the lingering pride Melville felt in his heritage appears in a letter he wrote to his mother in May 1870. He describes a visit to Gansevoort Hotel in New York during which he asked a clerk what "Gansevoort" meant. Being informed by a man who overhead the question that the name belonged to a rich family who used to own property in the area, Melville was somewhat disillusioned:

> The dense ignorance of this solemn gentleman,--his knowing nothing of the hero of Fort Stanwix, aroused such an indignation in my breast, that, disdaining to enlighten his benighted soul, I left the place without further colloquy. Repairing to the philosophic privacy of the District Office, I then moralized upon the instability of human glory and the evanescence of--many other things.[11]

Six years later, writing to Catherine Gansevoort Lansing, Melville approved the changing of the name of Stanwix Hall to Fort Stanwix Hotel because the latter was "genuine, historic, natural, and purely American."[12]

Melville's father, Allan Melvill, believed in maintaining a certain gentlemanly distance from political wrangling. For example, he informed Peter Gansevoort that though he would do what he could in private to support DeWitt Clinton for governor of New York, he would "still habitually avoid taking an open part in political warfare."[13] Nevertheless, Allan's acquaintance with distinguished political figures and his concern with domestic and foreign political issues probably made

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[11]Herman Melville, The Letters of Herman Melville, eds. Merrell R. Davis and William H. Gilman (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1960), p. 235. Hereafter cited as Letters.

[12]Letters, p. 248.

[13]Leyda, I, 19.

some impact on Melville, either at the time or in retrospect. In addition to DeWitt Clinton, Allan's political friends included Martin Van Buren, Daniel Webster, Smith Thompson, Secretary of the Navy under Monroe, and James Stevenson, mayor of Albany.[14] Allan tried to use his political influence after the election of Andrew Jackson, making a trip to Washington in an effort to secure his father's position as Officer of Boston Port.[15] When Major Melvill fell victim to the spoils system,[16] Allan fell out with Jackson. He wrote an angry letter to his father, saying that he could not consider Jackson "de facto President of my Country" and avowing that not only will he never forgive Jackson but that neither "shall my Children while they remember you & me."[17] Some of the opinions Allan expressed on current political issues have a noticeable resemblance to the views Melville was later to hold. For example, he referred to the introduction of slavery into the country as "a national misfortune" and hoped that it would not "prove the ruin of our rising empire."[18] And in a letter to Peter Gansevoort occasioned by the French Revolution of 1830, he brought up some of the considerations that were later to intrigue his son:

> I congratulate you in the glorious Revolution in France, & the triumph of the majesty of the People over the despotism

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[14]Gilman, p. 16.

[15]Leyda, I, 10.

[16]Howard, p. 4; Leyda, I, 37.

[17]Leyda, I, 37.

[18]Leyda, I, 7.

> of a Tyrant--it is a lesson which I think both Kingcraft & Priestcraft will long remember, & may not be altogether unavailable even to republican Rulers, for Men in Power are naturally prone to tyranny, & the people may be oppressed under any form of Government... . .[19]

Two other relatives whose interest and involvement in politics would have concerned Melville were his uncles Thomas Melvill, acting American consul in Paris during the reign of Napoleon Bonaparte and acquaintance of Lafayette and James Monroe,[20] and Peter Gansevoort, whose assistance was requested every time Melville (or his family for him) sought a political appointment. After he returned from France, Thomas Melvill held the rank of major during the War of 1812. He later served a term in the state legislature[21] and was fourth vice-president of the local Democratic organization in Pittsfield.[22] References to Thomas's activities within the Democratic party can be found in the Pittsfield Sun, and an item appearing on January 14, 1836, describes a "Democratic Party Supper" at which Thomas offered toasts to America's military prowess and the "memory of John Hancock and Samuel Adams."[23] Thomas also wrote a number of letters to the Sun, using the name Ben Austin, in which he carried on political debates and among other things "opposed the law of imprisonment for debt, . . . railed against lawyers or attacked members of the opposition party, and

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[19] Leyda, I, 45.

[20] Gilman, p. 65.

[21] Gilman, p. 66.

[22] Jeanne C. Howes, "Melville's Sensitive Years," in Melville & Hawthorne in the Berkshires: A Symposium, ed. Howard P. Vincent, Kent Studies in English, No. 7 (Kent, Ohio: Kent State Univ. Press, 1968), p. 26.

[23] Howes, pp. 26-27.

. . . . spoke out on the irregular and unjustifiable practices of banks."[24] As a member of the school committee, Thomas was active in trying to improve the common schools, and his influence probably helped Melville secure his teaching position in Pittsfield.[25] The common school concept was viewed as an essential part of a democratic society,[26] and it is sometimes suggested that it was his experience teaching in a common school that helped establish Melville's awareness of the frequent discrepancy between the theory and practice of American ideals.[27] When he moved to Illinois, seeking the prosperity that always eluded him, Thomas Melvill stayed active in politics, holding several civic offices in Galena.[28] Peter Gansevoort was a well-known Albany Democrat, who was elected to a number of state and local offices and nominated for others. He served as state senator from 1833 to 1836 and also as first judge of the County Court in Albany. In 1829 and 1843 he ran unsuccessfully for mayor.[29]

Of Melville's immediate family, it was his older brother who was to have the most spectacular, although brief, political career. Gansevoort Melville rose from president of the Young Men's Association's

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[24]Howes, p. 27.

[25]Howes, p. 28; Gilman, p. 84.

[26]See Howes, p. 29.

[27]Willard Thorp, Herman Melville: Representative Selections (New York: American Book Co., 1938), p. xvi.

[28]Howard, p. 36.

[29]Hershel Parker, "Gansevoort Melville's Role in the Campaign of 1844," New-York Historical Society Quarterly, 49 (1965), 147, 152.

debating society[30] to secretary of the American legation in England.[31]

Gansevoort made some speeches for the Democrats in the 1840 campaign, and in 1843 he began to be a leading voice in favor of the repeal of the union between Ireland and Great Britain. By seizing on an emotional issue that had supporters among both the Whigs and Democrats, Gansevoort soon established himself as a talented political orator.[32] He had ample opportunity to use his skills on a national level in the presidential campaign of 1844. When Polk, who favored the early annexation of Texas, won the Democratic nomination over ex-President Van Buren, who wanted to postpone annexation, Gansevoort headed a committee sent to invite Van Buren to speak in favor of Polk at a mass meeting of Democrats. The effort to unify the party was only partially successful, but although Van Buren refused to come in person, he gave Gansevoort a letter of qualified endorsement to read to the assembly. By dramatically presenting the letter in the midst of a very expansionist speech, Gansevoort minimized the dissension in the party,[33] and thereafter he was in great demand as a speaker who was both a mediator between party factions and an "emissary between

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[30]Leyda, I, 66.

[31]Howard, p. 94.

[32]See Hershel Parker, ed., "Introduction," Gansevoort Melville's 1846 London Journal and Letters from England, 1845 (New York: The New York Public Library, 1966), pp. 6-7; Parker, "Gansevoort," pp. 147-50; and Leyda, I, 160.

[33]See Parker, "Introduction," pp. 8-9; and Parker, "Gansevoort," p. 154.

Eastern and Western Democrats."[34] In June he was addressing an audience in City Hall Park in New York, praising Andrew Jackson (Allan Melvill's feud obviously did not descend to the second generation) and suggesting that as a follower in his footsteps Polk could appropriately be hailed as "Young Hickory."[35]

When Melville returned from duty on the United States, Gansevoort was making a tour through Tennessee, Kentucky, Ohio, and western New York, speaking on behalf of Polk and the admission of Texas.[36] While in Tennessee, Gansevoort visited Jackson at the Hermitage and spent some time at Polk's house.[37] Gansevoort's expansionist sentiments were very evident in his campaign activities, and in October he wrote Polk that the Texas issue should be stressed more heavily.[38] Later that month The Schenectady Reflector reviewed a speech in which Gansevoort had described England as "jealous" of American growth and revealed how she was "insidiously attempting to check" the "territorial extension" of the United States and to "increase her colonial possessions in America."[39]

Gansevoort's reward for his efforts in the campaign was late in coming even though he had recommendations from a number of

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[34]Parker, "Gansevoort," pp. 158, 146.

[35]See Parker, "Gansevoort," pp. 155-58.

[36]Howard, p. 89.

[37]Parker, "Introduction," p. 10. A letter to Allan Melville written while Gansevoort was staying in Polk's home stressed Gansevoort's familiarity with Polk; see Parker, "Gansevoort," p. 163.

[38]Leyda, I, 185.

[39]Leyda, I, 187. For further references to Gansevoort's speaking efforts and his interest in the 1844 campaign, see Leyda, I, 181-88.

influential people, including Stephen A. Douglas,[40] and the belated decision to appoint him to the American legation in England was unfortunate. There seems to have been a personality clash between Gansevoort and the American minister, Louis McLane, and this was made worse by Gansevoort's enthusiastic nationalism and his outspokenness on the Oregon question.[41] Gansevoort's London journal contains repeated references to the conflict between America and England as it related to American's Manifest Destiny in general and the Oregon question in particular. His account of a dinner conversation with some English men and women reveals the ideas Gansevoort felt he had to support and the kind of conduct McLane found intolerable:

> The conversation turned on American matters. They thought it "bragging" & "presumptuous" in Americans to talk of any equality between the two countries or their inhabitants. I chanced to say that I considered "a pound of American blood & bones to be as good as a pound of English"--which they really seemed to think very insulting.[42]

When Gansevoort died unexpectedly in England, inadequate family resources forced Melville to seek government help in paying the funeral expenses.[43] He wrote the President as well as the Secretary of State, James Buchanan, and the Secretary of War, William Marcy, citing Gansevoort's "short but brilliant public career" and "the

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[40]Parker, "Introduction," p. 11.

[41]Howard, p. 96.

[42]Gansevoort Melville, Gansevoort Melville's 1846 London Journal and Letters from England, 1845, ed. Hershel Parker (New York: The New York Public Library, 1966), p. 43.

[43]Howard, p. 99.

noble service he rendered the Democratic Party"[44] as reasons the requested aid should be granted.

Melville's brother Allan was also involved in political activities during these years, and in May 1844, only a month after his twenty-first birthday, he signed a document supporting Van Buren for the Democratic nomination.[45] In November his signature appeared along with Gansevoort's in an advertisement in the New York Evening Post inviting citizens to attend a Democratic assembly.[46] Early in 1848, according to Lemuel Shaw, Jr., Allan attended "a great Democratic war meeting in Tammany Hall,"[47] and in November he ran for state office as a Democrat.[48]

Melville's own involvement in politics began when he was a member of the Albany Young Men's Association (January 29, 1835-Spring 1837).[49] Political issues were often discussed and debated by the association's members.[50] One political debate, for example, considered the question "Are representatives bound in the exercise of delegated powers by

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[44] Letters, pp. 31-32.

[45] Parker, "Gansevoort," p. 153.

[46] Leyda, I, 188.

[47] Leyda, I, 270.

[48] Howard, p. 124.

[49] Gilman, p. 73.

[50] Gilman, p. 73. It is interesting to note that when Melville wrote a letter to the Albany Microscope (March 31, 1838) asking the young men of Albany to support the debating society, the examples he gave of men whose careers had been promoted by debating experience were Edmund Burke, Henry Clay, and Benjamin Franklin; see Gilman, p. 262.

instructions from their constituents?"[51] In connection with the Young Men's debating society, the Philologos Society, Melville got his first taste of political controversy. Having been elected president of the Society in what its former president considered an underhanded manner, Melville found himself attacked in letters printed in the Albany Microscope. He was described as a "wary pettifogger" with "no fixed principles" and disparaging remarks were made about the way he displayed his "political powers."[52] Melville, of course, responded, attempting to discredit his attacker and assert the legitimacy of his election, and the resulting newspaper debate has been compared to Thomas Melvill's newspaper crusades.[53]

The Albany years probably also contributed a nationalistic enthusiasm to Melville's developing concern with social and political issues. Albany was a patriotic community, observing Fourth of July celebrations and promoting nationalistic speeches by school children, and it is likely that Melville participated in such "patriotic displays" as the parade of the Young Men's Association on July 4, 1836. A part of the program climaxing the parade was the reading of the Declaration of Independence by Gansevoort Melville.[54]

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[51]Gansevoort Melville, "An Albany Journal of Gansevoort Melville," ed. Jay Leyda, Boston Public Library Quarterly, 2 (1950), 335.

[52]Gilman, pp. 74-75. For a brief summary of the issues involved in the controversy, see Gilman, pp. 91-95; for Melville's contribution to the debate, see Letters, pp. 7-16.

[53]Howes, p. 28.

[54]Gilman, pp. 45, 76.

After he took up residence in New York City in 1847, Melville's interest in politics and political issues was stimulated as his success as an author began to bring him into close contact with the city's literary circle. Evert Duyckinck's house served as a gathering place where writers and artists, as well as lawyers, politicans, and military men,[55] "met and discussed the events of the day, the revolutions of '48, the gold rush on the western coast, the slavery question, Manifest Destiny, [and] Frémont."[56] Evert's brother, George, wrote home from Europe firsthand observations on current events (including the French Revolution of 1848) that sparked more political conversations.[57] The extent of Melville's increased awareness of contemporary events and issues can be seen in the fact that he made significant changes in Mardi in order to incorporate topical subjects.[58] He wrote Richard Bentley that his new book contained "the peculiar thoughts & fancies of a Yankee upon politics."[59]

Even more concrete evidence of his interest in current affairs is the series of humorous articles on Zachary Taylor, "Authentic Anecdotes of 'Old Zack,'" that Melville wrote for Yankee Doodle in the summer of 1847. Taylor was the extremely popular hero of the

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[55]Charles Roberts Anderson, Melville in the South Seas (1939; revised rpt. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1966), p. 344.

[56]Van Wyck Brooks, The Times of Melville and Whitman (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., Inc., 1947), p. 22.

[57]Howard, pp. 105, 123.

[58]Merrell R. Davis, Melville's Mardi: A Chartless Voyage (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1952), pp. 39, 81.

[59]Letters, p. 86.

Mexican War, and at the time of Melville's Anecdotes he was a strong prospect for the Whig's presidential nomination.[60] The literary quality of the articles is not outstanding, but Perry Miller has pointed out that this can in part be attributed to Melville's attempt to parody the prose style of Taylor's dispatches.[61] Purporting to be communications directly from Taylor's camp, the articles refer to Taylor as "the hero of Palo Alto" and "the hero of Buena Vista"[62] and mention his successful campaign in Florida. But though Taylor is given some of the attributes of a folk hero, such as an exaggerated physical courage, and is presented as a basically benevolent man, stress is also given to his slovenliness in matters of dress and eating and his tendency to obesity. Melville also imputes vanity and ambition to the general as he describes an incident in which Taylor, who has vehemently refused to make public the letters he has written to Santa Anna and other Mexican generals, quickly reverses his position when the correspondent asks him to "consider the duty you owe to history--to the world--to your own reputation--."[63] The articles also touch on partisan politics in their reference to Taylor's differences with the Democratic administration

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[60] F. O. Matthiessen, American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1941), p. 382.

[61] Miller, pp. 213-14.

[62] Herman Melville, "Authentic Anecdotes of 'Old Zack,'" in Shorter Works of Hawthorne and Melville, ed. Hershel Parker (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Co., 1972), pp. 206, 210. Hereafter cited as "Anecdotes."

[63] "Anecdotes," p. 214.

and in two direct and unflattering comments on Secretary of War Marcy.[64] Taylor's own presidential ambitions are mentioned three different times,[65] and in response to an inquiry in Anecdote VIII concerning his political principles, Taylor replies that he does not "like to commit [himself] positively," but by means of a line drawing he asserts that he will always support the flag[66]--an unassailable if slightly shallow philosophy. It is interesting in connection with the overall political climate to note that on the same page of Yankee Doodle as this Anecdote was a short item entitled "Counting Chickens Very Early," which reported a rumor that James Fenimore Cooper had already been selected to be Secretary of the Navy after Taylor's election.[67]

Melville's real excitement over the Mexican War can be seen more clearly in a letter he wrote to Gansevoort in May 1846. The ironic detachment with which the letter begins breaks down as Melville speculates on what the war portends of the nation's future:

> The Mexican War . . . . is nothing of itself--but "a little spark kindleth a great fire" . . . . and who knows what all this may lead to--Will it breed a rupture with England? Or any other great powers?--Prithee, are there any notable battles in store--any Yankee Waterloos?--Or think once of a mighty Yankee fleet coming to the war shock in the middle of the Atlantic with an English one.--Lord, the day is at hand, when we will be able to talk of our killed & wounded like some of the old Eastern conquerors reckoning them up by thousands;--when the Battle of Monmouth will be thought

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[64] See "Anecdotes," pp. 209, 216, 220.

[65] See "Anecdotes," pp. 206, 217, 218.

[66] See "Anecdotes," p 218.

[67] Yankee Doodle, 28 August 1847, p. 202.

> child's play--& canes made out of the Constitution's timbers be thought no more of than bamboos.[68]

But despite his imaginative fascination with the concept of Manifest Destiny, Melville was also aware of its practical consequences. In lecturing on "The South Seas" in 1858 and 1859, he discussed the proposal to annex Hawaii and the Georgian Islands to the United States, noting that "the whalemen of Nantucket and the Westward ho! of California" were exerting pressure in favor of the annexation. In a sentiment reminiscent of Typee and Omoo, he observed that the extension of "civilization" is often "productive to the civilizers, destructive to the civilizees:"

> And as for annexation, I beg to offer up an earnest prayer ... . that the banns of that union should be forbidden until we have found for ourselves a civilization morally, mentally, and physically higher than one which has culminated in almshouses, prisons, and hospitals.[69]

During his years in New York, Melville was also caught up in the spirit of the Young America movement, which was dedicated to creating a truly American literature and, as F. O. Matthiessen says, to providing "a culture commensurate with America's political opportunity."[70] In his discussion of Melville's relation to this movement, Perry Miller has observed that Melville carried his devotion to the idea of literary nationalism to the point that those who had originated

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[68] Letters, p. 29.

[69] Merton M. Sealts, Jr., Melville As Lecturer (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1957), pp. 179-80.

[70] Matthiessen, p. xv.

the movement began to fall behind him.[71] Melville's review of Hawthorne's Mosses From an Old Manse is one of the most enthusiastic pronouncements of Young America, but this spirited celebration of a great American author and prediction of the bright future of American literature as it kept pace with the movement toward "political supremacy"[72] is actually a toned-down version of an even more ecstatic original. Perhaps under the influence of two early supporters of the Young American movement, Evert Duyckinck and Cornelius Mathews, Melville revised his draft to "restrain the exuberant nationalism."[73] Removed in the revision was the assertion that an American would surpass Shakespeare. In addition, a deprecatory allusion to "an American Milton" was changed to "an American Tompkins," and a prediction that England would soon be the literary flunkey to American was omitted.[74] Melville's commitment to American literature was also revealed in a mealtime debate with Oliver Wendell Holmes over the relative merits of English and American writing.[75]

It is interesting (though ironic in view of his alignment with Young America) to note that there was actually some public condemnation

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[71]Miller, p. 4.

[72]Herman Melville, "Hawthorne and His Mosses: By a Virginian Spending July in Vermont," in Billy Budd and Other Prose Pieces (hereafter cited as Prose Pieces), ed. Raymond W. Weaver (London: Constable, 1924), p. 136.

[73]Miller, pp. 285-86.

[74]Miller, p. 286.

[75]Miller, p. 284; Howard, p. 156.

of Melville's political stance by his countrymen. In a review of White-Jacket, the official magazine of the Democratic party, the United States Magazine and Democratic Review, attacked Melville as being pro-England. He was accused of "betraying his country" and of making his heroes English and praising English admirals because England paid better for his copyright.[76] In 1852, after Moby-Dick was published, the Democratic Review again censured Melville for publishing first in England in order to get the copyright there.[77] In contrasting the English and American receptions of Omoo, Melville had in fact observed, ". . . when I compare their reception of Omoo . . . with its treatment here, it begets ideas not very favorable to one's patriotism."[78]

In the early 1850's Melville joined other American authors in a political effort to get international copyright protection. The difficulties facing the proponents of the copyright were summarized by Melville in a letter to Richard Bentley in July 1851:

> . . . . in all reasonable probability no International Copyright will ever be obtained--in our time, at least--if you Englishmen wait at all for the first step to be taken in this country. Who have any motive in this country to bestir themselves in this thing? Only the authors. . . . . And what influence have they to bring to bear upon any question whose settlement must necessarily assume a political form? . . . This country & nearly all its affairs are governed by sturdy backwoodsmen--noble fellows enough, but not at all literary. . . . . And tho' the number of cultivated, catholic men, who may be supposed to feel an interest in a national literature, is large & every day growing larger; yet they are nothing in comparison with the overwhelming majority who care nothing about

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[76] See Miller, pp. 272-73; and Leyda, I, 373.

[77] Miller, p. 300.

[78] Letters, p. 64.

> it. This country is at present engaged in furnishing material for future authors; not in encouraging its living ones.
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> Nevertheless, if this matter by any means comes to be made nationally conspicuous; and if you in England come out magnanimously, & protect a foreign author; then there is that sort of stuff in the people here, which will be sure to make them all eagerness in reciprocating. For . . . my countrymen will never be outdone in generosity.[79]

Despite the gloomy prospects, Melville joined Cooper, Bryant, Irving, and others in signing a petition in favor of an international copyright law,[80] and the petition was presented to the Senate in July 1852 by Charles Sumner.[81]

During this time Melville was apparently still interested in presidential politics; in a letter to Evert Duyckinck written just before the inauguration of Zachary Taylor in 1849, Melville alluded to "Old Zack" as "the hero of Palo Alto."[82] He also followed the Senate vote that outlawed flogging in the navy,[83] a practice he had denounced in White-Jacket. In 1853 Melville was asked to deliver the Fourth of July oration in Pittsfield, and though he very graciously declined to speak (". . . did it lie within the scope of my ability, I can hardly think of any Celebration in which I would more willingly take part in any active way . . ."),[84] he did attend the program and

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[79] Letters, p. 134.

[80] See Letters, p. 89, n. 8; and Leyda, I, 412.

[81] Leyda, I, 454-55.

[82] Letters, p. 78; p. 78, n. 6.

[83] Leyda, I, 396.

[84] Leyda, II, 933.

listened to the orator allude to Major Melvill's part in the Boston Tea Party as well as to Melville himself.[85]

For almost thirty years Melville was involved in an intermittent search for government employment that brought him into contact with the intricacies of political patronage and some of the important political figures of the era. Melville first tried for a government job in 1839, when he sought his Uncle Peter's help in obtaining work as an engineer.[86] Then in 1847 he traveled to Washington in an effort to get a position in the Treasury Department,[87] writing Peter Gansevoort that he had "obtained several strong letters from various prominant [sic] persons [in New York] to the most influential men at the seat of government."[88] While in the capital, Melville called on Senator and Mrs. John A. Dix and paid a visit to the Twenty-ninth Congress.[89] After the Democratic victory in 1852, Melville, with the aid of Hawthorne, attempted to get a consular appointment. But the prospects of a post in Honolulu dwindled into a tentative offer of one in Rome, which had to be rejected because of the low salary.[90] An effort to secure him a place in the New York Customshouse, made by Melville's

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[85]Leyda, I, 476-77.

[86]Harrison Hayford and Merrell Davis, "Herman Melville as Office-Seeker," Modern Language Quarterly, 10 (June and September 1949), 168.

[87]Leyda, I, 234.

[88]Letters, p. 56.

[89]Leyda, I, 234-35; also see Howard, p. 103.

[90]Hayford, "Melville as Office-Seeker," pp. 173, 178-81.

family while he was on tour abroad in 1856 and 1857, was also unsuccessful.[91]

Another serious try for a foreign consulship came in 1861, with Melville seeking support from Peter Gansevoort, Richard Henry Dana, Thurlow Weed (who was asked to write Secretary of State Seward), and Charles Sumner.[92] Following up on the recommendations he had secured, Melville again journeyed to Washington as a political job seeker. While there he visited the still uncompleted Washington Monument, went to a party attended by the Vice President as well as senators and their wives, saw two sessions of the Senate, and met President Lincoln.[93] In a letter to his wife, Elizabeth, Melville concluded that "nothing very interesting" was happening in the Senate, though he was impressed by the new additions to the Capitol building.[94] Describing his meeting with Lincoln at a White House levee, Melville noted that "Old Abe" was "better looking" and "younger looking" than anticipated and that "he shook hands like a good fellow--working hard at it like a man sawing wood at so much per cord."[95] Five years later, through the influence of Henry A. Smythe, Melville finally secured a position as an inspector of the New York Customshouse.[96] He served at that post

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[91]Hayford, "Melville as Office-Seeker," p. 377.

[92]See Letters, pp. 207-09, 211.

[93]Howard, p. 270; Letters, p. 209.

[94]Letters, p. 210.

[95]Letters, pp. 209-10.

[96]Hayford, "Melville as Office-Seeker," pp. 386-87.

until retirement, escaping the misfortune of political house cleaning that had befallen the venerable Major Melvill.

The Civil War was, of course, the most serious challenge ever presented to American society and the American political system, and like all citizens Melville kept a watchful eye on the war through newspaper accounts.[97] He also paid a visit to the war front, during which he went along on a scouting patrol and, according to his wife's memoir, saw General Grant.[98] Melville's interest in the war was naturally increased by the active participation of friends and relatives like Guert Gansevoort, Tobias Green, and Henry Gansevoort,[99] whom Melville and his brother Allan visited at Fort Hamilton in 1863.[100] Melville's own name appeared on the roll of the Pittsfield Militia from 1852 to 1854[101] and in 1861 and 1862,[102] and in June 1861 he took his son Stanwix to see the soldiers drill (though a factory fire resulted in a cancellation of the maneuvers.)[103] Early in the war

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[97]Tyrus Hillway, Herman Melville, Twayne's United States Authors Series, No. 37 (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1963), p. 59.

[98]See Howard, p. 276; and Leyda, II, 667. Melville also met General Robert O. Tyler on this visit and wrote him a consolatory letter in July 1864 after hearing he had been wounded; see Howard, p. 276, and Letters, pp. 226-27.

[99]Howard, pp. 272, 274. Also see letter from Toby in Leyda, II, 663; and Melville's letter to his brother Thomas about the war and Guert Gansevoort's role in it in Letters, p. 215.

[100]Letters, p. 217.

[101]Leyda, I, 451, 476, 489.

[102]Leyda, II, 641, 653.

[103]Leyda, II, 641.

Melville visited the Navy Yard, where he saw the body of Captain James H. Ward, a war casualty, on the North Carolina; and Samuel Shaw recorded in his diary that he and Melville conversed about the war news.[104] An item in the Berkshire County Eagle seems to indicate that when the 49th Regiment of Pittsfield returned on August 22, 1863, Melville's house was decorated with "flags and festoons."[105] Another example of Melville's devotion to the Union cause was his agreement to donate a poem to be sold to raise funds at a Sanitary Fair.[106]

While he was keeping up with specific developments of the conflict, Melville was also considering the fundamental problems being created by the war. Though he did not reach a very large audience, in Battle-Pieces (1866) Melville attempted to speak as "an unofficial poet laureate"[107] and put the war in historical perspective for the American people. The political nature and conciliatory intent of the "Supplement" to Battle-Pieces is obvious[108] as Melville deals with the practical problems involved in reconciliation and the need for the North to act humanely and responsibly to insure the future tranquility of the nation. Siding with the Democrats and the more moderate Republicans in favoring peaceful reconstruction,[109] Melville reminds Northerners that slavery

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[104]Leyda, II, 641, 946.

[105]Leyda, II, 662.

[106]Howard, pp. 274-75.

[107]Richard Harter Fogle, "Melville and the Civil War," Tulane Studies in English, 9 (1959), 63.

[108]See Fogle, "The Civil War," pp. 85-88; and Howard, p. 281.

[109]Howard, p. 280.

was only inherited by the South and that in this the Southern people were "less fortunate, not less righteous than we."[110] He points out that both sides inflamed the situation that led to war, the South being "politically misled" by both "designing" and "honestly-erring" men,[111] and that the North can take pride in its victory only if that triumph means "an advance for our whole country and for humanity."[112] In pleading for moderation, Melville recognizes the obstacles facing the adoption of such a policy, but he argues that there is "no reason why patriotism and narrowness should go together, or why intellectual impartiality should be confounded with political trimming, or why serviceable truth should keep cloistered because not partisan."[113] He warns that harsh treatment of the Southern states may, among other problems, promote race hatred in the South and expresses his belief that eventually the North must restore political representation to the secessionists.[114] His challenge to the victorious North seems to summarize Melville's appraisal of the situation: "The years of the war tried our devotion to the Union; the time of peace may test the sincerity of our faith in democracy."[115]

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[110] Herman Melville, Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War, ed. Sidney Kaplan (1866; facsimile rpt. Gainesville, Fla.: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1960), p. 266. Hereafter cited as Battle-Pieces.

[111] Battle-Pieces, pp. 265-66.

[112] Battle-Pieces, p. 264.

[113] Battle-Pieces, p. 260.

[114] Battle-Pieces, p. 268, 271.

[115] Battle-Pieces, p. 271.

The interest in political issues that appears in Melville's fiction is also evident to some extent in his reading, his journal entries, and his correspondence. While only a few of the books listed in Merton Sealts' check list as being owned by or available to Melville are specifically related to political concerns or the problems of government, many more deal with the history and contemporary conditions of the United States and other countries and with political biography. Among the books Melville read on these subjects were works such as Pierre Bayle's An Historical and Critical Dictionary; Thomas Carlyle's On Heroes and Hero Worship; Edward Gibbon's The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire; The Men of the Times; or, Sketches of Living Notables; William L. Stone's Life of Joseph Brant--Thayendenega: Including the Border Wars of the American Revolution; and Christopher Wordsworth's Greece: Pictorial, Descriptive, and Historical. The books that he purchased and probably read include J. W. Draper's Thoughts on the Future Civil Policy of America, Richard Hildreth's The History of the United States of America, and Thomas Babington Macaulay's The History of England.[116]

The underscorings and annotations Melville added to the works he read also sometimes suggest an interest in the political side of man's existence. For example, in a copy of Jefferson's first inaugural address, Melville marked the following passage:

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[116]The respective numbered listings of the volumes mentioned appear in Merton M. Sealts, Jr., Melville's Reading: A Check-List of Books Owned and Borrowed (Madison; the Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1966) as follows: 51, 122, 223b, 356, 491a, 563, 190, 272, 335-37. Information concerning Melville's familiarity with the works was taken from Howard; Leyda; Letters; and Hillway, Herman Melville, p. 43.

> And let us reflect that having banished from our land that religious intolerance, under which mankind so long bled and suffered, we have yet gained little, if we countenance a political intolerance, as despotic, as wicked, and capable of as bitter and bloody persecutions.[117]

Melville scored a sentence in Lord Viscount Strangford's introduction to Camoëns' Poems from the Portuguese to the effect that "the decline of public spirit in matters of taste is a certain indication of political decay,"[118] and in his copy of The Life of James Thomson by H. S. Salt, he triple-scored and checked the following comment on Thomson's essay "Bumbleism":

> Thomson saw clearly that true democracy must be rid of other things besides political inequalities; since religious intolerance, backed up by plutocratic influence, is absolutely fatal to the existence of a free community. "Imperalism imposes fines, imprisonment, banishment; Bumble simply imposes death by starvation."[119]

A topical reference identifies the description of the crowd and its reaction to Caesar in Julius Caesar, Act II, Scene ii, with Tammany Hall.[120] Commenting on a newspaper clipping headed "Editorial in London Times," which said that leisure is necessary for a good education and an understanding of life, Melville wrote, "How un-American is all this, and yet--how true."[121] Toward the end of his life, Melville marked a passage in Bureaucracy or a Civil Service Reformer that comments on the disorder in the modern state and undoubtedly

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[117] Leyda, II, 679.

[118] Leyda, II, 686.

[119] Leyda, II, 821.

[120] Leyda, I, 290.

[121] Leyda, II, 946. For additional comments on the same subject, see Letters, p. 266.

recalled some of his own frustrations as a government employee in a system where "The State . . . is everybody. Everybody of course cares for nobody. . . . [and] everybody forgets tomorrow the service of yesterday."[122]

In addition to the expected comments on places of historic interest, the journals of Melville's visits abroad contain other references showing his political consciousness. For example, on landing near Dover in 1849, Melville was reminded of the arrival of Julius Caesar.[123] In the record of his 1856-57 trip, Melville revealed his interest in a ship's engineer's story about meeting Mike Walsh, the labor leader and politician who had contended with Tammany Hall.[124] On December 8, 1856, Melville noted a rumor that Louis Napoleon had been assassinated.[125] Naturally enough for a traveler away from home, Melville was also very eager to find people with whom he could talk about America, and he carried his comparison of Europe and America even into the area of train service.[126] The comparison between England and America was given at least one formal airing. Melville recorded an incident that occurred on the ship to London in 1849:

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[122]Leyda, II, 830.

[123]Herman Melville, Journal of a Visit to London and the Continent, 1849-1850, ed. Eleanor Melville Metcalf (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1948), p. 21. Hereafter cited as Journal of London.

[124]Herman Melville, Journal of a Visit to Europe and the Levant: October 11, 1856-May 6, 1857, ed. Howard C. Horsford (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1955), p. 167; p. 167, n. 1. Hereafter cited as Journal of Europe.

[125]Journal of Europe, p. 73.

[126]See Journal of London, pp. 42, 59, 60, 61, 65.

> In the evening put the Captain in the Chair, & argued the question "which was best, a Monarchy or a republic?"--Had some good sport during the debate--the Englishmen wouldn't take part in it though.[127]

While in London, Melville chanced to meet the Queen and, having bowed politely as protocol required, observed privately in his journal that the Queen might do well to use "Rowland's Kalydore for clarifying the complexion."[128] Seemingly unawed by his encounter with Her Majesty, he concluded his observations on British royalty in a whimsical vein: "She is an amiable domestic woman though, I doubt not, & God bless her, say I, & long live the 'Prince of whales.'"[129]

Many of Melville's surviving letters deal with business concerns or with personal subjects that did not lend themselves to the incorporation of political thoughts. Also a number of the political references in Melville's letters are simply the same kind of general allusions to governments and rulers that are sometimes used in his fiction to create a sense of expansiveness or to establish the magnitude of the topic being discussed. For example, he wrote Abraham Lansing that though "the Shah of Persia or the Great Khan of Tartary" should be met with ceremony, it was not necessary for a "Custom House Inspector."[130] But some of the letters contain direct remarks about politics or related subjects. The political

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[127] Journal of London, p. 15.

[128] Journal of London, p. 42.

[129] Journal of London, p. 42.

[130] Letters, p. 242.

comments from Melville's letters that have already been cited in this chapter[131] have revealed among other things his pride in his patriot ancestors, his interest in the Mexican War and its portents for America, his political efforts in behalf of an international copyright, his impressions of the Washington trip during which he visited the United States Senate and met President Lincoln, his contact with a number of other important political figures in an effort to secure government employment, and his concern with the Civil War as well as his participation in fund-raising efforts for the Union cause. Among the other letters containing political references is one to Hawthorne in which Melville opposed his own "ruthless democracy" to the attitude of "those who, while earnest in behalf of political equality," acknowledge "an aristocracy of the brain." With democratic fervor, Melville declared that "a thief in jail is as honorable a personage as Gen. George Washington."[132] In a letter to Evert Duyckinck, Melville observed that though absolute honesty in writing and expression would perhaps always be impossible, "the Declaration of Independence makes a difference."[133] A letter to Catherine Gansevoort Lansing contains one of Melville's most outspoken comments on partisan politics. In the disputed election in 1876, Rutherford B. Hayes, a Republican, was elected President over the Democratic candidate by one electoral vote

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[131]See Notes 11-12, 44, 52, 59, 68, 78-80, 82, 88, 92-95, 98-100, 121.

[132]Letters, pp. 126-27.

[133]Letters, p. 80.

after an arrangement was made with Southern Democrats.[134] Writing to Catherine shortly after Hayes's inauguration, Melville took a philosophical (yet practical) view of the situation.

> Now about President Hayes? I chanced to turn over a file of your Albany Argus yesterday, and was all but blown off the stool by the tremendous fulminations of that indignant sheet. --But what's the use? life is short, and Hayes' term is four years, each of 365 days.[135]

Thus Melville watched the political developments and controversies of the nineteenth century, sometimes drawn into the activity himself on a limited scale, speaking out in the "Supplement" to Battle-Pieces when he saw the new dangers threatening the union that had just been so painfully preserved, following with an artist's eye the changes taking place in his country and the world and seeking to comprehend the significance of the change. This political awarness is reflected in much of his fiction as he criticizes or comments on actual political and social situations, scrutinizes the governments of the isles of Mardi, and uses the ship microcosm to examine characteristics and effects of various political systems.

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[134] Letters, p. 255, n. 2.

[135] Letters, p. 255.

CHAPTER III

FROM THE BEGINNING TO MONARCHY: *TYPEE*, *OMOO*, *MARDI*, AND *WHITE-JACKET*

Although his concern with political issues becomes more evident in his later works, Melville's interest in examining and comparing different forms of political organization and the social consequences of political systems is evident as early as *Typee* (1846). Here this interest is mainly displayed in comparisons between the primitive island civilization and the supposedly more advanced Western world. Judging each by the quality of life it provides for the ordinary man, Melville reveals a democratic humanism that appears in much of his later fiction. But the novel also contains some specific analysis of the political structure of the Typees.

Unable to ascertain the finer details of the Typees' governmental system, Tommo is nevertheless impressed by the minimal degree of governmental restriction evident among the natives.[1] The "freedom" and social "equality" of the people,[2] as well as the amazing "harmony and smoothness" with which life progresses in the Typees' valley, lead to a pertinent inquiry into "how . . . these people [are] governed":

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[1] See Nicholas Canaday, Jr., *Melville and Authority*, University of Florida Monographs, Humanities No. 28 (Gainesville: Univ. of Florida Press, 1968), p. 4.

[2] Herman Melville, *Typee: A Peep at Polynesian Life*, eds. Harrison Hayford, Hershel Parker, and G. Thomas Tanselle (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1968), p. 185. Hereafter cited by page number in the text of the paper.

> These islanders were heathens! savages! ay, cannibals! and how came they, without the aid of established law, to exhibit . . . that social order which is the greatest blessing and highest pride of the social state? (p. 200)

The conclusion is that, regardless of the popular idea that formalized government is necessary to control man's natural iniquity, the Typees are governed largely by a "sort of tacit common-sense law" and by "the inherent principle of honesty and charity" that is characteristic of the human race so long as man is not subjected to "arbitrary codes" which distort his "perception of what is just and noble" (p. 201). Even the authority of the Typee's noble tribal chief--"King Mehevi" (p. 188), who Tommo believes has a better right to a royal title than the corrupt "domineering" (p. 188) chieftain-kings supported by French and missionary influences--seems "very limited" in "matters concerning the general welfare" (p. 185). Mehevi, apparently deriving his rank largely from his position of "high birth" (p. 186), receives "the required degree of deference" and a remarkably "immediate obedience" (p. 185) in certain matters, but he mingles rather freely and openly with his subjects and the real regulatory force in Typee life seems to be the "taboo" (pp. 200, 221-24) rather than the king.

In carrying out his comparisons between the Typee way of life and that to be found in the West, Melville suggests a number of areas in which the more rigidly governed societies fall below the Typees' in terms of general social welfare. And although the Typees' harmony and felicity may be largely the result of the natural abundance of material comfort available to them,[3] Melville still concludes that

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[3]Kaul, p. 232, points out that America also had abundant resources and suggests that the discrepancies between social and economic welfare in America and in the Typees' valley must have to do with the way in which resources are shared.

"civilization does not engross all the virtues of humanity: she has not even her full share of them" (p. 202). While realizing that ingrained cultural differences prohibit the Typee way of life from being a viable political and social alternative for Western man, Melville does use the depiction of the Typee state to caution against an unqualified acceptance of Western methods and values. Such a message is of particular significance to America, which in its current stage of development might be well advised to learn from the positive qualities of other societies in the hope that such evils as those found in European civilization will not be the inevitable consequence of America's coming of age.

Melville's view of the political situation in the Marquesas also extends to the ongoing confrontation between the primitive island monarchies and the agents of the French government. And he presents a harsh picture of the unsettling results of French interference in the internal political affairs of both the Marquesas Islands and Tahiti.[4]

It is also significant to note that Melville's later practice of using a ship as a microcosm in order to study governmental forms is hinted at briefly in Typee. Tommo's decision to desert the Dolly is based on what he considers to be violations of the "contract" (p. 20) he believes to exist between him and the captain. The contractual

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[4]For Melville's comments on French interference in the Marquesas Islands and Tahiti, see pp. 7, 16-18, 188-89, 254; for examples of Melville's comments on American and English activities in the islands, see pp. 26, 254-58. Anderson, pp. 67-69, 77-78, 96-98, describes the French and American involvement in the islands.

theory of government as developed by John Locke recognizes the rights of citizens to break away from a government if it abuses the terms of the contract or man's natural rights,[5] and in addition to directly disregarding the ship's articles, Captain Vangs, the governmental authority on the Dolly, is "tyrannical" as well as "arbitrary and violent" (p. 21) in his conduct. The arbitrary exercise of power is a problem that is continually analyzed in Melville's fiction. Also, Tommo's ridicule of Vang's self-serving "paternal" (p. 30) concern for the welfare of the crew casts disparagement on a governmental philosophy which would be a natural antithesis to the American democratic ideal of independent self-government.

Continuing the objections raised in Typee, Omoo (1847) elaborates upon the unfortunate consequences of Western interference in the South Sea Islands. Although the tone of the second book is generally more congenial, perhaps because the situation seems past all reclamation, considerable attention is given to the French takeover in Tahiti and to the undesirable effects of both outright political intervention and the effort of imperialistically minded missionaries. While the final outcome of the intrusion is still not completely clear, the narrator concludes that "these disorders must accelerate the final extinction"[6] of the native population.

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[5]See D. B. Heater, Political Ideas in the Modern World (New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1960), pp. 123-24.

[6]Herman Melville, Omoo: A Narrative of Adventures in the South Seas, eds. Harrison Hayford, Hershel Parker, and G. Thomas Tanselle (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1968), p. 125. Hereafter cited by page number in the text of the paper.

The decline of the islanders is reflected in the debased situation of their hereditary ruler. Moving from the somewhat vague description of the governmental system of the Typees, Melville presents a more specific, though brief, account of the current state of the Tahitian monarchy. While earlier rulers governed Tahiti with "feudal sway" (p. 305), recent missionary influence has undermined royal authority and the activities of the French have forced Pomaree Vahinee I to flee the island. The description of Pamaree Vahinee's obvious naive helplessness in her efforts to cope with the French intrusion is touched with sadness. But the depiction of her court and the incongruities between her real status and actions and her assumed dignity present a comical view of some of the universal pretensions of power.

A substantial portion of the narrative in Omoo is devoted to an account of the deteriorated conditions on the Julia, the sailors' revolt, and the imprisonment of the rebellious members of the crew. Although the ship is not presented as a microcosm, the situation on the Julia does reflect on certain forms of authority[7] and suggests that there may be legitimate causes for rebellion, a question which arises in many politically related readings of Melville's books. The discipline on the ship is in a deplorable state because of the inadequacies of Captain Guy. The only real authority rests in the mate Jermin, but his drunkenness often leads to arbitrary conduct and recklessness. This situation, coupled with poor rations, inadequate medical care, the run-down condition of the ship, and the

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[7] Canaday, p. 8, says that the theme of authority is important in Omoo.

continued refusal to put into port, ultimately gives rise to a mutinous attitude, and the ship's "forecastle parliament" (p. 74)--the social "democracy" (p. 36) of the forecastle has been referred to earlier--submits a Round Robin of grievances to the British consul. When appropriate redress is not forthcoming, passive resistance in the form of refusal to work is tried. The subsequent handling of the strike reveals the corrupt and biased dealings of the shore authorities. It is noteworthy that when confined in the calabooza, the rambunctious crew, which had previously been controlled only by Jermin's "knock-down authority" (p. 15), "cheerfully acquiesced" in Captain Bob's "authority" (p. 117) and "would have been ashamed" to think of trying to escape from the old man who treated them "so frankly and cordially" (p. 118).[8] The contrast between the islanders' tradition of personal freedom and the repression found on the ship is very clear, and it is generally agreed that Melville's concern with the relationship of freedom and authority probably began as a result of his exposure to such clear-cut alternative approaches to human organization during his days at sea.

The conditions on the French ship on which the arrested sailors are confined in an effort to intimidate them also reveal problems in discipline and the consequences of a crew's being under the control of "a great disciplinarian" captain and a watchfully "paternal" (p. 110) admiral. The analysis of the circumstances on the French ship takes on a very nationalistic tenor however, the French procedures and naval

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[8]For information on the circumstances surrounding the actual revolt in which Melville took part, see Anderson, pp. 205-08, 215; Leyda, I, 146-47; and Gordon Roper, "Historical Note," in Omoo, by Herman Melville, eds. Harrison Hayford, Hershel Parker, and G. Thomas Tanselle (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1968), pp. 319-25.

abilities being contrasted unfavorably with both English and American seamanship. Some other features of the French character are also disparaged, but the narrator ends by asserting that as an American he is glad to acknowledge that, though they may not make great sailors, the French are a "right gallant nation" (p. 111)--after all, they had been wise enough to follow the precedent of the American revolution.[9]

In Mardi (1849) the developing political awareness seen in Typee and Omoo is much more clearly defined. Here the search for the white maiden, with all the philosophical and psychological ideals she embodies, also becomes a search for a political ideal.[10] A historian, philosopher, king, and poet join Taji in seeking a land with political and social arrangements such that there Yillah might comfortably and safely abide.[11] The tour includes the mythical islands of Mardi and allegorical replicas of contemporary states.

In Typee and particularly in Omoo, Melville had touched on the status of the island monarchies, and it is to a more detailed analysis

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[9]The narrator's pride in being a Yankee and his love for his country appear several times in Omoo (see, for example, pp. 102, 314), and there are several portraits of industrious and intrepid Yankees (for example: Salem, pp. 80-81, 90-91; the carpenter, pp. 285-86; Zeke, p. 204 ff.; the captain of the Leviathan, pp. 312-14).

[10]James E. Miller, Jr., "The Many Masks of Mardi," Journal of English and Germanic Philology, 58 (1959), 401, says this is one thing Yillah represents; Canaday, p. 11, says Yillah represents "the authority of ultimate truth"; Loren Baritz, City on a Hill: A History of Ideas and Myths in America (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1964), p. 279, says in part Mardi involves a search for "community."

[11]Kaul, p. 240, says Yillah represents "perfect social justice and harmony" and notes that Yoomy judges whether or not Yillah may be found on a particular island by examining its "social conditions."

of monarchial rule that much of the political commentary in Mardi is devoted. Aside from the fact that monarchy constituted the most prevalent political order in mid-nineteenth-century Europe,[12] specific contemporary events made a study of the nature and future of monarchy especially appropriate at the time Mardi was written.

For the preceding thirty years, the nations of western Europe had experienced an increase in industrialization and urbanization, a general population increase, and substantial growth of the middle class as well as an upsurge of nationalistic spirit. These circumstances had combined to produce a popular political base and social and economic changes that challenged the absolute power of monarchs.[13] There had already been two waves of revolution (1820-24 and 1829-34).[14] Then in 1848 came a dramatic surge of revolutionary uprisings; a "spontaneous and general conflagration" engulfed much of Europe.[15] The situation created great interest in the United States, where it was hailed by the press as an indication that the day of monarchy had passed and that the global rise of democracy was about to begin.[16] Melville was so strongly

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[12] E. J. Hobsbawm, The Age of Revolution: 1789-1848 (New York: The World Publishing Co., 1962), p. 301.

[13] Henri Brunschwig, "The Revolution of 1848," trans. Melissa Nelksen, in Revolutions in Modern European History, ed. Heinz Lubasz (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1966), pp. 87-88; Hobsbawm, pp. 297-308.

[14] Hobsbawm, pp. 109-10.

[15] Hobsbawm, p. 112.

[16] Frederick Merk, Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History: A Reinterpretation (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963), pp. 195-201.

affected by the political situation in Europe that he revised Mardi so that a consideration of the recent events could be included.[17]

It was therefore at a crucial moment in the history of monarchial rule--at a time when the contrast between monarchy and democracy was popularly conceived--that Mardi was written. And as Melville analyzes the monarchial system through an examination of the various kingdoms, imaginary and actual, in Mardi and through the depiction of King Media, the chief secular contrast provided to monarchial rule is American democracy. A consideration of the Vivenza section of Mardi is included in the discussion of Melville's analysis of American democracy in a later chapter, but it is significant to note here that in Mardi America is seen as holding great promise and, along with Serenia, comes closest to providing surroundings in which Yillah could live and flourish. As Melville pursues the political ideal through the kingdoms of Mardi, as always his prime criterion for judging a political system is the effect it has on the common man.

The first kingdom Taji encounters is that of Odo, the island domain of the "good lord, King Media."[18] Descended from "innumerable kings, and scores of great heroes, chiefs, and priests," (p. 190) not to mention ancestral deities, Media rules with the monarch's typical hereditary authority. Also, he, like the other kings of Mardi,

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[17] Davis, p. 94; also see Davis, p. 194.

[18] Herman Melville, Mardi and A Voyage Thither, eds. Harrison Hayford, Hershel Parker, and G. Thomas Tanselle (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1970), p. 183. Hereafter cited by page number in the text of the paper.

personifies the concept of the divine right of princes;[19] in fact, most of the kings of Mardi claim to be demigods themselves. Through "this immaculate union of church and state, god and king," the rulers of Mardi reign "supreme Caesars over the souls and bodies of their subjects" (p. 175). One result of the union of secular and divine authority is that "in several instances the people of the land [address] the supreme god Oro, in the very same terms employed in the political adoration of their sublunary rulers" (p. 175). Described as "a gallant gentleman" (p. 190), Media is apparently intended to represent a benevolent monarch who tempers his absolute rule with fairness and concern for the welfare of his subjects, and his name suggests a moderate application of authority. However even under this best of kings, there is much injustice and misery in Odo.

The most favorable statements about monarchy expressed in the description of Odo concern the judicial system and are basically as much anti-democratic as pro-monarchy. Media's answer to the petitioners who seek to establish trial by a jury of peers strikes at the heart of democracy's dependence on the collective wisdom of the community:

> . . . are twelve wise men more wise than one? or will twelve fools, put together, make one sage? Are twelve honest men more honest than one? or twelve knaves less knavish than one? And if, of twelve men, three be fools, and three wise, three knaves, and three upright, how obtain real unanimity from such? (p. 184)

Media challenges the democratic belief that a group of men can be wiser than the individual by observing that "the conflicting opinions of one man's mind" will only become "the uproar of twelve puzzled brains"

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[19] See Carl Joachim Friedrich and Frederick Mundell Watkins, "Monarchy," in Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1933) for a discussion of the characteristics of monarchy.

(p. 184). He makes the logical extension from the concept of decision by jury to the democratic tenet of popular sovereignty and finds direct political democracy impractical:

> . . . if twelve judges be better than one, then are twelve hundred better than twelve. But take the whole populace for a judge, and you will long wait for a unanimous verdict. (p. 184)

But despite the logical force of Media's arguments concerning the justice of absolute rule, the depiction of monarchy in the Odo section of Mardi is basically negative. For example, what at first appears to be a complimentary defense of kingship against the creeds of democratic "Levelers," is in fact a satiric denunciation of a system that stratifies men in a manner never dreamed of by the supposed author of "divine rights":

> Man lording it over man, man kneeling to man, is a spectacle that Gabriel might well travel hitherward to behold; for never did he behold it in heaven. (p. 183)

And with democratic perspective, the narrator concludes that "a king on his throne" is "but a gentleman seated" (p. 183).

But it is the poverty and oppression endured by most of Media's subjects that cast the most damaging light on monarchial rule. This section of Mardi exhibits strong political commentary as it describes the wretched conditions of the poor, who are kept conveniently out of sight of "the chiefs of Odo," and the inadequacy of the political system to alleviate the problem:

> . . . the chiefs of Odo . . . marveled how these swine could grovel in the mire, and wear such shallow cheeks. But they offered no sweet homes; from that mire they never sought to drag them out; they threw open no orchard; and intermitted not the mandates that condemned their drudges to a life of deaths. (p. 191)

The serfs who protest their situation are "scourged" for "the heresy" (p. 191) of proclaiming that Media is not a demigod. It is painfully

evident that the initial impression of Odo as "care-free and beautiful" (p. 191) is based on a surface illusion and that the prosperity of this not so "happy land" (p. 192) depends on the enslavement of a large portion of the population.

Taji's tour of the other Mardian isles leads to a further consideration of the characteristics and consequences of monarchial rule. For example, a satiric view of hereditary authority and the divine right of kings emerges from the visit to Valapee.[20] The ruler of Valapee is King Peepi, ten-year-old "inheritor of souls and subjects," who supposedly can "do no wrong" (p. 203). Unfortunately, the conflicting dispositions Peepi has inherited make it impossible for him to be consistent, and he is "plainly denuded of all moral obligation to virtue" (p. 203). As a result, his kingdom is in a perpetual state of confusion. The satire also extends to the "complaisant parliament" (p. 203) that sanctioned the idea of Peepi's infallibility and to the "servile, yet audacious senators" who dared to "administrate away the inalienable rights of posterity" (p. 202).

The description of King Donjalolo, absolute monarch of Juam, shows that any king may be made captive by his hereditary responsibilities--the only "slave in Juan" is its "king" (p. 221). Donjalolo's frustrated confinement explains his outbursts of excessive indulgence and his vacillation "between virtue and vice" (p. 224). Although "in his serious intervals" he is "a charitable prince," Donjalolo's restricted position--a literal representation of the more subtle isolation that

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[20] Davis, p. 155; Canaday, pp. 14-15, sees the Valapee section as a satire of democracy since Peepi is so beset by factional influences that he cannot govern effectively.

often surrounds the powerful--makes him incapable of insuring "the welfare of his subjects" (p. 251). Unable to discern from the conflicting reports of his impartial observers even the simple facts about the physical makeup of the isle of Rafona, Donjalolo has no defense against the viceroys who present "innocent" and "pious" faces to the king but rule his domain like "tyrants" (p. 251).

Also included in the section on Juam is an idea that is present throughout Mardi--the idea that in a basic human sense kings are no different from other men. Pondering over the spectacle of the bones which represent Donjalolo's "ancestral line" (p. 237), Babbalanja acknowledges the mortality and common humanity of all men. The kings attending Donjalolo's lavish banquet represent all forms of men--"They were old and young, tall and short, handsome and ugly, fat and lean, cunning and simple" (p. 254)--and the wine they imbibe is capable of "bringing all hearts on a level, and at last all legs to the earth; even those of kings" (p. 259).

Unlike Donjalolo, who strives to gain information that will enable him to rule justly despite his forced isolation, Abrazza, king of Bonovona, purposefully cuts himself off from any communication with his subjects and the unpleasantness of their sufferings, many of which are a direct result of his personal selfishness. A "king-philosopher, he never weeps; but pities with a placid smile; and that but seldom" (p. 589). Abrazza lets his subjects "take heed to themselves" (p. 606) and is concerned only that petitioners not be allowed to intrude upon his jovial existence. Angered by Abrazza's call for "short prayers and long rent-rolls" (p. 609), Babbalanja reminds Abrazza of the hardships facing the average man, ultimately offending the king so severely

that Media must come to Babbalanja's protection. This episode is perhaps one indication that during the tour of Mardi and the consequent inspection of its various political situations, Media's ideas on government are changing. It has been suggested that the real significance of the search for Yillah lies in the changes wrought in the attitudes of Media and Babbalanja.[21]

Not all the evils associated with monarchial rule in Mardi stem from a lack of action by the kings. Some are the result of the direct and deliberate actions of monarchs. Satirizing both war and kingship, Melville describes the situation in Diranda, where the joint rulers, Hello and Piko, use war games to control the population of their island, manipulating their subjects so that "the men of Diranda might be induced to kill off one another voluntarily, in a peaceable manner, without troubling their rulers" (p. 440). Coldly calculating, with "sickle-shaped scepters" (p. 444), the monarchs watch their subjects die "for glory" (p. 448). Among the other actively evil monarchs referred to in the novel are Tribonnora, the "mad prince" (p. 316) who, protected by his high position, purposely swamps canoes belonging to the poorer islanders, and King Klanko, whose "scourged slaves, toiling in their pits" (p. 611) are a reflection not only of Klanko's inhumanity but of one of the evils of nineteenth-century colonialism.

The picture of monarchy that emerges from the travelers' tour of the imaginary islands of Mardi is largely a negative one, with the usual authoritative bases of kingship--divine right and hereditary authority--being called into question and with monarchial rule being shown to often

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[21]Milton R. Stern, The Fine Hammered Steel of Herman Melville (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1957), p. 76.

have detrimental effects on the welfare of the people subject to it. In addition, the pretensions of kingship (as well as common human vanity) are effectively deflated by the enigma the travelers encounter in Hooloomooloo, the Isle of Cripples. The islanders have found to their dismay (and presumably to the pleasure of evolutionists) that they cannot distinguish between the bones of their former monarch and those of his pet monkey. It might also be noted that a similar discovery of relics on the Isle of Fossils had previously given Media a glimpse of the treacherous past of monarchy in the form of a "petrified" scene that revealed "a monarch fossilized in very act of murdering his guest" (p. 416).

In the part of the search that encompasses allegorical island likenesses of nineteenth-century kingdoms, the analysis of monarchy and its future is extended into the realm of contemporary politics. The merits and future of kingship are considered primarily through the references to old King Bello of Dominora (England),[22] the observations on the European revolutions of 1848, and through the counterpoint to monarchy represented by Vivenza (the United States).[23]

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[22]For the basic identification of some of the allegorical islands, see Davis, p. 156; and Thorp, p. 411, nn. 1, 3. For a contemporary European view of Melville's political commentary in Mardi, see Philarète Chasles, "Parisian Critical Sketches: The Actual and Fantastic Voyages of Herman Melville," The Literary World, 11 Aug. 1849, pp. 102-03.

[23]The relationship between the United States and the powers of Europe is interestingly dramatized in the famous race scene in White-Jacket. The race is probably based on two races in which the United States was involved while Melville was on board (see Howard, pp. 85, 88; and Anderson, pp. 379-80), but he altered the original circumstances to pit one American ship against single representatives of two of the foremost powers of Europe--England and France. Though the United States won its races easily, Melville leaves the outcome of the race in White-Jacket totally ambiguous, thus indicating that the race

The chapters on Dominora satirize both England's history of colonial expansion and her European foreign policy.[24] Bello's "love of wide dominion" (p. 471) is humorously depicted as causing him to be constantly on the look out for any new lands, however diminutive, in which to plant his spear, but the more serious issues of colonialism are also considered. Acting out of the "paternal interest" often asserted to justify expansionism, Bello relieves the presumably inept citizens of remote lands of "their political anxieties, by assuming the dictatorship over them" (p. 468). If the people he so befriends challenge Bello's conduct, they are treated as "rebels" (p. 468). Nineteenth-century England's foreign policy commitment to a balance of power is illustrated by Bello's support for the "Equipoise of Calabashes" (p. 468),[25] but the reaction of Bello's neighbors--"Who put the balance into thy hands, King Bello?" (p. 468)--gives a more exact suggestion of the focus of English diplomacy.[26] However, despite Bello's "territorial acquisitiveness" and assumption of central significance in Mardian affairs,

> all the isles [of Mardi] were proud of him. And . . . upon the whole, perhaps, they were the better for his deeds. For if sometimes he did evil . . . he had fifty ways of accomplishing good with the best. (p. 473)

It is to be noted, though, that King Bello has recently "somewhat abated his efforts to extend his dominions," perhaps because of the difficulty

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for political supremacy is still under way and America's destiny in the struggle for world power still to be determined.

[24] See Thorp, p. 411, n. 1.

[25] Davis, p. 156; and Thorp, p. 411, n. 4.

[26] See D. F. MacDonald, The Age of Transition: Britain in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1967), pp. 194-96.

of ruling such a wide domain or because of the disproportionate growth of his hump--the English national debt,[27] and this is seen by some, especially "blusterers" (p. 473) in Vivenza, as one indication that old Bello's days are numbered.

Domestic events, too, pose a challenge to England's stability. Melville looks at both past and present events as he suggests some of the reasons behind various economic and political upheavals being experienced in England. Providing the background for the ineffectual climax of the efforts of the Chartist movement with its six demands aimed at improving social and economic conditions through political reform[28] are the peasant's cries that the landowner robs him of his "bread" (p. 478), the spectacle of labor riots and the breaking of machinery,[29] the problems caused by the enclosure of public lands,[30] and the general impersonal ruthlessness of the factory system. The

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[27]Davis, p. 156; Thorp, p. 411, n. 1.

[28]Davis, pp. 84-85, and Thorp, p. 411, n. 13, identify the demonstration described in the novel (pp. 479-80) with the Chartist march in London on April 10, 1848. For a description of the Chartist march, see Elie Halévy, Victorian Years, 1841-1895, Vol. IV of A History of the English People in the Nineteenth Century, trans. E. I. Watkin (New York: Barnes & Noble Inc., 1961), pp. 245-46; for a brief discussion of Chartism as a political tool, see Asa Briggs, The Age of Improvement (London: Longman, Green and Co., 1959), pp. 293-94.

[29]See Hobsbawm, pp. 38-39; and Elie Halévy, England in 1815, Vol. I of A History of the English People in the Nineteenth Century, trans. E. I. Watkin and D. A. Barker (New York: Barnes & Noble Inc., 1961), pp. 290-94.

[30]Thorp, p. 411, n. 12. For a discussion of the process and effect of enclosure, see W. E. Lunt, History of England, 4th ed., Harper's Historical Series (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957), pp. 566-69.

view of Bello's forceful dispersion of his riotous subjects would seem to portend disaster for the island, but although the flames from the revolutions in Europe "blow over upon Dominora" (p. 499), the rebellion does not engulf this kingdom--a circumstance usually explained as largely the result of England's more flexible political process.[31] Even with the weight of his hump growing so great it seems in a position to "crush" (p. 476) Bello and his subjects, the king appears to be in no immediate danger of collapse (p. 477), though he is advised to keep his "barge of state" (p. 483) in good repair by constantly replacing worn planks with new. However, Yillah cannot be found in Dominora since some severe injustices do exist there.

The situation in Dominora is very different from that in Franko (France) and the rest of Porpheero (Europe), for there monarchy is under widespread attack. The 1848 revolution has erupted in Franko, and the flames of rebellion are spreading throughout Porpheero. Media is shocked and angered by the circumstances, but Yoomy and Babbalanja take the optimistic liberal attitude prevalent in America at the time, noting that "ashes breed loam" and suggesting that perhaps "Porpheero's future has been cheaply won" (p. 500).

The mysterious scroll that the travelers hear read in Vivenza characterizes the situation somewhat differently however, predicting that the current revolutions are only part of a perpetual cycle from

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[31] Hobsbawm, p. 306; Priscilla Robertson, Revolutions of 1848: A Social History (1952; rpt. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960), pp. 405-07, discusses the situation in England during the European revolutions and some of the reasons England did not experience a similar violent upheaval.

monarchy to republic and back again. There has been considerable critical disagreement about which character in the novel is responsible for the attitudes presented in the scroll and about the degree to which the sentiments expressed in it are supported by Melville.[32] The assertion in the scroll that its ideas may be credited "to the gods" (p. 524) and the pro-monarchial statements that appear in it suggest that the demigod Media is the author, but the historical perspective taken in the scroll would seem to reflect Melville's personal view of the way the world's political growth had evolved, though his remarks seem to relate not so much to what he hopes the future will bring as to the historical cycles that can be expected to continue as long as man does not learn "the lessons of history" (pp. 525-26).

Though Yoomy and Babbalanja had indicated that positive benefits might result from the violent upheaval in Porpheero, the scroll recognizes the need for reform but denies the necessity of "bloody revolution" (p. 529), asserting that one of the important benefits of monarchial rule is social and political stability. This reprimand of misplaced revolutionary optimism is followed by a caution against blind devotion to the idea that a republic is the only form of government allowing "freedom" (p. 528) to men. The author of the scroll insists that

> in themselves, monarchies are not utterly evil. For many nations, they are better than republics. . . . And better, on all hands, that peace should rule with a scepter, than that the tribunes of the people should brandish their broadswords. (p. 527).

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[32] For example, see Matthiessen, p. 382, who says the "criticisms of America" are "partly Melville's, partly . ... the warnings of a detached king and philosopher"; and Thorp, p. 412, who says the scroll was written by "Taji-Melville."

Vivenza does present some challenges to this favorable view of kingship, however. The travelers agree that the republic of Vivenza seems to hold "more of good" (p. 542) than the other islands of Mardi, and Media is forcefully reminded that though there may be slaves in Vivenza, there are starving serfs in his own Odo.

As the travelers leave Vivenza and pass by the disorderly "Kolumbo of the south" (p. 540), or South America, a still more negative view of monarchy emerges. Perhaps slightly overcome by drink, Media makes the damning admission that "Peace is War against all kings" and that "spears" are the "ministers" (p. 541) of kings. Dismissing the idea that the current wave of revolution means monarchy is on the wane, Media refers to the evidence of past history and confidently predicts:

> My children's children will be kings; though, haply, called by other titles. Mardi grows fastidious in names: we royalties will humor it. . . . The whole herd rears and plunges, but soon will bow again: the old, old way! (p. 541)

In addition to the democratic republic of Vivenza, the theocracies of Maramma and Serenia represent alternatives to secular monarchy. Though, as D. B. Heater has pointed out, a close theoretic connection must always exist between politics and religion to the extent that both are concerned with the welfare of the individual,[33] the Maramma section of the novel is mostly a satiric depiction of the personal effects of religious hypocrisy and superstition and a satiric view of Roman Catholicism, or institutionalized religion of any kind. However, the political power of Hivohitee (the Pontiff) is referred to, and there is the suggestion that

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[33]Heater, p. 159.

the Church is contributing to the poverty of the average man. Yillah may once have dwelled in Maramma, but since truth and justice are silenced there, she is no longer to be found.[34] Thus, of the two islands, Serenia is the only viable alternative to monarchy.

Devoted to following the precepts of Alma, Serenia is a community ruled by the laws of love but ever responsive to "Right-reason" (p. 629). Reminiscent of nineteenth-century Utopian experiments, Serenia maintains stability through a practical approach to the unattainable ideals set forth by Alma.[35] There is no king in Serenia because "Alma's precepts rebuke the arrogance of place and power" (p. 627), and, in fact, Alma's doctrine can triumph in Mardi only when all the kings are gone. The people of Serenia display Alma's concern for the poor and make certain that here "the miserable many" do not "support the happy few" (p. 627). But total economic equality is not found in Serenia; such equality would be contrary to reason and would lead to anarchy. There are still rich and poor, but charity insures that "none starve" (p. 627).

The philosophy of Serenia strongly affects all the voyagers except Taji.[36] When Media hears that Alma had criticized rulers for

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[34]Canaday, p. 17, says that the reference to Yillah's perhaps having once been in Maramma implies that Melville believed that at one time religious authority may have been justified but that now the church was perverting the spirit of religion.

[35]James Miller, Jr., p. 409. Taking a different view, Chase, p. 20, says that Serenia represents what the United States would be if it "practiced its liberal democratic ideals" and condemns such ideals, and Serenia, as "too mild . . . too innocent."

[36]Kaul, p. 246, points out that the personal change experienced by the other travelers conforms to the nineteenth-century idea that "the moral transformation of the individual" was necessary if widespread social improvements were to occur.

their empty pride and asserted that the "heart of mild content" which they sought in "rank and title" could be found only in him, Media asks the guide, "Wouldst thou unking me?" (p. 630). Finally Media declares himself a demigod no longer. He will be a "subject" (p. 630) of Alma and seek to relieve the miseries of the serfs of Odo. As he leaves Serenia to return to his duties at home, Media is advised by Babbalanja: "Abdicate thy throne: but still retain the scepter. None need a king; but many need a ruler" (p. 637). However, revolution has spread to Odo and Media's dream of trouble has come true. The novel's final view of kingship focuses on Media's noble and courageous return to Odo and his determination to save his ravaged kingdom or perish with its "wreck" (p. 654). Yet it is typical of the equivocal attitude of the novel that the personal nobility of King Media is qualified by the remembrance that it was the injustice of his rule that led to the rebellion.

Both the evils and benefits of monarchy are considered in Mardi, and though no clear conclusion is reached concerning monarchy's absolute merit, it is suggested that freedom may be more a "social" than a "political" (p. 528) consideration and that if monarchy survives into the modern age, it will be as a result of man's own excesses and weaknesses. But the search for Yillah is not over. Babbalanja warns Taji that by seeking perfection, he blinds himself to the nearest perfection Mardi can offer and that only in Serenia can the long-sought peace and fulfillment possibly be found. But Taji cannot accept the intellectual and spiritual restrictions imposed by Serenia,[37] and for

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[37]Kaul, p. 246; see also Nathalia Wright, Melville's Use of the Bible (1949; rpt. New York: Octagon Books, 1969), pp. 116-18. Taking a broad view of the object of the quest, Davis, p. 199, suggests

him and Melville the search for the best political system goes on.

Having noted in Mardi that the confined shipboard society offers a good opportunity for the study of "human nature" (p. 14), in White-Jacket (1850) Melville demonstrates that it offers a similar opportunity for the study of the nature and effects of political organization. Using the society with which he was most familiar, Melville extends the metaphor loosely suggested in his earlier novels and begins to use the ship as a microcosm[38] in order to examine in miniature such things as the effectiveness and desirability of the world's political alternatives. The analysis of monarchy found in Mardi is thus continued in White-Jacket as Melville considers the nature and consequences of the rule of Captain Claret of the Neversink.

Although, technically the commodore is the chief officer on the Neversink, most of the practical decisions are made by Claret. Linked

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that "in his specialized role of king or historian or philosopher or poet, man may find a solution for his quest, but in his unspecialized role of man he is not to be satisfied."

[38]In addition to the microcosmic use of the ship in Typee and the use of ships for a political analysis of authority in Omoo, there are political overtones to the treatment of the Arcturion in Mardi. Taji feels justified in deserting the ship community because the captain has broken his contract with him (pp. 6-7); later, when he thinks of the ship's fate, Taji feels a vague sense of responsibility that suggests the perpetual conflict between individual and society (p. 25).

Harry Levin, The Power of Blackness: Hawthorne, Poe, Melville (1958; rpt. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970), p. 181, suggests that the real name of the Neversink (i.e. United States) may have suggested the microcosmic approach; Howard P. Vincent, The Tailoring of Melville's White-Jacket (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1970), p. 155, identifies "the ship as microcosm" as one of the three themes of the novel; Kaul, pp. 252-53, summarizes the use and significance of the Neversink as a microcosm.

Priscilla Allen, "White-Jacket: Melville and the Man-of-War Microcosm," American Quarterly, 25 (1973), relates Melville's use

with such despotic personages as the "Grand Turk" and the "Czar of Russia," Claret is the acknowledged "king" of the absolute monarchy represented by the Neversink--he is "a Harry the Eighth afloat".[39] In the hierarchical arrangement of this monarchy, the various levels of officers and the midshipmen comprise the "aristocracy" (p. 26), while the petty officers and the common sailors, or "the people" (p. 28), make up the lowest level. The maintenance of this hierarchical structure, with the systematic subordination it entails, is insured by the Articles of War, which are read to the crew each month and which impose penalties of flogging or death for specified and general offenses; by the presence of the marines who keep watch over the seamen; by the efforts of the master-at-arms, or the chief-of-police; and by the long established dictates of naval "usage."

The ship's hierarchy creates obvious burdens for the common sailors. For example, not only must their meals be compressed into

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of the warship as a microcosm to earlier efforts along this line. She makes the interesting (though perhaps predictable) observation that when ordinary seamen took a microcosmic approach in recounting their life on a warship, they condemned the ship's autocracy, p. 44, while officer-authors praised the "perfection of military government," p. 37. Allen, p. 44, also points out the flexibility of Melville's use of the microcosmic approach:

> When the logical implications of his metaphor intrude, he escapes them simply by contradicting them, interjecting into his argument distinctions between the ship and the ship-microcosm. . . .

[39] Herman Melville, White-Jacket: Or the World in a Man-of-War, eds. Harrison Hayford, Hershel Parker, and G. Thomas Tanselle (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1970), p. 23; also see pp. 144, 297 for descriptions of the Neversink as an absolute monarchy. Hereafter cited by page number in the text of the paper.

Melville frequently used references to the Czar of Russia to indicate the ultimate in despotism; for a more extended view of his attitude on Russian rule, see the discussion of Muzkovi in Mardi, pp. 467-68.

an eight hour period so as not to interfere with naval protocol, but they are frequently imposed upon simply to satisfy the personal caprice of the captain or other officers. Undue official enthusiasm for a clean deck, for example, may mean excessive work and hazardous health conditions for the crew; in wartime, an over-gallant captain may assert his heroism at the cost of the senseless slaughter of his own men, while in peacetime, an officer's pride in efficiency may lead him to push his sailors too hard and needlessly imperil their lives:[40] "And thus do the people of the gun-deck suffer, that the Commodore on the poop may be glorified" (p. 197). In addition, the excessive ceremony accorded the officers represents not only an inconvenience to the crew, but also creates "a feeling of servility and debasement in the hearts of most of the seamen" (p. 166). An extreme example of this sense of degradation is the sailor Frank's shame at the thought of having his brother--a midshipman--see him in his "lackey" (p. 244) position on the Neversink.[41] The undesirable consequences of this enforcement of class division also extend to the commissioned officers and midshipmen since each rank has its own proportionate display of "pomp" (p. 166).

The hierarchical system is such that it both fosters corruption and tolerates incompetence among the officers,[42] but the most serious

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[40] For examples of such situations, see pp. 86-87, 314-15, and 195-97.

[41] Wilson L. Heflin, "A Man-of-War Button Divides Two Cousins," Boston Public Library Quarterly, 3 (1951), 56-57, suggests that this incident reflects the relationship between Melville and his cousin Stanwix Gansevoort.

[42] While the narrator suggests that many of these incompetent men are given shore duty as a protective measure

result of the consciousness of position and the concept of extended authority is the arbitrariness of discipline on the Neversink.[43] Not only is there a distinct double standard concerning the recognition of punishable offenses and the severity of punishment, based on whether or not the offender is an officer or one of "the people,"[44] but the subject and degree of punishment are often determined by arbitrary and sometimes vindictive decisions. The officers swear with impunity, and when the master-at-arms is caught smuggling, his sentence is light and he is soon returned to his post--partly, it is hinted, because of certain gifts he has made to Claret. The other members of the smuggling ring are flogged. On occasion Claret uses his authority to punish those against whom he has a personal grudge, as in the case of Candy, and he also arbitrarily ignores the specific limits set by the Articles of War in the reprisals sometimes taken against errant midshipmen. Because of the liberties taken with the

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(see p. 113), some--like Selvagee (see, for example, p. 33)--are found at sea, and it might be noted that Claret's intemperance almost causes disaster for the Neversink. The ship is saved not because of the functioning of the system of command, but because Mad Jack directly countermands the captain's order (p. 106), proving that "in time of peril . . . obedience, irrespective of rank, generally flies to him who is best fitted to command" (p. 110).

[43]For a discussion of this point, see pp. 216-17; Keith Huntress, "Melville's Use of a Source for White-Jacket," American Literature, 17 (1945), 72, 74, identifies White-Jacket as a protest against "arbitrary authority" and notes that the changes made in Melville's source material from Scenes in Old Ironsides emphasize this.

[44]For example, see pp. 300-01, 144-45.

specific requirements of the Articles of War and because of a general clause in the Articles that allows sea usage to determine the punishment for all offenses not specified therein, the king-captain of this sea monarchy becomes "legislator . . . judge and . . . executive" (p. 143). Theoretically, since naval discipline was defined by law and by the traditional customs of the sea, discipline should have been similar on every man-of-war, but in reality the extent to which the captain exercises his authority is the determining factor:[45] ". . . . the Captain . . . is an absolute ruler, making and unmaking law as he pleases" (p. 144).

And the abuses or arbitrary application of power does not stop with the captain; on many occasions the subordinate officers take it upon themselves to administer punishments that can be legally imposed only by the captain.[46] As might be expected, this arbitrary system of justice and the jealousies fostered by the hierarchical structure of the ship's company create an unhealthy climate for all on board:[47]

> The whole body of this discipline is emphatically a system of cruel cogs and wheels, systematically grinding up in one common hopper all that might minister to the moral well-being of the crew.
>
> It is the same with both officers and men. If a Captain have a grudge against a Lieutenant, or a Lieutenant against a midshipman, how easy to torture him by official treatment, which shall not lay open the superior officer to legal rebuke. And if a midshipman bears a grudge against a sailor, how easy . . . to have him degraded at the gangway. Through all the endless ramifications of rank and station, in most men-of-war there runs a sinister vein of bitterness. . . . (pp. 374-75)

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[45] Canaday, p. 32.

[46] For example, see p. 140.

[47] Vincent, p. 137.

But although the despotic nature of the warship's government has undesirable effects on all who serve on her--even Captain Claret, who is more lenient than many officers, has been made the despot he is by "the usages of the Navy" (p. 367)--it is among "the people" that the most drastic results of the ship's oppressive government are seen. The narrator asserts that much of the vice and depravity often attributed to a man-of-war's men is the result of repression and dehumanizing punishments:

> . . . most of the sailor iniquities . . . are indirectly to be ascribed to the morally debasing effects of the unjust, despotic, and degrading laws under which the man-of-war's man lives. (p. 304)

It is obvious that the floggings that are so arbitrarily administered have a degrading effect on the crew and that it is the basically good man who is the most spiritiually wounded by such punishment.[48] Even White Jacket suddenly finds himself ready to commit murder rather than submit to humiliation at the mainmast.[49] It is true that some men, like Happy Jack, become "so drilled and disciplined to servitude, that . . . they seem cheerfully to resign themselves to their fate" (p. 383), but such "invincible indifference" is the mark of a man "so dead to the least dignity of manhood that he [can] hardly be called a man" (p. 384). Others, who, like old Ushant with his emblematic

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[48]John Bernstein, Pacifism and Rebellion in the Writings of Herman Melville (London: Mouton and Co., 1964), p. 70, points out the negative effects of flogging on the good men and the lack of effect on the bad.

[49]See Matthiessen, p. 403.

beard,[50] assert their personal liberty despite the oppressive demands of the authoritative government, suffer harshly for their small efforts to retain some portion of individual freedom and dignity. In the man-of-war world, those who fare best are those like Jack Chase. Chase may be "a stickler for the Rights of Man, and the liberties of the world" while "ashore," but he recognizes the expediency of "bowing to naval discipline afloat" (p. 17). And thus he manages to keep some degree of his internal manhood intact even if the external beard which symbolizes it must go. It is interesting to note that the beard that is shaved off in compliance with the repressive rules of the Neversink grew "amazingly" (p. 19) while Chase served in the Peruvian fight for freedom. But although he often speaks for the common sailors in their confrontations with the king-captain of the Neversink, it is clear from White Jacket's glowing praise of him that Jack Chase is the exceptional rather than the average man.[51] If, therefore, the best of men can sustain only a small degree of freedom under the circumstances found

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[50] Vincent, pp. 185-86, says Ushant may have been based on Joseph Palmer of Fitchburg, who had a beard battle with the community, and comments that the beard episode represents "the violation of the sanctity of a human soul," which was "the Unpardonable Sin" for Melville.

[51] The frequent identification of Jack Chase as a representative common man does reflect Melville's criterion for judging the appropriateness of governmental conditions on the Neversink; see Chase, pp. ix, and Henry W. Wells, "An Unobtrusive Democrat: Herman Melville," South Atlantic Quarterly, 43 (1944), 49. It might also be noted that the manly "good sense and good feeling" (p. 14) with which Chase commands the respect of his crew in the foretop represents a distinct alternative to the rigid despotic rule of the ship as a whole.

on the Neversink, what hope is there that the ordinary man will be able to retain or achieve true personal freedom and dignity?

Melville's condemnation of the cruelties and inequities on the Neversink appeals generally to the Christian ethic and to the democratic humanitarian view of "right and wrong" (p. 146). But more specifically, the ship's despotic government is analyzed and criticized in terms of the principles and practices of the American republic.[52] The privileges denied to the Neversink's crew by the Articles of War are described in terms of the constitutional rights guaranteed all Americans (at least on land). For example, the sailors are denied freedom of worship and the freedom to assemble for the purpose of obtaining "a redress of grievances" (p. 294). They are also denied trial by their "peers" (p. 302), "there is an everlasting suspension of the Habeas Corpus" (p. 144), and the concept of equal justice for all is ignored.[53] Captain Claret embodies "three things opposed to the genius of the American Constitution"--"irresponsibility in a judge, unlimited discretionary authority in an executive, and the union of an irresponsible judge and an unlimited executive in one person" (p. 143). Also, the narrator comments on the marked contrast between the ceremonies surrounding the captain and commodore upon even trivial occasions and the

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[52]Allen, pp. 45-46, takes a different perspective and says Melville contrasts America as it is, represented by the Neversink, with America as it should be.

[53]Wayne Charles Miller, "Herman Melville and the Dissection of the Military World: A Warning to America," in An Armed America, Its Face in Fiction: A History of the American Military Novel (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1970), p. 37, points out some of the constitutional rights denied the sailors.

nonpretentiousness of "the President of the United States, [who] may be seen entering his residence with his umbrella under his arm, and no brass band or military guard at his heels" (p. 165). The President also mingles with and is accessible to the ordinary citizens and never forgets that his obligation is to the totality of the populace—to "his sovereign lords and masters, the imperial people" (p. 189). And Melville suggests that the evils resulting from the hierarchical structure on the Neversink could be substantially reduced by a "leveling . . . downward" (p. 166).

In judging the shortcomings of absolute monarchy as illustrated by the microcosm of the Neversink, Melville exposes the corruption, jealousies, incompetence, and injustice that exist within such a system, his primary criterion being the condition of the ordinary man under such a government. Condemning the placing of arbitrary and degrading restrictions upon "the people," Melville inserts a reminder that because of "the essential dignity of man" (p. 146) there is a basic equality which cannot be denied--"we all wear crowns, from our cradles to our graves" (p. 237).

CHAPTER IV

TOTALITARIANISM: *MOBY-DICK*

Melville's use of a shipboard setting to examine how men are controlled by other men is continued in *Moby-Dick* (1851), but here the *Neversink*'s hierarchical monarchy is replaced by the absolute dominance of Captain Ahab and the crass personal motives that prevailed among the officers of the man-of-war are transcended by Ahab's heroic quest for the white whale, whose destruction will by implication give meaning to life and dignity to man. While his position on the *Pequod* might be generally described as that of a despot, the emblematic nature of his quest and the methods by which he achieves control over the ship's crew and binds them to his purpose remove Ahab from the category of the traditional repressive ruler who wields authority for selfish materialistic gains or out of the love of power for its own sake. In fact, the microcosm of the *Pequod* strikingly resembles a modern totalitarian society.[1] Although the

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[1]Ahab is sometimes referred to by critics as a totalitarian dictator and the *Pequod* is sometimes likened to a totalitarian state. For example, see Baritz, p. 308; Levin, p. 216; and Albert McLean, "Spouter Inn and Whaleman's Chapel: The Cultural Matrices of *Moby-Dick*," in *Melville & Hawthorne in the Berkshires: A Symposium*, ed. Howard P. Vincent, Kent Studies in English, No. 7 (Kent, Ohio: Kent State Univ. Press, 1968), p. 100. However only C. L. R. James, *Mariners, Renegades and Castaways: The Story of Herman Melville and the World We Live In* (New York: C. L. R. James, 1953), has elaborated upon the relationship between the phenomenon of totalitarianism and the circumstances described in the novel.

basic ideology of totalitarianism existed before the industrial era,[2] totalitarianism is usually considered an essentially twentieth-century phenomenon since the total control which it seeks to establish is largely dependent on the resources of modern technology and the structure of modern industrialized society.[3] However as Melville analyzed how isolated, disillusioned men might react when confronted by a captain with a fanatic devotion to a visionary mission, the confines of shipboard provided a compact setting in which techniques of mass control could be effectively applied. Therefore a recognition of the similarities between the conditions on the Pequod and the ideology and tactics of totalitarianism can create a new awareness of the significance of certain events in the novel and provide a clearer understanding of the relationship between Ahab, the mates, and the crew.

Totalitarianism can be generally defined as the assertion of governmental control[4] over the totality of human life. In a totalitarian system, the political, social, and economic aspects of society are all dominated by a central power that uses terror and indoctrination

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[2]See Barrington Moore, Jr., Political Power and Social Theory: Seven Studies (1958; rpt. New York: Harper and Row, 1965), pp. 74-78.

[3]See Carl J. Friedrich and Zbigniew K. Brzezinski, Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy, 2nd ed., revised by Carl J. Friedrich (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1965), pp. 15-27.

[4]Carl J. Friedrich, ed., "The Problem of Totalitarianism--An Introduction," in Totalitarianism (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1954), p. 4, points out that totalitarianism is much more than a political form, but in the general sense and with the qualifications given in this paper, the term "government control" seems adequate.

to destroy man's independent will and ultimately create a unanimity of mass support for the system's ideological aims that can be sustained without the use of external force.[5] Such a system is characterized by a sense of movement toward a predestined goal,[6] and totalitarianism tends to arise in times of social stress because its authoritative view of history gives isolated and insecure men a sense of stability and purpose by making them participants in the fated unfolding of destiny.[7] The movement is directed by a leader who embodies the ideology of the system[8] and who uses propaganda and terror to insure the progress of the movement. At the same time, the leader is himself a subservient tool of the inevitable forces of history.[9]

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[5]See S. Andreski, "Totalitarianism," in A Dictionary of the Social Sciences, eds. Julius Gould and William L. Kolb (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1964), p. 719; and Moore, pp. 31-32. J. L. Talmon, The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1960), p. 2, says that totalitarianism "widens the scope of politics to embrace the whole of human existence."

Generalizations about the nature of totalitarianism in this paper will be based largely on reading in: Hannah Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism, 2nd ed. (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1966); Zevedei Barbu, Democracy and Dictatorship: Their Psychology and Patterns of Life (New York: Grove Press, 1956); Friedrich, Totalitarian Dictatorship; and Totalitarianism, ed. Carl J. Friedrich.

[6]See Arendt, pp. 323-26, 415; and Herbert J. Spiro, "Totalitarianism," in International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences (New York: The Macmillan Co. and The Free Press, 1968), p. 111.

[7]See Arendt, pp. 317, 323-24, 351-53, 458.

[8]See Alex Inkeles, "The Totalitarian Mystique: Some Impressions of the Dynamics of Totalitarian Society," in Totalitarianism, ed. Carl J. Friedrich (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1954), p. 88.

[9]Inkeles, pp. 95-96; Arendt, p. 325; and Friedrich, Totalitarian Dictatorship, p. 85.

In Moby-Dick Ahab is a totalitarian leader[10] and the white whale represents the goal of the Pequod's totalitarian quest. The apparently fated nature of the quest and Ahab's determination to impose meaning on the universe through the destruction of Moby Dick correspond to totalitarianism's attempt to establish cultural stability by asserting that the absolute truth of history is known to the movement and that the future is therefore predictable and inevitable.[11] In addition Ahab's rejection of reason and his reliance on emotion and primitive instinct as means of discovering the "'truer' reality concealed behind all perceptible things"[12] are characteristic of fascistic totalitarian ideology:[13] ". . . Ahab never thinks; he only feels, feels, feels. . . ."[14] Fedallah's presence is also suggestive of the primitive and mythical bases of Ahab's totalitarianism.[15] Like the typical totalitarian leader,

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[10]Ahab can also be viewed as the product of the nineteenth-century interest in the great man or the hero. For example, see Willie T. Weathers, "Moby Dick and the Nineteenth-Century Scene," Texas Studies in Literature and Language, 1 (Winter 1960), 477; and Brooks, pp. 472-75. Raney Stanford, "The Romantic Hero and That Fatal Selfhood," Centennial Review, 12 (1968), 445-46, notes that totalitarian propaganda is built on the theory of the great man and that twentieth-century totalitarianism develops from the same "social frustration" that encouraged hero worship in the nineteenth century.

[11]See Arendt, pp. 461-62.

[12]Arendt, pp. 470-71.

[13]See Barbu, pp. 6, 9, 131.

[14]Herman Melville, Moby-Dick, eds. Harrison Hayford and Hershel Parker (New York: Norton, 1967), p. 460. Hereafter cited by page number in the text of the paper.

[15]See Barbu, pp. 80-81, with respect to the link between totalitarianism and the primitive.

Ahab is secretive about his personal life and is surrounded by "an inner circle" of those especially "initiated" into the essence of the movement.[16] His private whale boat crew, who are outside the normal sphere of authority on the ship, also serve to create the duality of organization that weakens traditional forms and promotes totalitarian control.[17]

The more practical organizational aspect of Ahab's totalitarian leadership is seen in his relation to the regular crew of the Pequod. Admitting that the explanation lies too deep for him to uncover, Ishmael can only wonder

> how it was that [the crew] so aboundingly responded to the old man's ire--by what evil magic their souls were possessed, that at times his hate seemed almost theirs; the White Whale as much their insufferable foe as his; how all this come to be. (p. 162)

But Melville reveals the answer through his depiction of the circumstances and the events that lead to the crew's submission to Ahab's will and their enlistment in his cause as he begins to weld them into a totalitarian unit.

As "Isolatoes" separated from the "common continent of men" (p. 108), the crew are especially susceptible to the unifying and seemingly ennobling qualities to be found by joining the impassioned pursuit of Moby Dick.[18] The social alienation which facilitates

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[16]Arendt, p. 373; James, p. 61, identifies Ahab's private crew as the totalitarian leader's "special force."

[17]See Arendt, pp. 395-402.

[18]See Arendt, pp. 316-17.

Ahab's domination is most clearly seen in the situation of Ishmael, whose name suggests he is the representative outcast. The opening chapters of the book expose Ishmael's isolation and mental restlessness. Feeling a "drizzly November" (p. 12) of discontent with himself and his fellow men, Ishmael is ready to submit to the discipline of ship life, which has in the past provided him with a sense of contentment and human brotherhood by reaffirming that everybody is subject to "the universal thump" (p. 15)--whether delivered by ship captains or life in general.[19] Before signing on the Pequod, Ishmael does find companionship in the person of Queequeg, but his affinity with the savage in one sense represents his cultural isolation and a rejection of his own society that makes him susceptible to totalitarian influences. Elijah asserts that Ishmael and men like him are just right for Ahab's purposes, and Ishmael's tendency to philosophical speculation which blurs the perception of reality makes him especially vulnerable before the certainty of vision offered by totalitarianism, though Ishmael asserts that for men in general, going to sea is a subconscious effort to get closer to "the ungraspable phantom of life" (p. 14)--a phantom totalitarianism aspires to dispel. In addition to typifying

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[19]McLean, pp. 99-101. Alfred Kazin, "'Introduction' to Moby-Dick," in Melville: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Richard Chase (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1962), p. 42, describes Ishmael as a representative of modern man's feeling of alienation; also see Henry Nash Smith, "The Image of Society in Moby-Dick," in Moby-Dick Centennial Essays, ed. Tyrus Hillway and Luther S. Mansfield (Dallas: Southern Methodist Univ. Press, 1953), p. 63.

the isolated type of person who is most likely to be swept up in a totalitarian movement, Ishmael also reveals attitudes characteristic of an individual who finds himself caught up in a totalitarian system. For example, even before the ship sails, Ishmael is apprehensive about its future under the mysterious Captain Ahab:

> But when a man suspects any wrong, it sometimes happens that if he be already involved in the matter, he insensibly strives to cover up his suspicions even from himself. And much this way it was with me. I said nothing, and tried to think nothing. (p. 90)

Later, as the quest begins, Ishmael gives himself "up to the abandonment of the time and the place" (p. 163). He makes his will following a narrow escape in the whale boat; and, feeling he has "survived" himself, he is thereafter with complete submission, "like a quiet ghost with a clean conscience," ready "for a cool, collected dive at death and destruction" (p. 197).[20]

Given the crew's general psychological readiness to accept the security offered by a totalitarian system, Ahab uses a combination of the totalitarian techniques of propaganda and terror[21] to gain complete dominance over them and turns a simple whaling voyage into an ideological

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[20]Arendt, pp. 316-17, points out that "typical 'nonjoiners'" are often the people most attracted by the totalitarian organization and that cultured, sophisticated people with "highly differentiated individualism" are often those who seem most in need of "the self-abandonment into the mass" which mass movements allow; Barbu, p. 147, points out that in the Nazi type of totalitarian society, "the individual realizes himself by self-annihilation."

[21]See Friedrich, Totalitarian Dictatorship, p. 129, 131-47; also see Arendt, pp. 437-59, 464-65.

quest. Circumventing the ship's hierarchical system of command, the normal function of which would weaken his totalitarian authority,[22] Ahab directly addresses the crew, already awed by his strange appearance and the mysterious rumors surrounding him, "in unusual terms . . . of condescension or in terrorem" (p. 129) as he works to make his will their own. One of the most striking examples of Ahab's use of the propaganda techniques of a totalitarian demagogue is the famous quarterdeck scene. Here Ahab works the crew up to a frantic pitch as he "magnetically" (p. 141) enlists their help in the quest for Moby Dick:

> . . . tossing both arms, with measureless imprecations [Ahab] shouted out: " . . . this is what ye have shipped for, men! to chase that white whale on both sides of land, and over all sides of earth, till he spouts black blood. . . . What say ye, men? . . ."
>
> "Aye, aye!" shouted the harpooners and seamen, running closer to the excited old man. . . ." (p. 143)

In addition to asserting the magnetic and persuasive force of his personality, Ahab uses ritual and ceremony to increase the effectiveness of his appeal. For example, the mates are instructed to symbolically cross their lances and act as "cup-bearers" (p. 146) to the harpooners.[23] When the mates seem reluctant to be made subservient to Ahab's "pagan kinsmen," Ahab persuades them to carry out his wishes, concluding his remarks on the subject with a sentence that illustrates the kind of

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[22] See Arendt, pp. 404-05, 364-65, 398.

[23] The extreme ease with which the harpooners accept Ahab's quest might be explained in terms of the relation between primitivism and Ahab's fascistic totalitarianism.

total domination he is seeking to establish: "I do not order ye; ye will it" (p. 146). By their acquiescence the mates, including the very reluctant Starbuck, are "made parties to this indissoluble league," and the entire "frantic" crew is involved in drinking an oath of loyalty to the quest:

> Death to Moby Dick! God hunt us all, if we do not hunt Moby Dick to his death! (p. 146)

Later Ahab contemplates the success of his performance:

> 'Twas not so hard a task. I thought to find one stubborn, at the least; but my one cogged circle fits into all their various wheels, and they revolve. (p. 147)

The ritual and magic characteristic of totalitarian propaganda[24] are also found in the blood baptism given the harpoon that has been especially forged to kill Moby Dick, who has become the symbolic enemy--the embodiment of all evil,[25] and in Ahab's creation of a new and accurate compass to replace those made useless by the storm. Realizing the superstitious significance the crew have attached to the inversion of the compass needles, as he makes the new compass Ahab goes through "some small strange motions" that are perhaps "merely intended to augment the awe of the crew" (p. 425) and increase his stature among them. With "abashed glances of servile wonder," the crew watch the process "with fascinated eyes . . . [awaiting] whatever magic might follow" (p. 425).

By proving that he is "lord over the level loadstone" (p. 425), Ahab is projecting the image of infallibility associated with a

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[24]See Arendt, pp. 377-78; and Friedrich, Totalitarian Dictatorship, p. 26.

[25]See Friedrich, Totalitarian Dictatorship, p. 90.

totalitarian leader and reinforced by totalitarian propaganda.[26] In this episode and in his destruction of the quadrant, as well as in his confrontation with the lightning, Ahab asserts his control over nature and, while rejecting science as a too limited tool of truth, shows that the laws of science can be made to serve his cause[27]--thus linking the infallibility of the totalitarian leader to the encompassing certainty of the totalitarian view of the world.[28] Regardless of circumstances, Ahab stoutly maintains his posture of infallibility throughout the novel:

> I crush the quadrant, the thunder turns the needles, and now the mad sea parts the log-line. But Ahab can mend all. (p. 427)

The concept of infallibility, both of the leader and the system, is supported by the use of predictions that ideally are later made to come true,[29] and this aspect of totalitarianism is suggested by the prophecies of both Fedallah and Ahab. For example, Ahab declares:

> I now prophesy that I will dismember my dismemberer. Now, then, be the prophet and the fulfiller one. That's more than ye, ye great gods, ever were. (p. 147)

The control achieved through propaganda is supplemented by the typically unpredictable use or threat of physical force, which promotes an anxiety among the crew that leads toward the total psychological terror characteristic of totalitarian control.

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[26] See Arendt, pp. 348-49.

[27] See Friedrich, Totalitarian Dictatorship, p. 316.

[28] See Arendt, p. 383.

[29] Arendt, p. 349.

This atmosphere of uncertainty tends to encourage the destruction of individual identity and force of will. For example, Ahab's abusive remarks and physical threats totally confuse Stubb, and the mate ultimately concludes that to be struck by a "great man" such as Ahab should be considered "an honor" (p. 116) and that kicking back would be futile anyway.[30] The totalitarian tendency to judge the rightness or wrongness of an action solely in the terms of the degree to which it furthers or impedes the movement[31] is reflected in the blow Ahab gives the steersman who has been heading the ship in the wrong direction. In the lightning episode the frightened crew become almost "mutinous" (p. 418) and Ahab has to use the threat of force to control them. He drives them into a submissive "terror of dismay" by waving the burning harpoon that had been taken by the crew as a sign of God's displeasure and threatening to "transfix with it" (p. 418) any man who tries to turn the ship back toward home. He follows this threat with a reminder that the men are bound by oath to hunt Moby Dick and regains final control by demonstrating his personal infallibility as he blows out the flame of the blazing harpoon. During the third-day's chase Ahab threatens to "harpoon," not the first man, but the first "thing" (p. 465) that moves to leave the whale boat.

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[30]Stubb's position on the Pequod might be explained in terms of Barbu's description of the Nazi hierarchy, which allowed the individual to feel secure in his obedience to authority above him and fulfill his need for dominance in his relation to those below him (see Barbu, p. 146); Stubb's relation to Fleece, the cook, would seem to bear this out.

[31]Arendt, p. 465.

Realizing that his magnetic control over the crew and the fever pitch reached in the quarterdeck episode cannot endure forever at such an intense level, Ahab resorts to the totalitarian tactic of setting up intermediate goals and rewards for the average man and keeping him immersed in activity.[32] Ahab knows

> that the full terror of the voyage must be kept withdrawn into the obscure background (for few men's courage is proof against protracted mediation unrelieved by action); that when they stood their long night watches, his officers and men must have some nearer things to think of than Moby Dick. (p. 183)

Ahab is well aware that though "in times of strong emotion mankind disdain all base considerations . . . such times are evanescent" and decides that it would be wise to follow the normal procedures of a whaling voyage and let the men make what profit they can:

> The permanent constitutional condition of the manufactured man, thought Ahab, is sordidness. Granting that the White Whale fully incites the hearts of this my savage crew, and . . . even breeds a certain generous knight-errantism in them, still . . . they must also have food for their more common, daily appetites. (p. 184)

In order "to accomplish his object Ahab must use tools; and of all tools . . . men are the most apt to get out of order" (p. 183); thus the captain of the Pequod decides to carry on with the "nominal purpose" (p. 184) of the ship. Such a procedure will also help protect Ahab from the legal consequences that could result from his "having . . . perhaps somewhat prematurely revealed the prime . . . purpose of the Pequod's voyage" (p. 184). To insure that there is

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[32]See Friedrich, Totalitarian Dictatorship, pp. 219-29.

no challenge to his authority, Ahab, in true totalitarian fashion, pays "calculating attention to every minute atmospheric influence which it was possible for his crew to be subjected to" (p. 184). But while Ahab is observing the "customary usages" (p. 184) of the sea,

> behind those forms and usages . . . he sometimes masked himself; incidentally making use of them for other and more private ends than they were legitimately intended to subserve. . . . For be a man's intellectual superiority what it will, it can never assume the practical, available supremacy over other men, without the aid of some sort of external arts and entrenchments, always, in themselves, more or less paltry and base. . . . Such large virtue lurks in these small things when extreme political superstitions invest them, that in some royal instances even to idiot imbecility they have imparted potency. But when, as in the case of Nicholas the Czar, the ringed crown of geographical empire encircles an imperial brain; then, the plebeian herds crouch abased before the tremendous centralization. (p. 129)

In addition to the general awe and fear evident among the crew, some of their more specific reactions to Ahab are also depicted in the novel. For example, the chapters immediately following the description of the quarterdeck scene present the reactions of Starbuck, Stubb, Ishmael, and the rest of the crew to Ahab's announcement of his quest. The sailors, who have freely indulged in the "old Mogul's wine" (p. 150), are preoccupied with ordinary rowdy merrymaking, though they do agree that Ahab is "a grand old cove" and that they "are the lads to hunt him up his whale" (p. 153). The deeper effect on the crew of Ahab's impassioned description of his quest is seen in the reaction of Ishmael, who, though perhaps more of a philosopher and intellectual than the others, is in this case "one" with the crew:

> . . . my shout had gone up with the rest . . . and stronger I shouted, and more did I hammer and clinch my oath, because of the dread in my soul. (p. 155)

Ishmael's response also illustrates the effectiveness of the mythical element of totalitarian propaganda:

> A wild, mystical, sympathetical feeling was in me; Ahab's quenchless feud seemed mine. With greedy ears I learned the history of that murderous monster against whom I and all the others had taken our oaths of violence and revenge. (p. 155)

The reactions of Starbuck and Stubb present a contrast between Starbuck's weak rationalizing hope that God may divert Ahab from his purpose and Stubb's fatalistic acceptance of all that may happen: ". . . one comfort's always left-- . . . it's all predestinated" (p. 149). At one point in the novel Ahab acknowledges the counterpoint between Starbuck and Stubb, declaring that "Starbuck is Stubb reversed . . . and ye two are all mankind" (p. 452). As representatives of two types of human nature, the practical Stubb and the superstitious and moral Starbuck both prove susceptible to Ahab's domination. The character of each makes him prey to totalitarian control. The usually courageous Starbuck has certain underlying fears that lead to a strong instinct for self-preservation and divided feelings about religion and life that make him unable to "withstand those . . . spiritual terrors, which sometimes menace . . . from the concentrating brow of an enraged and mighty man" (p. 104); Stubb's inclination to "think not" (p. 114) and just accept what is allows him to take a "sensible" (p. 419) view of any circumstance. The third mate, Flask, represents still another variety of man,[33] and his "unconscious fearlessness" (p. 106) relates

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[33]Matthiessen, p. 452, notes that the mates represent a descending order of spiritual awareness.

him to one type of man who would be expected to loyally serve a totalitarian cause--the moral cynic whose belief that "everything is permitted" is based on his trust that "everything is possible."[34] Thus,

> chiefly made up of mongrel renegades, and castaways, and cannibals--morally enfeebled also, by the incompetence of mere unaided virtue or right-mindedness in Starbuck, the invulnerable jollity of indifference and recklessness in Stubb, and the pervading mediocrity in Flask,

the Pequod's crew seem "specially picked" (p. 162) to suit Ahab's plans and are very susceptible to totalitarian doctrine and control.

But even though Starbuck acquiesces in the plan to pursue Moby Dick, his persistent serious moral objections to the quest--his feeling that there is a conflict between obedience to Ahab and obedience to God--and his position of respected authority among the ship's crew make him the severest potential challenge to Ahab,[35] who knows that Starbuck's opposition could foil his plan and perhaps even result in mutiny. Aware of the profound nature of the mate's misgivings, Ahab realizes that the first level of totalitarian propaganda, which is intended to appeal to the mass of men,[36] will be insufficient in Starbuck's case. He therefore reveals to Starbuck "the little lower layer" (p. 144) of the truth about the quest. This unexpected revelation, which elevates the search for Moby Dick from the realm of personal

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[34] Arendt, p. 387.

[35] Canaday, p. 56.

[36] See Inkeles, p. 97.

vengeance directed at a "dumb brute" to a metaphysical crusade, is coupled with reminders that of all the crew Starbuck is alone in his hesitation: "Stand up amid the general hurricane, thy one tost sapling cannot . . ." (p. 144). And before the overawed mate can raise any conscientious objections to Ahab's newly revealed motives, which make Starbuck's earlier charge of blasphemy seem palely insufficient, Ahab deflates his opposition by suggesting that for Starbuck the destruction of Moby Dick need after all mean only the death of another whale. In the equivocal climate produced by these ideas, Starbuck is reduced to the silence with which totalitarianism is often greeted by moderate men, and that silence becomes his practical surrender.[37] Having tacitly assented to Ahab's plan, Starbuck has helped to establish a new system of order on the Pequod, and under this new order any future dissension on his part becomes illegal, as Ahab well understands: "Starbuck now is mine; cannot oppose me now, without rebellion" (p. 144).[38] To maintain his control over Starbuck, who feels trapped in a situation in which he has "to obey, rebelling" (p. 148), Ahab uses the same methods of terror that he applies to the crew as a whole. For example, when Starbuck informs Ahab that there is an oil leak in the cargo hold, the mate's suggestion that the situation needs checking out sends Ahab into a rage since what to Starbuck is mere prudential policy is to Ahab an obstruction of his quest, whose

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[37]Matthiessen, p. 451, links Starbuck to the passage in The Confidence-Man which suggests that the moderate man is a tool of the wicked.

[38]See Canaday, p. 55.

furtherance or hindrance is, in the true totalitarian sense, the only determinant of right and wrong. Ahab levels a musket at Starbuck and drives him on deck, but moments later he agrees to Starbuck's demand and orders an inspection of the main-hold, probably out of "mere prudential policy which, under the circumstances, imperiously forbade the slightest symptom of open disaffection, however transient, in the important chief officer of his ship" (p. 394). Later in the novel, when Ahab wants to be hoisted aloft in order to search out Moby Dick, it is to Starbuck's hand that he entrusts the rope by which his life will soon hang. Aware that of all the crew Starbuck is the most hostile to his quest, Ahab knows that when dealing with a man like Starbuck, the imposition of a moral obligation is the surest means of establishing commitment and control. It is Starbuck's strong dedication to the legitimate purpose of the ship's voyage that in part convinces Ahab of the need to adhere temporarily to normal usage on the Pequod:

> He knew . . . that however magnetic his ascendency in some respects was over Starbuck, yet that ascendency did not cover the complete spiritual man any more than mere corporeal superiority involves intellectual mastership. . . . Starbuck's body and Starbuck's coerced will were Ahab's so long as Ahab kept his magnet at Starbuck's brain; still . . . it might be that a long interval would elapse ere the White Whale was seen. During that long interval Starbuck would ever be apt to fall into open relapses of rebellion against his captain's leadership, unless some ordinary, prudential, circumstantial influences were brought to bear upon him. (p. 183)

Starbuck's failure to make use of his opportunity to shoot Ahab while he sleeps and thus save the crew from what he believes to be certain disaster is perhaps the clearest example of the effectiveness

of totalitarian terror on the Pequod. Starbuck wants to find a "lawful way" (p. 422) out of the Pequod's dilemma, but on the ship the only law is defined in terms of the furtherance of the quest and Ahab's dedication to it. So Starbuck stands physically and spiritually "alone . . . upon an open sea, with two oceans and a whole continent between [him] and law" (p. 422). His choice is therefore between killing Ahab and saving the ship or not killing him and condemning the crew to destruction. The horribleness of each alternative leaves Starbuck incapable of making an individual moral decision. Starbuck's inability to act is explained by a consequence of totalitarian terror observed by Hannah Arendt:

> Totalitarian terror achieved its most terrible triumph when it succeeded in cutting the moral person off from the individualist escape and in making the decisions of conscience absolutely questionable and equivocal. When a man is faced with the alternative of betraying and thus murdering his friends or of sending his wife and children, for whom he is . . . responsible, to their death . . . how is he to decide? The alternative is no longer between good and evil, but between murder and murder.[39]

As the Pequod nears the end of its voyage and its fated encounter with Moby Dick, Ahab's totalitarian control tightens. The pervasive effect of his terror tactics has been such that, following the characteristic progression of totalitarian domination, the terror has become internalized:[40]

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[39]Arendt, p. 452.

[40]Friedrich, Totalitarian Dictatorship, p. 170; Inkeles, pp. 106-07; Arendt, pp. 325, 464-468.

> . . . Ahab's purpose now fixedly gleamed down upon the . . . gloomy crew. It domineered above them so, that all their bodings, doubts, misgivings, fears, were fain to hide beneath their souls, and not sprout forth a single spear or leaf. (pp. 437-38)

Among the crew

> all humor, forced or natural, vanished. Stubb no more strove to raise a smile; Starbuck no more strove to check one. Alike, joy and sorrow, hope and fear, seemed ground to finest dust, and powdered, for the time, in the clamped mortar of Ahab's iron soul. Like machines, they dumbly moved about the deck. (p. 438)

The crew members are losing their individual identities and moving toward the mechanical type of man that Ahab on one level despises but which he recognizes to be best suited to serve a totalitarian movement.[41] The ideal mechanical man Ahab would order from the blacksmith would have "no heart at all" but "about a quarter of an acre of fine brains" (p. 390). He will not be an independent thinker, though. Instead of eyes that can see reality, he will have a "sky-light" (p. 390) through which any necessary illumination can be provided for him.

In the final frenzied pursuit of Moby Dick, the ultimate of totalitarian control is achieved on the ship. The lurking "fears and forebodings" that had been held in check by the crew's "growing awe of Ahab" are now "broken up, and on all sides routed" as the crew become immersed in the chase:

> The hand of Fate had snatched all their souls; and by the stirring perils of the previous day; the rack of the past night's suspense; the fixed, unfearing, blind, reckless way in which their wild craft went plunging towards its

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[41] Arendt, p. 405, notes that totalitarianism attempts to eradicate "human spontaneity."

> flying mark; by all these things, their hearts were bowled along. (p. 454)

Hannah Arendt has described the culminating effect of totalitarian terror by saying that

> it substitutes for the boundaries and channels of communication between individual men a band of iron which holds them so tightly together that it is as though their plurality had disappeared into One Man of gigantic dimensions.[42]

And in the final chase, the Pequod's crew is so unified:[43]

> They were one man, not thirty. . . . the individualities of the crew, this man's valor, that man's fear; guilt and guiltlessness, all varieties were welded into oneness, and were all directed to that fatal goal which Ahab their lord and keel did point to. (pp. 454-55)

On the third day of the chase, Ahab addresses his boat's crew: "Ye are not other men, but my arms and legs; and so obey me" (p. 465). Thus with the "enthusiastic unanimity"[44] characteristic of totalitarianism, the Pequod pursues its fated quest as Ahab affirms the inevitability of its movement toward its goal:

> This whole act's immutably decreed. 'Twas rehearsed . . . a billion years before this ocean rolled. . . . I am the Fates' lieutenant; I act under orders. (p. 459)

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[42] Arendt, pp. 465-66.

[43] Leo Marx, The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1964), p. 287, notes that in the chase, the crew becomes a "totalitarian unit."

[44] Friedrich, Totalitarian Dictatorship, p. 163; with respect to the importance of unanimity in the totalitarian system also see pp. 163-67.

Though Ahab is invested with a certain tragic grandeur, Melville's judgment on the viability of the totalitarianism represented by the Pequod is clearly negative. It leads to the death of the members of the crew and to the wreck of the microcosmic system itself.[45] The only survivor floats on a coffin--emblem of both the destructive nature of totalitarianism and of the genuine human bond that offers the only defense against it.

Ishmael's earlier experience at the helm of the Pequod during the trying-out had vividly dramatized the dangers of the ship's totalitarianism. Made drowsy by the late hour and dazed by the fiery redness that engulfs the deck, Ishmael suddenly awakens to find nothing before him but "a jet gloom":

> Uppermost was the impression, that . . . I . . . was not so much bound to any haven ahead as rushing from all havens astern. A stark, bewildered feeling, as of death, came over me. Convulsively my hands grasped the tiller, but . . . the tiller was . . . in some enchanted way, inverted. (p. 354)

Ishmael discovers, however, that it is not the universe which has abruptly become inverted; it is his view of it that is distorted. He regains his bearings just in time to save the ship. The speculations which follow link the incident to Ahab's view of the world, and the point is clear; the totalitarian vision is dangerous and false because it denies the complexity of life:

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[45]Stern, pp. 22-23, calls Ahab "apolitical" but says the "final evaluation" of him must be based upon "what he does to himself and the human community (the novel's 'politics')."

> Look not too long in the face of the fire, O man! Never dream with thy hand on the helm! Turn not thy back to the compass; . . . believe not the artificial fire, when its redness makes all things look ghastly. To-morrow, in the natural sun, the skies will be bright. . . .
> . . . . . .
> Give not thyself up, then, to fire, lest it invert thee, deaden thee; as for the time it did me. There is a wisdom that is woe; but there is a woe that is madness. (pp. 354-55)

Moby-Dick can also be read as a direct warning to nineteenth-century America of the possible consequences of certain national actions and attitudes. The Pequod sails from America with an American captain and a melting-pot conglomerate of a crew,[46] whose number, thirty, parallels the number of states in the "federated" (p. 108) union.[47] The ship's fatal voyage has been interpreted as a dramatization of the dangers of America's expansionism,[48] the ruthlessness of American industry,[49] and the latent fallacies behind the American stress on individualism[50] and on the need to subdue the continent

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[46]Levin, p. 206.

[47]Alan Heimert, "Moby-Dick and American Political Symbolism," American Quarterly, 15 (1963), 501; for additional comments on some of the topical political references in Moby-Dick, see Weathers.

[48]For example, see Harry Slochower, "Moby Dick: The Myth of Democratic Expectancy," American Quarterly, 2 (1950), 262.

[49]For example, see James B. Hall, "Moby Dick: Parable of a Dying System," Western Review, 14 (1950), 223-24; Newton Arvin, Herman Melville, The American Men of Letters Series (New York: William Sloane Associates, 1950), p. 180; Charles Olson, Call Me Ishmael (New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1947), p. 17; Chase, p. 43; Levin, p. 212; Smith, p. 62; and Marx, p. 306.

[50]For example, see Harold Kaplan, Democratic Humanism in American Literature (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1972), p. 159; Arvin, pp. 176, 181; and Matthiessen, p. 459.

by conquering nature.[51] The book has, thus, been considered a warning that America's headlong, arrogant rush toward the millennium could result in the loss of democratic freedoms and in the destruction of the ship of state.[52] From a strictly political point of view the warning to America is extremely ominous, especially so when it is remembered that totalitarianism developed as a response to perceived failures of democracy.[53] If American society became fragmented and America became a nation of Ishmaels, its people could fall prey to the same fears and pressures that beset the Pequod's crew and it would then be perfectly possible for Americans to ballot away their freedom, abdicating their political responsibility and giving the power over their lives into the hands of a single forceful man, even while clinging to the outward forms of democracy.[54] Melville clearly recognized the natural equality of men, but he knew that the commons could elevate their own demagogues and that the rights of men are "Loose-Fish" (p. 334) that may be seized by all men but can be kept only with diligence.

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[51]For example, see Chase, p. 43; and Arvin, p. 180.

[52]See Milton R. Stern, "Moby Dick, Millennial Attitudes, and Politics," Emerson Society Quarterly, No. 54, Part I (1969), 53; Frederic I. Carpenter, American Literature and the Dream, Essay Index Reprint Series (1955; rpt. Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1968), p. 73; and Baritz, p. 316.

[53]See Friedrich, Totalitarian Dictatorship, p. 25.

[54]See Barbu, p. 19.

CHAPTER V

AMERICAN DEMOCRACY: THE DREAM AND THE REALITY

Since Melville was an American writer, it is natural that among his analyses of various political systems are a number of works that deal rather specifically with American democracy. In these works Melville scrutinizes the historical and contemporary situation of America in light of the fundamental ideals and principles upon which the republic was founded. In effect, he judges the American reality in terms of the American dream.

The pre-Civil War period in which most of Melville's fiction was written was a time of great national growth and change and consequently furnished a variety of issues upon which the serious observer might dwell. Despite occasional economic setbacks, Americans in the first half of the nineteenth century (after the War of 1812) were fundamentally optimistic. National prosperity and population and territorial gains were seen as evidence of a bright future for the young nation.[1] Nationalistic feeling--expressed, for example, culturally in the Young America Movement in literature and seen politically in the concept of Manifest Destiny--ran high. In 1823 the Monroe Doctrine claimed to secure the Western Hemisphere from

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[1]See Literary History of the United States, eds. Robert E. Spiller et al., 3rd ed., revised (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1963), pp. 222, 345-46.

further colonial intervention by European powers,[2] and expansionist America talked of gaining control of Canada, Mexico, Cuba, Central America, and the Pacific and Caribbean islands. The nationalistic spirit reached its peak in the Mexican War and in the controversy over Oregon.[3] This was also a period of great faith in the individual and of movement toward popular democracy with the extension of suffrage and the election of Andrew Jackson.[4] The western frontier, with its strenuous demands on personal initiative, promoted democratic individualism, and Transcendental philosophy also encouraged self-reliance.

But serious problems were developing beneath the generally prevailing optimism. The increasing industrialization of the United States was producing situations that would lead to substantial challenges to the American dream. In addition to such specific problems as poor working conditions and abuses in woman and child labor, basic social and economic complications accompanied the growth of manufacture and the simultaneous rise of a class of urban wage earners. The specter of urban crowding and poverty, intensified by massive immigration,

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[2]Charles A. Beard and Mary R. Beard, The Beards' New Basic History of the United States, rev. by William Beard (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1968), p. 174.

[3]See Norman Foerster, Image of America: Our Literature from Puritanism to the Space Age (Notre Dame, Indiana: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1962), p. 49; Henry Nash Smith, Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth (1950: rpt. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1970), pp. 153-54; and Gilman Ostrander, The Rights of Man in America, 1606-1861, 2nd ed. (Columbia: Univ. of Missouri Press, 1971), pp. 231-32. Also see Howard, p. 122.

[4]See Ostrander, pp. 160-204, for an account of the growth of democracy. Also see Beard, pp. 203-09; and Literary History, p. 225.

posed severe problems for the concept of human dignity to which America was theoretically committed.[5] Overshadowing all other concerns as the century passed its halfway mark was the dilemma of slavery and the various sectional interests that separated East, West, and South economically, socially, and politically and that would lead to the break in the Union in 1861.[6]

That Melville's study of American democracy frequently addresses such areas of social and economic concern is largely explained by the inherent nature of democracy.[7] Because of its assumption that ordinary citizens can participate in their own government, democracy necessarily emphasizes the total importance of the individual. As a result, democracy is more than a political arrangement and branches out into areas of social and economic concern where the full welfare of the individual can potentially be realized. Thus political equality extends into social equality.[8] Zevedei Barbu has concluded that in reality democracy is perhaps less a political doctrine than "a specific

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[5]Literary History, p. 223; Walter Fuller Taylor, The Economic Novel in America (1942; rpt. New York: Octagon Books, Inc., 1964), pp. 20-21; Kaul, p. 52; Ostrander, pp. 296-302; Beard, p. 190.

[6]See Henry Bamford Parkes, The United States of America: A History, 3rd ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968), pp. 321-48; Literary History, pp. 222-23; Don Martindale, American Social Structure: Historical Antecedents and Contemporary Analysis (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1960), p. 144.

[7]For a concise definition of democracy, see Carl Cohen, Democracy (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1971), p. 7. For a brief account of the nature of democracy see Harold J. Laski, "Democracy," in Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1931), pp. 76-84; Govanni Sartori, "Democracy," in International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences (New York: The Macmillan Co. and The Free Press, 1968), pp. 112-20; and Kaplan, p. xiii.

[8]See Laski, p. 77; and Taylor, pp. 17-18.

cultural climate"--one that is flexible and receptive to change while upholding basic human rights.[9] This pervasive concern has been especially characteristic of American democracy.[10] After all, in popular metaphor America was the new Eden, or the new Zion, whose fresh shores and natural abundance were looked to by both the Old World and the New as offering universal material prosperity and social equality as well as political democracy.[11] This feature of the American dream was supplemented by a vision of inevitable progress toward an ideal society based on human equality and dignity and a belief that the perfection and promotion of democracy was the nation's sacred mission.[12]

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[9]Barbu, pp. 53, 3-4, 20.

[10]Taylor, p. 21, summarizes the nature and the impact of America's pervasive democracy prior to the Civil War:

> The democracy that gave aim and form to our pre-Civil-War culture was more . . . by far than just a method of government; it was also a tradition, a philosophy, almost an entire way of life in itself. It was a dynamic ideology, which broke through any narrow political boundaries to make itself felt in education, in economics, in the entire range of American society . . . pressing onward everywhere toward the . . . enlargement of all the possibilities of life for the common man.

[11]See R. W. B. Lewis, The American Adam: Innocence Tragedy and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1955), p. 5; Literary History, pp. 192-215; and Baritz, pp. 17-18. For an additional description of America as the new Zion and a discussion of the impact of this idea on early American literature, see Benjamin T. Spencer, The Quest for Nationality: An American Literary Campaign (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse Univ. Press, 1957), pp. 1-24.

[12]For a discussion of America's sense of mission and Manifest Destiny, see Ostrander, pp. 226-32.

As he examines American reality in terms of the American ideals of independence, prosperity, and equality, Melville's basis of judgment is consistently the degree to which the nation is upholding the promises to the individual inherent in the American dream. And as he considers the position of the individual in American society, Melville continually returns to one fundamental issue--an issue which attracted the attention of other nineteenth-century American writers. Melville was concerned both with how the individual independence promoted by American democracy was to be reconciled with community responsibility and with the identity problems faced by individuals who found themselves in a society that provided a much larger degree of individual choice and social mobility than the stratified societies of Europe. Among the dangers frequently seen as accompanying the development of American society was the possibility that too much emphasis on self-reliance could lead to a fragmented society of isolated men or that the despotic tyranny left behind in Europe might simply be replaced by the tyranny of the democratic majority in America.[13]

The tone in which Melville speaks of American issues has often led to confusion and misunderstanding on the part of modern readers. He is seen at times to be excessively, blindly pro-American, as, for example, in this passage from White-Jacket that reflects nineteenth-century America's enthusiastic sense of democratic mission:

> . . . we Americans are the peculiar, chosen people--the Israel of our time; we bear the ark of the liberties of the world. Seventy years ago we escaped from thrall;

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[13]For discussions of the decisions facing the individual, see Kaplan, pp. x-xi; and Kaul, p. 71.

> and, besides our first birth-right--embracing one continent of earth--God has given to us, for a future inheritance, the broad domains of the political pagans, that shall yet come and lie down under the shade of our ark, without bloody hands being lifted. God has predestinated, mankind expects, great things from our race; and great things we feel in our souls. The rest of the nations must soon be in our rear. We are the pioneers of the world; the advance-guard, sent on through the wilderness of untried things, to break a new path in the New World that is ours. In our youth is our strength; in our inexperience, our wisdom. At a period when other nations have but lisped, our deep voice is heard afar. Long enough have we been skeptics with regard to ourselves, and doubted whether, indeed, the political Messiah had come. But he has come in us, if we would but give utterance to his promptings. And let us always remember that with ourselves, almost for the first time in the history of earth, national selfishness is unbounded philanthropy; for we cannot do a good to America but we give alms to the world. (p. 151)

At other times Melville is accused of being negative to the point of nihilism in his observations on American life. But the sincere urgency of his comments and the apparent contradictions in his viewpoint can be explained in terms of the general attitude prevalent in the United States at the time. America was still considered a great social and political experiment--the outcome of which was by no means certain--and whose nature or course was still amendable:

> American society could not yet be looked on as a thing immutably crystallized; the possibilities of democracy were still being explored; and the institutions that would best embody the democratic ideal were still in the process of discovery.[14]

Harold Kaplan has said that the major writers of the American Renaissance wrote

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[14]Taylor, p. 20.

> as if the problem of living in society had just been offered to men who were otherwise morally and intellectually complete. These were the men of the myth of America, stepping onto the soil of a new continent and preparing to establish a new society.[15]

It was not then a question of praising or condemning a finished state, but the possibility of influencing its development that inspired American authors as they turned to national themes.

Mardi (1849)

The first depiction of American democracy in Melville's fiction occurs in Mardi, where the island of Vivenza represents America.[16] Having failed to discover the ideal of political and social order represented by Yillah in disrupted and monarchial Porpheero, or Europe, Taji and his companions have turned to the "New Mardi" (p. 501) --the New World of the west--hoping that in Vivenza the fair maiden will yet be found. But even before the voyagers reach the shores of Vivenza, the nature of that island is partially revealed.

Mohi refers directly to the basic premise of the American dream when he notes that the men of Vivenza consider themselves "a fresh start in the Mardian species; requiring a new world for their full development" (p. 472). And though introduced by a slightly ironic qualification as being as reliable as an account by "an impartialist from Arcturus" (p. 472),[17] the subsequent description

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[15]Kaplan, p. 184.

[16]Davis, p. 157.

[17]Arcturus was the name of a highly nationalistic literary magazine associated with the Young America movement and produced

of Vivenza echoes the messianic mission early incorporated into the American dream[18] as well as the idea that Vivenza, or America, represents a youthful break with "the old autumnal valleys of Porpheero" (p. 502) and the bonds of history:

> . . . Vivenza was a noble land. . . . She was promising as the morning.
>
> Or Vivenza might be likened to St. John, feeding on locusts and wild honey, and with prophetic voice, crying to the nations from the wilderness. Or, childlike, standing among the old robed kings and emperors of the Archipelago, Vivenza seemed a young Messiah, to whose discourse the bearded Rabbis bowed. (p. 472)

This is the ideal--Vivenza "in its better aspect" (p. 472), but unfortunately, and notwithstanding the courage of its people, in reality Vivenza is somewhat of "a braggadocio" (p. 472), overly optimistic about its future and taking credit for accomplishments that are due more to accidents of history and geography than to the efforts of its citizens. This aspect of Vivenza is revealed in its relationship to its parent nation--Dominora (England).[19] The description of Vivenza's revolutionary break with Dominora

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by the Duyckinck circle (see Perry Miller, pp. 88-92); Gordon Mills, "The Significance of 'Arcturus' in Mardi," American Literature, 14 (1942), 158-61, associates the name with the magazine but connects it to the explanation of that name in the original issue, which described Arcturus as a distant vantage point, and takes the statement concerning impartiality literally.

[18]John Gerlach, "Messianic Nationalism in the Early Works of Herman Melville: Against Perry Miller," Arizona Quarterly, 28 (1972), 5-26, is correct in saying that messianic passages in Melville's works must be read in context, but his opinion that Melville's positive comments on America were made only with an eye for commercial success is based on unconvincing and insufficient evidence and distorted readings of Melville's work.

[19]Perry Miller, p. 257, notes that the chapters on Dominora reveal the "curious mixture of spite, envy, and admiration" Young America felt for England.

strongly suggests that Americans are "perhaps too much inclined to carry a vauntful crest" regarding the glorious victory over England which established their independence, since they had not "vanquished" the Empire but only "defended their shores" (p. 472), the ruggedness of whose landscape became England's real foe. And the account of Dominora's impressment of Vivenza's sailors and of the subsequent hostilities between the two islands allegorically implies that only England's preoccupation with the Napoleonic wars[20] saved the young United States from defeat in 1812. In its pride, America has seemed to forget that its hereditary "valor" (p. 473) came from its English parentage, and in its nearsighted boastfulness lies the danger that it may lose the true perspective of its historic condition and discover that "nations, as well as men, may be too clever to be great" (p. 473). Despite America's asserted opposition to England's "political rapacity" (p. 468) in its colonial expansion, here also the two nations have much in common. For while Americans are denouncing England's policy as that of a "great national brigand," they are driving toward annihilation the "aboriginal people" (p. 468) of their own continent. Babbalanja is of the opinion that Vivenza and Dominora should take pride in their familial relationship, and speaking through his philosopher, Melville accepts the contemporary view that, though the most rabid proponents of democracy might hope otherwise, England's demise is not imminent[21] and hints of the greatness that could be achieved if in

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[20]Thorp, p. 411, n. 7.

[21]Merk, p. 196.

the future America and its parent nation could forget old animosities and "join hands" (p. 520).

As they approach Vivenza, the travelers sight "the tutelar deity" of that country, "a helmeted female" (p. 512)--the Statue of America on the dome of the Capitol--presiding over an arch inscribed with the fundamental precepts of the American dream: freedom and equality. Typically, Media, the demigod king, questions the assertion that all men are equal at birth; and Babbalanja, taking a sociological view, asks how long men can remain free amid the unequal pressures and opportunities of life. But the most serious challenge to the American dream is the contradiction that exists between the nation's own philosophy and actions; the noble sentiments on the arch do not apply to "the-tribe-of-Hamo" (p. 513), or the black slaves. This exception "nullifies" (p. 513) the beauty of the dream (and the pun suggests an additional threat to America).

The voyagers' sojourn in Vivenza provides for a firsthand allegorical assessment, facilitated by Media's skeptical attitude toward democracy, of some of the specifics of America's government and character and some of the contemporary issues with which the nation is concerned. Upon landing, the travelers are told that in Vivenza all men are "kings" (pp. 514, 521) in the sense that all are "equal" (p. 521), and they are impressed that the Head-Chief's familiarity with his people does not diminish his authority.[22]

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[22]The "Head Chief" is usually identified as President Polk (see Davis, p. 89, and Perry Miller, p. 257).

Some of the principals of the 1848 election also appear in allegorical guise in Mardi. For example, Davis, p. 90,

However, the view of the American Congress--specifically the Senate--is a very negative one. With pillars representative of the thirty states,[23] the Temple of Freedom, or the Capitol building, houses a spectacle of confusion, apathy, selfishness, vanity, and boredom.[24] The greatness of Daniel Webster is acknowledged through the portrayal of Saturnia,[25] but the Congressional assembly is dominated by the fiery jingoistic oratory of Alanno of Hio-Hio (Senator William Allen of Ohio), who passionately addresses himself to the matter of foreign encroachment upon the western part of the island (the Oregon controversy)[26] despite the fact that the members of his audience seem "wholly engrossed with themselves" (pp. 516-17). Later Babbalanja explains to Media that despite their wide variations in opinions, the tribes of Vivenza can keep their union intact because of the natural strength of a "federation" (p. 536), which allows its members considerable autonomy while providing a common front of support and defense in times of external threat.

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identifies the "fiery youth mounted upon the bowed shoulders of . . . his sire" (p. 524) who reads the anonymous scroll as John Van Buren, whose father, Martin Van Buren, ran for president on the Free-Soil ticket in 1848. The "portly warrior" whose address bores the Senate into a speedy recess (p. 518) is identified by Luther Stearns Mansfield, "Melville's Comic Articles on Zachary Taylor," American Literature, 9 (1938), 418, n. 21, as Zachary Taylor, the successful Whig candidate in 1848, who had previously been the subject of Melville's "Authentic Anecdotes of 'Old Zack.'"

[23]Thorp, p. 411, n. 15; Davis, p. 89, n. 9.

[24]Howard, p. 103, suggests this reflects the impression of the Senate Melville received during his job-hunting trip to Washington in 1847.

[25]Davis, p. 157.

[26]Davis, p. 88; also see Howard, p. 125.

Although evidence of slavery is found elsewhere in Vivenza (in the Capital the travelers see reward notices for the return of runaway slaves and the national flag being raised by "a man with a collar round his neck, and the red marks of stripes upon his back" [p. 515]), the full significance of this challenge to the American dream of freedom and equality becomes evident as the voyagers journey to the South of Vivenza, where "labor has lost his laugh" (p. 531). Confronted by the arguments of Nulli (John C. Calhoun),[27] the travelers explore the various aspects of the slavery question, considering the simplistic Northern view of the situation, the Southern position (rationalizations concerning the necessity and basic humanity of the institution and the subhuman nature of the blacks, fears of slave revolts, and threatened dissolution of the union), and the actual situation in the fields of the South. Unable to decide upon a feasible solution, since the answer must finally come from Vivenza itself, the travelers indulge in the hope, shared by many moderate nineteenth-century Americans, that somehow "Time--all-healing Time" (p. 535) will right the wrong.[28] While depicting slavery as the greatest of evils because of its denial of humanity, Melville declines to oversimplify and righteously assign blame for the situation. In fact, the approach taken here is much the same as the position set forth in the "Supplement" to Battle-Pieces years later:

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[27]Davis, p. 158.

[28]Davis, p. 158, identifies this as the basic Whig position on slavery.

> Blame not . . . the North; and wisely judge the South. Ere, as a nation, they became responsible, this thing was planted in their midst. . . . Place to-day those serfs in Dominora; and with them, all Vivenza's Past; --and serfs, for many years, in Dominora, they would be. Easy is it to stand afar and rail. (p. 534)

America's sense of democratic mission is also considered in the Vivenza section of Mardi. It is reflected, for example, in the enthusiasm with which the citizens of Vivenza receive the news of Porpheero's spreading rebellion (the revolution of 1848): "Ere we die, freemen, all Mardi will be free" (p. 524). But the disillusionment that some Americans felt at the outcome of the uprisings is also suggested in a reference to those who while rejoicing "that the kings were cast down," mourn "that the people themselves stood not firmer" (p. 523).[29] America's belief in its manifest destiny to eventually control most, if not all, of the western hemisphere, is also depicted here.[30] Vivenza's Temple of Freedom has "an almost interminable" capacity to incorporate

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[29]Because they saw themselves as the guardians of freedom, Americans felt they had an obligation to promote universal democracy. But although there was some support for democratic revolutions in other countries, America's mission was largely conceived in terms of perfecting American society so that it could serve as a source of inspiration to other peoples (see Ostrander, pp. 227-29). While many historians say that the outcome of the events in 1848 gave rise to disillusionment, Literary History, p. 221, suggests that seeing the failure of others really made Americans more proud of their successful political experiment. Matthiessen, p. 378, suggests that the failure of the 1848 revolutions contributed to Melville's awareness of the "complex forces involved in the struggle for freedom."

[30]In the first half of the nineteenth century, America's sense of democratic mission reinforced the concept of Manifest Destiny by giving divine and moral sanction to endeavors which would expand American territory and wealth while spreading the American principles of government; see Ostrander, pp. 229-32. According to Daniel J. Boorstin, The Americans: The National Experience (New York: Random House, 1965), p. 273, the term "Manifest Destiny" was coined by John L. O'Sullivan in the New York Morning News in December 1845.

new pillars (or states), "as if all the palms in Mardi [are] at some future time" (p. 515) to be part of the republic. At the present moment, men in the southwest portion of Vivenza are engaged in increasing the size of the island by bringing in canoe loads of new earth. This forceful acquisition of new territory by "digging down other lands" while "holding the spear in one hand, and striking the bargain with the other" (p. 536) is an obvious reference to the expansionistic tenor of the Mexican War and is used ironically to criticize America's professed philosophy of national destiny: "And this, they call extending their dominions agriculturally, and peaceably" (p. 536). America's expansionistic fever is also illustrated by Vivenza's designs on nearby islands now controlled by the kings of Porpheero. "Full of vanity; and mirroring themselves in the future," the citizens of Vivenza proclaim, "Mardi's half is ours" (p. 539). The reference is obviously to the Monroe Doctrine.[31]

The faith in the destined territorial expansion of the United States was closely linked to the idea of national prosperity, and Mardi presents a searching look at the tendency to identify prosperity and material wealth. The rush to participate in the national richness to be found in "the land of Gold" (p. 545) has led men to lose sight temporarily of the true things of value in life.

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[31]Davis, p. 158, n. 9. Expansionism is satirized earlier in Mardi (pp. 275-76) in the description of King Uhia's ambition to accomplish his "destiny" and rule all Mardi from a point of central power. The section on Uhia contains references that suggest the United States (see p. 276). Davis, p. 156, identifies the depiction of King Uhia as a satire on imperialism.

The mysterious scroll that the travelers hear read while in Vivenza summarizes many of the aspects of the American dream and the criticisms of America that appear in this section of Mardi, and elsewhere in Melville's writings. The scroll warns Americans of the dangers inherent in their tendency to let present optimism obscure "the lessons of history" (pp. 524-25)[32] and in their inclination arrogantly to regard their nation as the end product of all history. It urges them to temper their boastful pride in the freedom and felicity they have attained and reminds them that their greatness is due largely to their "origin and geography" (p. 528). After all, when the safety-valve of the western frontier is closed and there is no longer "room enough . . . to be free" (p. 526), may not the now liberal, youthful nation find itself forced into the oppressive mold of Europe?[33] The scroll also warns that romantic indulgence may obscure the real meaning and practical possibilities of the American goals of freedom and

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[32]With respect to the popular American idea that the New World was separated from the history of the past, see Baritz, p. 99; also see Stern, Fine Hammered Steel, pp. 4-5.

[33]In recognizing the importance of the western frontier as a "safety-valve" for America's developing civilization, Melville was following in a line of thought that originated in the seventeenth century. The idea was supported by Thomas Jefferson, and popularized in the nineteenth century by Horace Greeley. Melville was also anticipating the view of the frontier to be set forth by Frederick Jackson Turner. The above information was taken from Smith, Virgin Land, pp. 201-03, 250-60. Smith, Virgin Land, pp. 205-06, suggests that though the idea of the safety-valve had an important influence on American thought, the actual benefit of the "safety-valve" as a means of reducing urban poverty seems doubtful since eastern city workers usually lacked either the financial means needed to go west or the farming skill to prosper when they got there; in fact, the safety-valve theory may have led to undue minimizing of the problems arising from industrialization.

equality; and in any democracy these are unattainable ideals that must be used to shape the democratic reality and not allowed to destroy it by producing a climate of absolutism or disillusionment.[34] The scroll points out that literal freedom is anarchy, that a classless society is an impossibility, and that political freedom must be taken as a "means" and not as an "end in itself" (p. 528). In suggesting the personal and "social" (p. 528) nature of true freedom, the scroll is asserting traditions of American democracy upheld in theory, if not always in practice.

Much of the critical analysis of this portion of the novel has concerned itself with the questions of how closely Melville agreed with the more pessimistic sentiments expressed in the scroll and whether the cyclical version of history described there is intended to foreshadow the inevitable decline of America. In answering these questions, it is important to remember that the scroll is not an objective essay but a part of the fictive nature of the book. The identity of the character-author may be divined on one level, and King Media's prejudices must be taken into account. But on another level the authorship if left purposefully ambiguous, since the outcome of history, determined in part by how well America heeds the warnings of the scroll, will decide if the document reflects the biased sentiments of a demigod king or the perceptive fears of a concerned philosopher.

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[34]Barbu, pp. 65-66. Also see Arvin, p. 97; and Robert B. Heilman, "The Dream Metaphor: Some Ramifications," in American Dreams, American Nightmares, ed. David Madden (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1970), pp. 17-18.

In the overall view, Melville's purpose in presenting the scroll's cyclical history of republics and despotisms seems to be to show what the past has been, not necessarily what America's future must be,[35] though the Vivenzans' refusal to respect the lessons of the past is not an encouraging sign. It is noteworthy, however, that after the negative or critical comments covering both general and specific issues related to the viability of American democracy, the scroll does end on a somewhat optimistic note. America is urged to utilize its geographic isolation and to temper its expansionistic attitude, but the popular belief in the inevitable spread of America's dominion is not totally denied:

> Time, but Time only, may enable you to cross the equator; and give you the Arctic Circles for your boundaries. (p. 530)

In Mardi, the ideals of democratic America are generally upheld,[36] though the practical applications of these ideals are searchingly analyzed. But the final truth about America is yet unknown,[37] since

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[35]Matthiessen, p. 382-83, sees the scroll as a statement of Melville's awareness of the problems facing America, not his own definite conclusion as to the final outcome.

[36]Arvin, p. 97, points out that in Mardi Melville does not reject the basic principles of democracy but focuses his criticism on "a cluster of delusions and inessentials that, as he felt, had got themselves entangled with the idea of democracy in American minds."

[37]Voicing the popular belief in the westward movement of power and prestige (see Smith, Virgin Land, pp. 8-9; and Baritz, pp. 94-95), Babbalanja speculates that in the advance of history the role of "promised land" and haven for the "surplus hordes" of Mardi may shift away from the aging New World back to Porpheero in the "flux and reflux" of time (p. 512; also see p. 551).

the ultimate character of the infant nation can be proven only through time. Though at present Vivenza seems to hold "more of good than elsewhere" (p. 542), Yillah is still not to be found there. Whether Yillah will ever come to dwell in Vivenza remains a question that can only be answered "some four or five hundred centuries hence" (p. 530), for Melville, like Babbalanja, knows "Fate laughs at prophets" (p. 542).

Redburn (1849)

The analysis of America found in the Vivenza section of Mardi is continued in Redburn. For Redburn is not simply innocence being initiated into the harsh realities of life; he is a young American who travels to England and back on a voyage that leads him to an awareness of the real meaning of democracy and a better understanding of his native land.

As he begins his journey, Wellingborough Redburn is not the typical democratic Yankee. Though clad in patches and a conspicuously inappropriate shooting jacket, he clings to his family's aristocratic pretensions and expects to be treated as a gentleman.[38] But from the beginning, underlying Redburn's claim to aristocratic privilege is,

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[38]See Nicholas Canaday, Jr., "Harry Bolton and Redburn: The Old World and the New," in Essays in Honor of Esmond Linworth Marilla, eds. Thomas Austin Kirby and William John Olive (Baton Rouge: Louisiana St. Univ. Press, 1970), p. 292; John Seelye, Melville: The Ironic Diagram (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1970), p. 48, sees Redburn as "a representative of Young America" and the jacket as a symbol of Redburn's ability to cope with the American wilderness, but says that when removed from its natural setting into sophisticated society, the jacket becomes a source of humiliation instead of pride.

paradoxically, an assumption of equality. When the pilot bids Captain Riga and the officers goodbye after the Highlander is safely out of the New York harbor, Redburn does not understand why the pilot does not speak to the sailors too, and it is the "democracy" of the Liverpool churches that Redburn lauds.[39] His experiences on the Highlander convince him that a distinguished family background and some understanding of the social graces are not advantages in a situation in which each man is judged by the work he can do, and his further acquaintance with the sailor's life and his experience with widespread poverty in Liverpool begin to bring his latent belief in equality to the surface. A deeper recognition of equality comes when Redburn discovers the starving woman and her children in the Liverpool cellar. Reduced as they are, the woman and girls are still human beings "with eyes, and lips, and ears like any queen" (p. 181). This same sense of basic human equality and the equality of all men before death also reveals itself to Redburn on the return trip to New York. As Captain Riga once again exchanges shore dress and civilities for the harsh despotism of sea life and as the doctor sailing in the cabin denies his identity and refuses to treat the stricken immigrants, Redburn realizes that appearance and station are not valid bases for judging human worth. And as both cabin and steerage passengers cringe in the face of death, he recognizes the most fundamental concept of democracy--the common mortality of all.

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[39]Herman Melville, Redburn: His First Voyage, eds. Harrison Hayford, Hershel Parker, and G. Thomas Tanselle (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1969), p. 203. Hereafter cited by page number in the text of the paper.

Thus Redburn's voyage into social reality reveals to him the true basis of democratic equality and the need for men, especially Americans, to stand on their own achievements--"after all, every one in this world has his own fate intrusted to himself" (p. 220).

The journey to England also serves to help Redburn discover the real character of his native country. Personifying America's lingering sense of cultural inferiority, Redburn sails for England with romantic ideas of English life and a sentimental attachment to the scenes that had been familiar to his father, but arriving in Liverpool, he is struck by the port's "unexpected resemblance" (p. 127) to New York. As he makes his way through Liverpool and takes brief excursions into the countryside and to London, Redburn is constantly comparing England and America, and the comparison of the two countries is so structured that the primary result is an appraisal of American life.

The number of direct comparisons between Liverpool and New York[40] is one way in which the conditions of England are made to comment on America. One difference between Liverpool and New York that impresses Redburn is that there is large-scale poverty and a great number of beggars in Liverpool. He is especially amazed that the beggars are native Englishmen and links the absence of this condition in America to democratic suffrage:

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[40]Harold T. McCarthy, "Melville's Redburn and the City," Midwest Quarterly, 12 (1971), 395-96, observes that there are a number of parallels made between the two cities.

> For [in America], such a being as a native beggar is almost unknown; and to be a born American citizen seems a guarantee against pauperism; and this, perhaps, springs from the virtue of a vote. (p. 202)

In comparing the probable rapid future changes facing New York with the changes that have made his Liverpool guidebook obsolete, Redburn speculates upon the great progressive growth undoubtedly awaiting the American city. But this ultimate fulfillment of American progress is described as a "Nineveh" with "smoky alleys" (p. 149), and the relation of New York's development to that of Liverpool suggests or warns of a parallel growth of social ills. In fact, as he walks about the English city, Redburn is struck by the "humiliating fact" that even now,

> barring the poverty and beggary, Liverpool, away from the docks, [is] very much such a place as New York. There [are] the same sort of streets pretty much . . . and the same elbowing, heartless-looking crowd as ever. (p. 202)

During his sojourn in the English countryside, Redburn becomes indignant at the thought of "man-traps" being used to protect private property: "In America I had never heard of the like" (p. 210). He is outraged at the "excessive effrontery" of one man's laying "sole claim to a solid piece of this planet, right down to the earth's axis!" (p. 210). In "Melville's Redburn and the City," Harold McCarthy suggests this passage may relate to New York State's anti-rent controversy in the 1840's,[41] but it also probes into the whole issue of property ownership and land allocation and use. Chased away by another suspicious

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[41] McCarthy, p. 397.

property holder, Redburn defiantly contrasts American hospitality to English hostility.

In one area, however, America might well heed the example of England. Redburn notices the equality of status given to the black sailors in Liverpool and, overcoming his initial surprise, acknowledges that they have the right to be treated the same as other men. England has been successful in abolishing slavery because she satisfactorily resolved the conflict between "sordid [commercial] interest and humanity" (p. 156) that still plagues America, and Redburn is forced to conclude that "in some things, we Americans leave to other countries the carrying out of the principle that stands at the head of our Declaration of Independence" (p. 202).

The sharpest contrast between the New World and the Old World probably comes in Redburn's acquaintance with Harry Bolton. Nicholas Canaday, Jr., suggests that Redburn represents the "New World democrat" while Harry represents the "Old World aristocrat."[42] The differing social structures of each world quickly become apparent when Harry begins to talk of his noble background and Redburn has only his "poor old uncle the senator" to deploy against Harry's "dukes, lords, curricles, and countesses" (p. 221). Redburn's awe of royalty and nobility is part of his initial romantic view of England (Melville noted elsewhere that "Yankees" as well as Englishmen love a lord).[43] But Redburn's enthusiasm over English royalty, even his wonder that "a real queen"

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[42]Canaday, "Bolton and Redburn," p. 292.

[43]Leyda, I, 468.

is reigning in the "very land" (p. 125) he is in, is tempered by memories of Bunker Hill and the independence of Yankees,[44] and a close look at Harry's friend Lord Lovely modifies his attitude toward nobility. Redburn concludes that, after all, every "son of a man" is of "noble birth" (p. 281). Harry's personal situation also suggests the decadence of the Old World's aristocratic society, as does the Palace of Alladin in London.[45] On the return voyage on the Highlander and on arriving as a stranger in a new land, Harry's position almost parallels Redburn's at the first of the book. But while Redburn's self-reliance and democratic flexibility allowed him to cope more or less successfully with the challenges he met, Harry's constitutional weakness (his bad nerves are seen to be the result of riotous living, and this implies he is the product of a degenerate society inadequate to meet the demands of modern life) and his refusal or inability to give up his aristocratic status make his life on the ship one of extreme misery, and Harry seems unlikely to prosper in the land of individual opportunity.[46]

References to the tenets of the American Dream appear several times in Redburn, but the fullest statement is in Chapter 33. The vision of America as a new promised land offering progress and plenty and the concept of America's democratic mission and manifest destiny in the Western Hemisphere are revealed in an enthusiastic description

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[44]For Redburn's thoughts on this subject, see pp. 125, 163, 204.

[45]Canaday, "Bolton and Redburn," pp. 298, 295.

[46]See Canaday, "Bolton and Redburn," pp. 296-97.

of the dream's international significance:

> Settled by the people of all nations, all nations may claim [America] for their own. . . . We are not a nation, so much as a world. . . .
>
> . . . We are the heirs of all time, and with all nations we divide our inheritance. On this Western Hemisphere all tribes and people are forming into one federated whole; and there is a future which shall see the estranged children of Adam restored as to the old hearth-stone in Eden.
>
> The other world beyond this, which was longed for in Columbus' time, was found in the New. . . . (p. 169)

But the promise of the dream is qualified. America is not now a paradise, "but to be made so, at God's good pleasure, and in the fullness and mellowness of time" (p. 169). The contrast between the possibilities of the dream and the realities of the present are depicted in various ways in Redburn.

Although supposedly the land of plenty, America had not been able to provide Redburn with a means of livelihood, and the novel contains a strong suggestion that economic success may not be as easy as the believers in the American dream assume. The Wealth of Nations, in which Redburn hopes to find the secret of prosperity, proves very dry reading. America has also denied Redburn's desire to attend college and become "a great orator like Patrick Henry" (p. 36). And when he returns home, times are still very hard. But Redburn has not lost faith in America, and on his return to New York, he jubilantly asserts that "one handful" of "free and independent Yankee mud" is "worth a broad manor in England" (p. 301).

A crucial aspect of the American dream receives consideration in Redburn's analysis of the sailors' lot. The American ideal of equality and personal opportunity is dependent on the belief in a

flexible social structure and the possible moral improvement of the individual,[47] but as one of the groups that serve society as "wheels do . . . a coach" (p. 139), how can the sailors, or similar serving classes, ever be lifted out of the dust? Redburn concedes that current efforts to improve the sailor and his life seem ineffectual, but answers in terms of the inevitable progress necessary if the American dream is to be realized--"Time" and "God" (p. 140) will provide the solution.

The immigrants crowded into the steerage of the Highlander have placed their hopes in the promise of America, and Melville uses this section of the novel to consider the dream and the real problems of society in a number of ways. Numerous critics have pointed out that the depiction of conditions on the immigrant ship grew not out of Melville's past experience at sea but out of conditions existing in America at the time the book was written.[48] As the novel itself acknowledges, the subject of immigration was a major political question, an "agitated national topic" (p. 292), in America in the early and mid 1800's.[49] America needed immigrant labor but feared both the immigrants' potential as a political force and the influx of Catholics.[50] In Redburn, Melville comes out in opposition to "nativism" and asserts that America's promise belongs to all--in fact, "the whole world is

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[47]Kaul, p. 34.

[48]See, for example, Gilman, pp. 201, 238.

[49]Gilman, p. 238.

[50]McCarthy, p. 410.

the patrimony of the whole world" (p. 292). Also, the scenes of suffering and anguish resulting from hunger and disease which evoke Melville's humanitarian protests were probably inspired by a current cholera epidemic in New York, which first broke out among immigrants.[51] It is typical of Melville's outlook that the suffering of the immigrants is due not just to the absence of adequate laws but to the abuse of existing laws respecting immigration.

On the homeward voyage the suggestion of the ship as a microcosm is very strong. Invoking the image of a ship as an island, "a floating colony of the tribe to which it belongs" (p. 165), Redburn muses that to govern well a ship (or oneself) would be a supreme triumph, but the immigrants and crew of the Highlander are ruled by the despotic and arbitrary Riga, who is compared to "the Czar of Russia" (p. 263), and no legal redress of wrongs is possible. On the ship, the usually invisible line between social and economic classes is objectified in the ropes used to separate the steerage passengers from the others on board, and the effects of the crowding and poverty cause the immigrants to quarrel among themselves. This internal strife makes it easier for "their social superiors [to] hold them subject" (p. 264) --on the sea and in the slums of the cities on land.

It is a touch of pathetic irony that the Irish immigrants mistake the famine-stricken land they have just left for the green promise of America, and as destitute Ireland shimmers invitingly across the sea, the question arises as to the real substance of the

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[51]Howard, p. 136.

American dream. But as the ship finally pulls into the wharf in New York, the immigrants are not met by the sight of the hordes of beggars that swarmed the docks of Liverpool nor the sight of a policeman taking a boy to the guard-house, which was Redburn's last view of England, but by former immigrants who are now day-laborers and house-maids. And if these are not high professions, it must be remembered that in America every "honest" occupation is an "honorable" one[52] and the dream is still working itself out in "the fullness . . . of time" (p. 169). Thus, though the ideals of the dream may sometimes clash with current realities, the outlook in Redburn is predominately optimistic; America is still the virgin continent, offering a new start to the people of the world.

Pierre (1852)

Although the analysis of American democracy in Mardi and Redburn is presented with a certain qualified optimism, the view of America in Melville's later works is much less hopeful. In Pierre Melville focuses on the fate of the individual in democratic America, and the disparity between the promise of the dream and the realities of American life are dismally apparent.

A number of critics have contended that if the full significance of Pierre is to be discovered, it must be read as a book about

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[52]Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, the Henry Reeve text as revised by Francis Bowen and further revised by Phillips Bradley (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1948), II, 153.

America,[53] and Melville himself in a letter to Richard Bentley remarked on his intention to depict "a new & elevated aspect of American life."[54] The importance of the national setting is quickly made clear through the repeated references to Pierre's venerable patriotic grandfathers, whose courage and military prowess won the land and preserved the nation,[55] and there are a number of direct narrative comments on the nature of American civilization, especially as it compares to that of Europe. For example, expounding a tenet of the American dream that later proves ironically inaccurate, the narrator explains that if foreign nations are aghast at the rapidity of change the "democratic element" is causing in American life by "producing new things by corroding the old," it is simply because America "contradicts all prior notions of human things":

> . . . political institutions, which in other lands seem above all things intensely artificial, with America seem to possess the divine virtue of a natural law . . . out of Death she brings Life. (p. 9)

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[53]Chase, p. 138, observes that "Pierre [is] a peculiarly American book--the deepest and most searching fictional treatment of our national adolescence"; Ronald Mason, The Spirit Above the Dust: A Study of Herman Melville (1951; rpt. Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms, 1969), p. 171, notes that "Pierre loses much of its effect if its national significance is ignored."

Because of the uneven quality of this novel, its themes are not always consistently sustained; but it seems apparent that in addition to its metaphysical and religious side, Pierre's dilemma also has cultural and nationalistic aspects.

[54]Letters, p. 150.

[55]Herman Melville, Pierre: Or the Ambiguities, eds. Harrison Hayford, Hershel Parker, and G. Thomas Tanselle (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1971), pp. 5-6 and 12-13, for example. Hereafter cited by page number in the text of the paper.

The satiric depiction of "Young America in Literature" is another example of the nationalistic orientation of the novel. Also, the narrator makes an effort to establish the fact that America's aristocracy is more genuine than Europe's, although at the same time he recognizes the essentially undemocratic quality of such a boast (pp. 8-11). Later, this paradoxical American attitude is extended into a consideration of the question of democratic "leveling" (p. 275), though on the whole the narrator is perhaps less concerned with political leveling than with a degradation of cultural taste.[56] In spite of the attention given to the question of aristocracy, perhaps largely the result of an attempt to give Pierre a conventional heroic background, the emphasis is on the individual--how he reacts to his hereditary past and how he confronts his future. And, as the narrator acknowledges, Pierre proves to be "a thorough-going Democrat," perhaps even a little "Radical" (p. 13) since he confronts American social reality with the American ideals of equality and individual opportunity.

It is possible to approach Pierre in terms of a limited allegory, similar to that sometimes used in discussing Redburn and Israel Potter, in which Pierre represents the young American nation,[57] beginning with a brave heritage and optimistic idealism only to flounder as truth and divine national direction fade into ambiguity. In this semi-allegory, Isabel represents an inherited burden from the past (her arrival by

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[56]For example, see p. 264.

[57]For example, Chase, pp. 130-31, identifies Pierre with "the spiritual progress of America."

ship also links her to the immigrant population, to whom the dream had promised equality but to whom nativism attempted to deny it), and Pierre's effort to acknowledge her represents America's attempt to come to terms with its historical responsibilities.[58] Lucy, at least at first, would represent the excessively optimistic, and unrealistic, ideals of the new nation.[59] The relationship between Pierre and his grandfathers also contributes to a symbolic historical approach since it is observed that men have declined in "stature" since Old Pierre's day (p. 271). The attributes of the grandfathers are not always seen in a positive light, however,[60] and their mingling of violence and gentlemanly conduct has been described as a representation of the duality of America's heritage.[61] Richard Chase has also suggested that the phaeton in which Pierre takes Lucy riding has symbolic significance, especially since its age (sixty years) was approximately the same as that of the United States, and says that perhaps Melville is implying that America will follow in the footsteps of Rome.[62]

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[58]Alan Lebowitz, Progress Into Silence: A Study of Melville's Heroes (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1970), p. 164, says Isabel is Pierre's inherited responsibility but does not draw the historical parallel. Stern, Fine Hammered Steel, p. 199, and Chase, p. 131, suggest that Isabel can also be seen as representing European history or culture.

[59]Matthiessen, p. 484, says she represents the "pale American search for the ideal."

[60]Lebowitz, p. 161, notes that even the grandfathers grew old and fat.

[61]Sacvan Bercovitch, "Melville's Search for National Identity: Son and Father in Redburn, Pierre and Billy Budd, CLA Journal, 10 (1967), 221; Stern, Fine Hammered Steel, pp. 171-72, also observes that the grandfathers' victories over the Indians and the British do not lead to any meaningful improvement in human society.

[62]Chase, Melville, p. 129. Given the nature of this novel, a

There are also parallels between Pierre's break with his mother, who is often described in terms of royal imagery[63] and who is referred to as "Your Majesty" (see, for example, p. 103), and America's revolt against England; and the discovery of the second chair portrait has been seen as an indication of America's growing resemblance to the older society of Europe.[64]

Such allegorical suggestions, however, serve less as an end in themselves than as a background for the story of Pierre's personal crisis as he idealistically confronts nineteenth-century American society. It has been pointed out that the actions for which the characters in the novel so violently condemn Pierre are not, at least so far as these characters know, illegal or immoral; Pierre is guilty only of violating social forms.[65] The dialectic that exists in Pierre

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more pertinent parallel might be to connect the use of the term with the mythological story of Phaëton, who, like Pierre, sought the true identity of his father and who, by trying to assume his father's responsibilities, nearly set the world on fire and thus had to be struck down by Jupiter. A quotation from Ovid given in Thomas Bulfinch, Bulfinch's Mythology: The Age of Fable, The Age of Chivalry, Legends of Charlemagne (New York: Thomas Y. Cromwell Co., 1959), p. 45, could almost be seen as a summary of theme of Pierre:

> Driver of Phoebus' chariot, Phaëton,
> Struck by Jove's thunder, rests beneath this stone.
> He could not rule his father's car of fire,
> Yet was it much so nobly to aspire.

[63]Stern, Fine Hammered Steel, p. 166, has noted the use of "queen imagery" in connection with Mrs. Glendinning.

[64]Bercovitch, p. 226.

[65]Nicholas Canaday, Jr., "Melville's Pierre: At War With Social Convention," Papers on Languages & Literature, 5 (1969), 57.

corresponds to what Northrop Frye has defined as "the tension between concern and freedom."[66] Frye's division of cultural and political thought into the "myth of concern," consisting of the ideas that define the traditions, beliefs, and goals of a society and establish the socially accepted truth, and the "myth of freedom," a "socially critical" attitude founded on objective fact and respect for the individual which is simultaneously a part of and in conflict with the myth of concern,[67] provides useful insight into the antagonisms and ambiguities of the novel.[68] Pierre opposes the cultural myth of the American way of life that grew out of the American dream[69] but accepted far less than the dream promised. In doing so, he attains what Frye calls the "Utopian social view," shifting his loyalty from the established order to "a social ideal not yet in existence."[70] In reality he aligns himself with the ideals of the American dream, challenging the relative ethics of society by holding to absolute values of his own.

The individual's ability and right to judge for himself the fitness of social norms was theoretically a part of the American heritage, and as A. N. Kaul has observed, American fictional heroes often asserted this right by rejecting a corrupt society and attempting

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[66]Northrop Frye, The Critical Path: An Essay on the Social Context of Literary Criticism (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1971), p. 55.

[67]Frye, pp. 36, 44-45, 106.

[68]It could also be applied to "Bartleby," "I and My Chimney," Israel Potter, Billy Budd, and other of Melville's works.

[69]Frye, p. 107.

[70]Frye, p. 160.

to replace it with one more closely aligned with their own ideals.[71] Such an ethical conflict is characteristic of a democracy and reflects the constant struggle between "freedom and order" that provides the "dynamic balance between an ethics of the absolute and an ethics of empirical life" which is necessary to a democratic society.[72] However, when Pierre attempts to exercise his individual freedom and challenges an apparently hypocritical American society to be true to the dream on which it was founded,[73] that society denies his right to deviate from the established order and crushes his rebellion so forcefully that his downfall seems fated.

Although democracy depends on an open society in which the myth of freedom and the myth of concern can coexist, there is a tendency for "the ascendant class" to attempt "to take over the myth of concern and make it . . . a rationalization of its ascendancy."[74] The forces that oppose Pierre--represented by the rest of the Glendinning family, the Tartans, and even the church--have brought the spiritual heritage of the nation to the service of their own selfish ends. The result is a narrow and inflexible myth of concern, so closely linked to the predominant social pattern that any questioning of the myth is a threat to the entire social structure. The American society depicted in Pierre

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[71]Kaul, pp. 66-67.

[72]Barbu, pp. 64-65.

[73]Frye, p. 156, observes that "all genuine effort at social change aims, not at creating 'another society,' or even a 'new society,' but at releasing the real form of the society it is in."

[74]Frye, pp. 108-09, 49.

has sacrificed the ideals of the dream to expediency and concocted a myth of concern that denies the complexities of existence, creating an official drawing room portrait to supplant the truer sketch.

By denying the individual's responsibility, contemporary society is complicating his exercise of freedom, but some of the causes of Pierre's dilemma may be inherent in the position of the individual in a democracy. Pierre's difficulties are sometimes attributed to the failure of his aristocratic background to prepare him for life in the modern commercial world,[75] but his basic problem in finding an identity and in establishing a successful course of action is, at least in part, the legacy of a democratic culture. The very nature of democracy presupposes that an individual is capable of judging situations and reacting reasonably.[76] It is a precept of democracy that the individual feels he exercises some control over his destiny.[77] In discussing Pierre's search for truth, Richard Chase points out that while "in firmer cultures institutions tend to support and enhance human maturity," American culture "seems almost to have been contrived to put the burden of humanity wholly on the shoulders of the individual."[78] And so it is that Pierre's continual questioning and continual effort to discover personally what is true, coupled with the resistance of a repressive society, lead to the devastating isolation that de Tocqueville had feared might be the result of democracy's emphasis

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[75]Mason, p. 173.

[76]See Laski, p. 80; and Barbu, p. 20.

[77]Barbu, pp. 15-17.

[78]Chase, Melville, p. 139.

on the individual:

> . . . not only does democracy make every man forget his ancestors, but it hides his descendants and separates his contemporaries from him; it throws him back forever upon himself alone and threatens in the end to confine him entirely within the solitude of his own heart.[79]

This critical analysis of contemporary society and the individual's place in it is sustained and broadened in a number of supplementary events and narrative comments as Melville reveals ways in which "the time" seems "out of joint" (p. 168) when measured against the ideals of the American dream. For example, in a humanitarian vein, Melville looks at the plight of Delly Ulver, whose transgression is judged so harshly by the supposedly Christian and forgiving society that her own parents reject her and she is expected to leave the neighborhood even though she has nowhere to go and no way to provide for herself. The description of the city, whose gloom and compressed depravation and sharp social and economic divisions contrast drastically with the idyllic countryside of Saddlemeadows, reaffirms the awareness of urban crisis found in other of Melville's works. Miserably seeking to earn a living by writing in the depressing and constricting atmosphere of the city apartment, Pierre is characterized as a "victim" of "Civilization," pitiful counterpoint to "the Texan Camanche . . . crashing like a wild deer through the green underbrush" (p. 302).[80] The contrast

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[79] de Tocqueville, II, 99.

[80] James Baird, Ishmael (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1956), p. 394, calls Pierre "the man of the city" and identifies the city as a symbol of the chaos and meaninglessness of Western Civilization.

between Saddlemeadows and the city is made stronger by the importance previously attached to Pierre's rural background; and the American dream was largely agrarian, intent on making a garden of the wilderness.[81] There is also criticism of "the benevolent State" (p. 278), which with charitable good intentions and following the American ideal of advancement through education makes day laborers dissatisfied in their work yet fails to prepare them adequately for any other type of life.

The novel also contains a satiric description of the "povertiresque" (pp. 276-78), a subject that is treated at length in "Poor Man's Pudding." And Melville presents a sensitive consideration of the condition of the American poor in the character of the old farmer Millthorpe. The product of "political and social levelings" (p. 275), this descendant of an English Knight embodies part of the American paradox--he has an aristocratic profile and beggar's hands. Typical of the poor described elsewhere by Melville, Millthorpe retains a strong pride and dignity, even delaying for months collecting money owed him by Mrs. Glendinning. (Pierre's mother "benignantly" [p. 278] admired the old man's independent pose but was not concerned or considerate enough to offer early payment of her bill.) The villagers' effort to blame Millthorpe's poverty on

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[81] Mason, p. 171, suggests that Saddlemeadows represents "both the virile traditionalism and the secluded innocence of sentient young America"; in commenting on the contrast between rural and city life, Bercovitch, pp. 221-22, 225, observes that the idealized view of rural America proves to be a false one and that in both rural and urban America the "national . . . ideal" is being lost; Marx, p. 7, comments that a number of historians have implied that the American tendency to idealize rural life has interfered with social progress and the clear perception of social realities.

"moral derelictions" (p. 277) and thus avoid the unsettling idea that the American dream of opportunity for all might not be true in fact reflects an attitude that was prevalent in nineteenth-century America.[82] In death, Millthorpe joins Melville's other "beggars and paupers of earth" who sleep "beneath . . . the infinite sky, like emperors and kings" (p. 278). If "real and permanent democracies" (p. 278) exist nowhere else, there is at least democracy in death.

That this society's relative values would conflict sharply with Pierre's absolute ones is inevitable, and the conflict is figuratively outlined in terms of the horologicals and chronometricals of Plinlimmon's pamphlet, which states that though absolute ethics may be good in heaven, they do not belong in the everyday world. The pamphlet's advice of "virtuous expediency" (p. 214) does not really offer a positive solution to Pierre's problems, but rather describes the usual social standard,[83] the one against whose injustices Pierre revolted. The pamphlet is a further suggestion of the extent to which idealism has been lost and perverted in America. That it is a "bunglingly" (p. 290) presented report of the philosopher's message also indicates the ways in which truth becomes distorted. In addition, the pamphlet is only a fragment, and this very fragmentation symbolizes the

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[82]Ostrander, pp. 237-38.

[83]Stern, Fine Hammered Steel, p. 189; for a summary of a number of interpretations of the pamphlet and a more positive view of its message, see Floyd C. Watkins, "Melville's Plotinus Plinlimmon and Pierre," in Reality and Myth: Essays in American Literature in Memory of Richmond Croom Beatty, eds. William E. Walker and Robert L. Welker (Nashville: Vanderbilt Univ. Press, 1964), pp. 39-51.

incompleteness of its solution.[84] The title and the last legible word in Pierre's copy of the book return him again to ambiguities: "if----" (p. 215).

What then is the conscientious individual to do in a society that proclaims the ideals of justice and freedom but suppresses their expression? Thrown totally on his own to decide moral issues, how can the individual make coherent decisions if all truth, even the truth about one's own motives,[85] proves to be undiscernible, ambiguous, shrouded in silence? These are the issues that Pierre faces in nineteenth-century America, where traditional hereditary values and social classes are breaking down, leaving the individual more responsible for finding his own identity, and where there is a growing discrepancy between national ideal and social reality.[86] Melville does not force the easy answers, and the question of the proper relationship of the individual to society in "the infinite entanglements of all social things" (p. 191) is not fully resolved. It remains one of the ambiguities of the novel. But the fact that Pierre is so utterly crushed while trying modestly to assert his independent moral belief, seems to deny the current validity of the American dream.

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[84]Wright, p. 122.

[85]Tyrus Hillway, "Herman Melville's Major Themes," Americana-Austriaca, 1 (1966), 177.

[86]Kaplan, p. 39, notes that the conflicts in American literature often reflect the democratic problem of how to deal with apparently irreconcilable opposites.

Israel Potter (1855)

Israel Potter is the only work by Melville that can be categorized as a historical novel, and an awareness of the method often employed in such works casts some light on its development. Avrom Fleishman has described the typical relationship between the protagonist and famous people in historical fiction as follows:

> The individuals selected by the novelist for heroic (or at least specially marked) status are not likely to be world-historical figures, for such figures are by definition exceptional, since they realize in themselves the tensions and direction of history at a particular time. The typical man of an age is one whose life is shaped by world-historical figures and other influences in a way that epitomizes the process of change going forward in the society as a whole. . . . the relation of the representative hero to the society of his time is not one of statistically-determinable typicality but that of symbolic universality.[87]

Melville's "representative hero" is Israel Potter, veteran of Bunker Hill. Enlarging on Potter's own narrative and expanding its historical significance,[88] Melville presents Israel as the typical American

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[87]Avrom Fleishman, The English Historical Novel: Walter Scott to Virginia Woolf (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1971), pp. 10-11.

[88]Roger P. McCutcheon, "The Technique of Melville's Israel Potter," South Atlantic Quarterly, 27 (1928), 170, points out that Melville's version of Potter's story tends to place more emphasis on his nationality; McCutcheon, p. 163, and Howard, p. 214, note that in addition to expanding the descriptions of major historical figures who appear in Potter's account, Melville introduces John Paul Jones and Ethan Allen as characters. Melville's changes in Israel's story can, of course, be noted in a direct examination of a copy of the pamphlet: I. R. Potter, Life and Remarkable Adventures of Israel R. Potter (Providence: J. Howard, 1824).

common man--patriotic, self-reliant, and committed to the principle of equality.[89] As Israel comes in contact with three important American historical figures, Melville analyzes the fundamental forces that have shaped the character of the American nation. Israel's first encounter is with the eminent Dr. Benjamin Franklin.

Studying Franklin's reputation in Pre-Civil War America, Richard D. Miles has found that while Franklin was admired for his practical wisdom and scientific prowess and widely held up for emulation as an example of the success to be achieved through industry and thrift, there was also a negative strain undercutting his reputation--a suspicion that he was shrewd and self-serving and perhaps even "dissembling."[90] Both facets of Franklin's reputation are presented in Israel Potter.[91] The narrator describes Franklin with reverence as a man of wit and charm, an enduring sage and respected diplomat, who as a "Jack of all trades" suggests the independence and versatility

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[89]Alexander Keyssar, Melville's Israel Potter: Reflections on the American Dream (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1969), p. 50, considers Israel in this light; Robert M. Farnsworth, "Israel Potter: Pathetic Comedy," Bulletin of the New York Public Library, 65 (1961), 128, calls Israel the "American archetype"; Lebowitz, p. 173, calls Israel an "American Everyman." Another useful way of reading the novel is to see Israel as standing directly for the nation itself. This idea is suggested by Mason, p. 196.

[90]Richard D. Miles, "The American Image of Benjamin Franklin," American Quarterly, 9 (1957), 117-35; see especially 118, 123, 125-28, and 132-34. Also see Keyssar, p. 26, with respect to Franklin as a representative of the "Protestant ethic."

[91]Franklin is often seen as tending toward the position of the Confidence Man or Plinlimmon: see James E. Miller, Jr., A Reader's Guide to Herman Melville (New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1962), p. 13; Farnsworth, p. 128; Chase, pp. 178, 281; and Lebowitz, p. 174.

of his homeland and his countrymen, though, as several commentators have remarked, Franklin does lack one virtue--he is "everything but a poet."[92] The narrator's recognition of Franklin as "the type and genius of his land" (p. 62) takes on ironic connotations, however, since in his dealings with Israel, Franklin proves to be if not self-serving or hypocritical, certainly rather narrow and limited in his philosophy. And Israel perceives that the old man is "sly, sly, sly" (p. 70). As a man of "utility" (p. 51) and secular optimism, Franklin represents the materialistic enterprise of the Americans, who are destined and determined to obliterate "Desert" from the map of the New World.[93] The dual image of Franklin as well as Israel's own ambiguous reaction to him--for all his pettiness and irritatingly inappropriate wisdom,[94] he did invent a spring bolt for use in hitching oxen--is perpetuated in the reader's last view of this famous American:

> The man of wisdom stood mildly motionless a moment, with a look of sagacious, humane meditation on his face, as if pondering upon the chances of the important enterprise [Israel's mission and the fate of America]: one which, perhaps, might in the sequel affect the weal or woe of nations yet to come. Then suddenly clapping his hand to his capacious coat-pocket, dragged out a bit of cork with some hen's feathers, and hurrying to his room, took out his knife, and proceeded to whittle away at a shuttle cock of an original scientific construction. (p. 84)

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[92]Herman Melville, Israel Potter: His Fifty Years of Exile (London: Constable, 1923), p. 62; also see pp. 48-50, 59-62. Hereafter cited by page number in the text of the paper.

[93]See p. 49 for the description of Franklin's map of America. The mystical belief in American progress and expansion was so strong that for a time it was even thought that rain followed the plow; see Boorstin, pp. 223-41; see also Smith, Virgin Land, pp. 205-06.

[94]See p. 69 for Israel's reaction to Poor Richard.

Is he a strange mixture of idealism and practicality or was he thinking of the shuttle cock all along?

If Franklin represents the more practical side of the American character, John Paul Jones with his vainglorious ambitions represents its reckless idealism. Israel first meets Jones in Franklin's apartment and observes that the statesman acts as a moderating influence, bending Jones's feverish enthusiasm and personal ambition to the service of the state.[95] In this sense the two figures suggest the balance between the practical and the ideal which characterizes a democratic society.[96]

The most significant feature of Jones as Melville describes him is his embodiment of both savagery and civilization. This is presented with startling effectiveness in the image of Jones admiring in the mirror the "cabalistic" tattoo beneath his "laced coat-sleeve," while the modern city slumbers unaware of the "jaunty barbarian" (p. 81) in its midst. In the fierce battle with the Serapis, the tattoo is revealed again, and in full, as the coat of civilization is laid aside and the savage frenzy of battle rages. The struggle between the Bon Homme Richard and the Serapis seems to suggest that, "intrepid,

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[95]However, Keyssar, pp. 30-31, makes the interesting suggestion that Franklin's way of thinking, by implying that God is on the winning side and that the end justifies the means, "helped to let Paul Jones loose upon the world."

As Israel watches the two men absorbed in the construction of a new kind of war ship, "his heart swelling with the thought of being privy to . . . consultations . . . having ultimate reference to such momentous affairs as the freeing of nations" (pp. 76-77), the reader receives a strong impression that perhaps the object being created is the symbolic Ship of State.

[96]Barbu, pp. 62-63, 65-66.

unprincipled, reckless, predatory, with boundless ambition, civilised in externals but a savage at heart, America is, or may yet be, the Paul Jones of nations" (p. 158). Such a view of America's character serves as a comment on historic and contemporary expansionistic ambitions and dreams of national power and greatness.[97] It should not go unrecognized, however, that the novel does not depict America as the only "savage" civilization. The city that sleeps oblivious to Jones's midnight stalkings is Paris, soon to be the center of the French Revolution,[98] which will reveal "the primeval savageness which ever slumbers in human kind" (p. 82). And in the battle with the Serapis, both sides are engulfed in savagery:

> In view of this battle one may ask--What separates the enlightened man from the savage? Is civilisation a thing distinct, or is it an advanced stage of barbarism? (p. 173)

It is a question America as a new nation developing out of a literal wilderness must consider, but it is finally a question for all nations and men. As to whether Jones is ultimately "a knave or a hero, or a union of both," the narrator cautions that "war and warriors, like politics and politicians, like religion and religionists, admit of no metaphysics" (p. 126).

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[97] Lewis Mumford, Herman Melville: A Study of His Life And Vision (1929; revised rpt. London: Secker & Warburg, 1963), p. 205.

[98] The American Revolution of course anticipated the French Revolution, and Jones is sometimes seen as representing the United States itself: see Perry Miller, p. 332; James Miller, Jr., A Reader's Guide, p. 13; and Farnsworth, p. 131. Jones has also been compared to Andrew Jackson: see Frederick W. Turner, III, "Melville and Thomas Berger: The Novelist as Cultural Anthropologist," The Centennial Review, 13 (1969), 109.

The third historic representative of American character that Israel encounters is Ethan Allen, who symbolizes the democratic Western spirit. Rather than envying the power and glory of Czars as Jones does, Allen proclaims the equality of men and the virtue of freedom. Allen seems to represent both the genesis of a uniquely American spirit and the mythology of the West as it appeared in the American dream and emerged in the American experience--civilization was moving West and it was the "Western spirit" that would be "the true American one" (p. 198). Independent and defiant, Allen relies on "Jehovah and the Continental Congress" (p. 193).

Judging the contribution of these three national forces in terms of the effect their representatives have on the average man--symbolized by Israel Potter, it can be seen that while certain small practical benefits may come from Franklin's influence, the overall tenor of his advice proves to be at odds with the deeper realities of the world.[99] The boldness of Jones's example helps Israel to overcome some difficult situations but ends by estranging him from humanity as he is dropped into the midst of an enemy ship. The most positive influence would seem to be Allen's, whose personification of the Western spirit helps to keep the dream alive in Israel's inner thoughts despite the hardships he suffers in London, and at the end of the novel, it is the West

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[99]Leon F. Seltzer, The Vision of Melville and Conrad: A Comparative Study (Athens: Ohio Univ. Press, 1970), pp. 89-90, notes that Franklin's advice to not be suspicious at the wrong times necessarily implies a personal judgment and is therefore untenable--it just restates the problem.

that seems to offer the best hope for the survival of democracy in America's coming of age.[100]

Throughout the episodes of Israel's early life, the emphasis is on his fierce independence; Israel's interview with King George III illustrates the strong democratic spirit of the common man who will call a king "Majesty" (p. 39) only after such respect has been earned. But during his forty-year exile in England, Israel's democratic independence is blunted by the toil and troubles of daily life. In describing Israel's plight, Melville observes the effect social conditions can have on an individual's sense of independence and equality. The two chapters relating Israel's experiences as a brick-maker universalize the analysis of democracy by emphasizing the common clay out of which all men are made.[101] But Israel notes that men are "built into communities just like bricks into a wall" (pp. 206-07), and the stratification of the bricks in the kilns, with their degree of soundness dependent on their distance from the flames, suggests the layers of a class society. The consequences of such a society are visible in the dismal condition of the London poor, who have been

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[100]Howard, p. 215, suggests that Allen wins his freedom because of an aggressiveness Israel lacks, but the total view of the book does not bear this out; Israel makes the best of every situation just as Allen does.

[101]Keyssar, p. 12, calls Israel Potter "a story of the universal common man"; a similar idea is found in Lion Feuchtwanger, The House of Desdemona or The Laurels and Limitations of Historical Fiction, trans. Harold A. Basilius (Detroit: Wayne State Univ. Press, 1963), p. 94. Also, Keyssar, p. 8, notes that the pro-American and anti-English comments in the original pamphlet were "toned down" by Melville and points out that as America became a symbol of the hopes of all mankind, the failure of America became symbolic of the defeat of human expectations.

pressed down beneath the rest of the population and forced to confront the harshest trials of existence. The plight of London's poverty-stricken ex-soldiers parallels Israel's own, since neither England nor America has rewarded in peace the men relied upon in war. But Israel never resorts to the degrading practices of the British soldiers:

> . . . it may be noted, as a fact nationally characteristic, that however desperately reduced at times . . . Israel, the American, never sunk below the mud, to actual beggary. (p. 220)

And amid his wanderings in the civilized wilderness of London, Israel never completely loses faith in the American dream. Even in the city he finds small reminders of the rural life and natural setting he associates with his home country, and he holds out to his son the promise of "the far Canaan . . . the Fortunate Isles of the Free," "the Promised Land" where "happiness and plenty" (p. 221) are shared by all.

The novel's final comment on the viability of the American dream comes in the description of Israel's ultimate fate, for the success of a democratic system depends largely on the benefits it brings to the common man. Melville's alteration of the chronology of the original pamphlet narrative in order to have Israel return to America on the fiftieth anniversary of the Fourth of July[102] emphasizes the political significance of the novel[103] and provides for a doubly ironic view of America's reception of the old hero. The American dream lives on

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[102] McCutcheon, p. 173, notes the change to July 4.

[103] Keyssar, p. 23, notes that the original subtitle of the novel was "A Fourth of July Story."

in slogans and rhetoric, but the human commitments of that dream are being lost.[104] Israel is nearly run over by a car flying a banner proclaiming the "glory" (p. 222) of the heroes of Bunker Hill, and his request for a pension is denied. America's failure to recompense or recognize Israel is symbolic of its disregard of the values on which the nation was founded. Israel finds that in many ways his country, his birthplace, has changed beyond recognition; and his family, like much of the rest of the farm population, has moved West.[105] It is probably significant that upon his return, Israel discovers that the family of patriots he left behind had been reduced to a single surviving bachelor. It is to be hoped that, having moved West into the reservoir of democratic sentiment, the bachelor will be revitalized by the spirit that must be the future spirit of America if the dream is to endure.

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[104]Keyssar, p. 24; Wayne Charles Miller, p. 30, says Israel Potter focuses on "the tragic disparity between the American dream of democracy and the plight of the common man in America."

[105]Turner, pp. 111-12, says this is symbolic of the westward movement of the whole nation.

There is an interesting passage in de Tocqueville, I, 295-96, on the way in which progress is leaving a desert behind and creating ruins already in America, and a section of this passage is similar to the description of Israel's discovery of his old home:

> . . . what changes had taken place in the scene of his labors! The logs which he had hastily hewn to build himself a shed had sprouted afresh; the very props were intertwined with living verdue, and his cabin was transformed into a bower. In the midst of these shrubs a few stones were to be seen, blackened with fire and sprinkled with thin ashes; here the hearth had no doubt been, and the chimney in falling had covered it with rubbish. I stood for some time in silent admiration of the resources of Nature and the littleness of man; and . . . I exclaimed with sadness: "Are ruins, then, already here?"

Thus the elderly hero of Bunker Hill, who in his youth typified the bright promise of America, is ignored by a nation so intent on pursuing its future that it ignores the living ideals and human sacrifice out of which it was created. The dedication of the novel to "His Highness The Bunker Hill Monument" (p. v, italics added) is an ironic reminder of the extent to which America has moved away from the true democratic heritage represented by Israel Potter. The dedication echoes the current national reluctance to face unpleasant realities and attempts to let praise of the abstract monument compensate for the unrewarded "anonymous privates" (p. vi) of Bunker Hill. But while the warm sun of myopic optimism gleams on the artificial emblem of the myth, the real embodiment of the American ideal rests quietly beneath the "winter snow" (p. vii).

Stories (1853-1856)

In "Bartleby" Melville makes one of his most probing inquiries into the effect of nineteenth-century American life on the individual--to whom the dream had promised equality and dignity. In this story Wall Street becomes a symbol of America's preoccupation with material values, and the narrator is the typical representative of an American society that has given preeminence to material prosperity while insuring peace of mind by smugly assuming that it has all the answers concerning man's role in life and by carefully following the "safe" and prudent path.[106] The tyrannies of business repeatedly keep the narrator from

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[106]Herman Melville, "Bartleby," in Piazza Tales (hereafter cited as Piazza Tales), ed. Egbert S. Oliver (New York: Hendricks House,

having time to deal constructively with the problem posed by Bartleby,[107] just as the fiercely optimistic drive for material progress and security is keeping society at large from fully recognizing the degree to which individual freedom of choice and opportunity are being denied. As in Pierre the essential conflict is between an inflexible myth of concern, promoting society's current values, and the myth of freedom, which is based on respect for the individual and an openness to change. A constant struggle between order and freedom and a balance between the practical and spiritual sides of life are necessary features of a democratic society,[108] but in "Bartleby" the equilibrium has been lost and the myth of freedom is being crushed by the oppressive weight of a society that is ignoring the spiritual side of man.

Bartleby's situation clearly reveals the threat to individual identity and fulfillment in contemporary America.[109] Bartleby has

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Farrar Straus, 1948), p. 16. Hereafter cited by page number in the text of the paper.

In reading the story in terms of direct political parallels, John Seelye, "Contemporary 'Bartleby,'" American Transcendental Quarterly, No. 7 (Summer 1970), 15, identifies the lawyer as a Whig, perhaps Daniel Webster, and Bartleby as a transcendentalist, such as Emerson; also see p. 17.

[107]See, for example, pp. 27, 39.

[108]See Barbu, pp. 9, 64-66.

[109]However, the effects of the pressures of commercial life and the dehumanizing monotony of the office routine are also seen in the attitudes and behavior of the narrator and his staff--Turkey, Nippers, and Ginger Nut. The lawyer is driven to thoughts of murder (p. 43); Turkey reacts to the boredom and pressure of his work by indulging in drink, the effects of which allow him to assert a little of his own personality--otherwise it is repressed through conformity to Wall Street decorum; Nippers, who is ruled by "ambition and indigestion" (p. 20), is a victim of the conflict between the American ideal of equality

been maimed in some mysterious way by American society,[110] and the mystery surrounding the scrivener's incapacitating experience serves to universalize his dilemma.[111] He is simultaneously an example of what the nineteenth century has done to man and a revolt against the isolating and dehumanizing forces at work in America.[112] The walls of

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of opportunity and the reality of the economic system; Ginger Nut represents a new generation, one that is growing up in modern America and is oblivious to the conflicts of modern life because it has lost sight of traditional values. On this point see Karl F. Knight, "Melville's Variations of the Theme of Failure: 'Bartleby' and Billy Budd," The Arlington Quarterly, 2 (Autumn 1969), 47-48. Chase, p. 147, identifies Turkey and Nippers as artists compromised by a commercial society and attributes their unusual behavior to this conflict, but on a more basic level, it is individuality in general that is being compromised.

Richard Harter Fogle, Melville's Shorter Tales (Norman, Oklahoma: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1960), pp. 18-19, takes another view of Turkey's and Nippers' eccentric behavior and sees Turkey as representing a typical Englishman, Nippers as the typical American, and their relationship as "an allegory of the English and American national characters."

[110]Fogle, Tales, p. 21.

[111]Bartleby's dilemma is sometimes interpreted as that of the writer in modern commercial society; see Chase, p. 146, and Mario D'Avanzo, "Melville's 'Bartleby' and John Jacob Astor," New England Quarterly, 41 (1968), 261-63. But as a writer or an individual, Bartleby's lack of personal creativity is a result of social forces--he cannot develop new ideas; he only copies: see Paul Deane, "Herman Melville: Four Views of American Commercial Society," Revue Des Langues Vivantes Tijdschrift Voor Levende Talen, 34 (1968), 505. Leo Marx, "Melville's Parable of the Walls," Sewanee Review, 61 (1953), 602-27, also considers Bartleby as a typical American writer, but much of what he says about society and the artist would apply to a wider political or social interpretation.

[112]Kingsley Widmer, The Ways of Nihilism: A Study of Herman Melville's Short Novels (Los Angeles: California State Colleges, 1970), pp. 93-94.

urban society that paradoxically crowd yet isolate men have a profound effect upon Bartleby, who recognizes the death-like quality of the blank walls. It is as if Bartleby looks out not only at the walls of the imprisoning city, but at the image of modern society, symbolized here as in Israel Potter by crushing layers of brick.[113]

Melville uses Bartleby's condition to suggest the ultimate consequences of modern American life and values. The final effects of America's dehumanizing work ethic are evident in Bartleby's exaggerated case; what is only a part of life for others (ostensibly at least) is the whole of life for him.[114] When he is first employed by the lawyer, Bartleby copies "mechanically" working both "day and night" (p. 24), and, as the narrator later discovers, he lives in the Wall Street office. His total identity is bound to his work and all other aspects of life have been completely submerged. Thus when the scrivener prefers to devote himself no longer to the mechanical, noncreative task of copying, only a void remains.

When he surprises Bartleby in the law office on Sunday morning, the narrator is shocked to discover Bartleby's severe isolation and poverty, representative of the social and economic conditions that have undermined the American ideal of equality, and in a momentary rush of pity and guilt recognizes the democratic bond between them: " . . . both I and Bartleby were sons of Adam" (p. 33). He realizes

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[113]McCarthy, p. 396, suggests this relationship.

[114]Fogle, Tales, p. 21.

the fallacy in America's social outlook: ". . . Ah, happiness courts the light, so we deem the world is gay; but misery hides aloof, so we deem misery there is none" (p. 33). The contrast between the empty silence of Wall Street on Sunday and the bustling gaiety of Broadway that is noted by the narrator points to a severance between the practical and spiritual sides of life, and Bartleby's presence in the office on Sunday, as always, suggests that the secular element is gaining ascendancy in America. It is significant that the narrator's discovery of Bartleby's true condition "disqualified [him] for the time from church-going" (p. 35); the church itself supports the self-assured illusions of the Wall Street World. However, the narrator's pity soon turns to "prudential" feelings of "fear" and "repulsion" (pp. 34-35) as he realizes instinctively the threat the truth of Bartleby's status poses to the current social order.

Bartleby also represents a distinct political threat to the American status quo. The law office is a microcosm of American society,[115] and since a democracy depends to a great extent on voluntary compliance with the demands of the social order,[116] Bartleby's decision to assert his individuality in the only way he can, by negatively preferring not to conform to social expectations, leaves the narrator somewhat at a loss as to how to deal with this passive revolt.[117] At first he tries

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[115]Herbert F. Smith, "Melville's Master in Chancery and His Recalcitrant Clerk," American Quarterly, 17 (1965), 736, recognizes that the office has microcosmic qualities.

[116]See Barbu, p. 51.

[117]Maurice Friedman, Problematic Rebel: Melville, Dostoievsky, Kafka, Camus, revised ed. (Chicago: The Univ. of Chicago Press, 1970), 85, 135-36, points out that if Bartleby had said he would not or could

to reason with Bartleby, basing his argument on "common usage" (p. 26).[118] But although Bartleby understands the narrator's logic and is incapable of effectively countering it on a rationalistic plane, he senses that such reasoning has become a tool of oppression and prefers to step out of the current of conformity. Unsettled by such irrational and persistent obstinance, the narrator's faith in the myth of concern falters, and he wonders if in fact "all the reason is on the other side" (p. 26). To determine the truth of the situation, he polls the other members of his staff, bringing both the relative truth of public opinion and the weight of majority rule to bear on Bartleby, the results at once reaffirming the narrator's own faith and challenging the right of the minority. The narrator is at one point so concerned over his difficulties with Bartleby that he mistakes betting on a public election for wagers as to whether or not he can rid himself of the scrivener, little realizing that the question of how to deal with Bartleby and the problems he represents is the most serious issue facing America and challenging its claim of insuring justice through a democratic political process. Current political practices also have a bearing on the events of the story; if the "vague report" (p. 54)

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not do the work he was asked to do, the narrator would have known how to handle the situation; but by preferring not to recognize ordinary social expectations, Bartleby confounds the narrator with the question of whether Bartleby is "free" or "helpless." Egbert S. Oliver, "A Second Look at 'Bartleby,'" College English, 6 (1945), 431-39, says that Melville is taking Thoreau's ideas in "Civil Disobedience" to their logical extreme.

[118] Widmer, pp. 7, 91, 104-05, 107-09, 120, devotes considerable discussion to the narrator's role as a benevolent rationalist whose responses to Bartleby indicate the inadequacies of self-satisfied rationalism; Seelye, Melville, p. 98, supports this view of the narrator by observing that he exhibits qualities similar to those of Cicero, whose bust adorns his office.

in the epilogue is to be credited, Bartleby lost his job in the Dead Letter Office as a result of the vicissitudes of political patronage.

The threat that Bartleby poses to the established political and social order becomes most apparent as his use of the word "prefer" spreads to the others in the office.[119] And though the narrator continues to try to find reasonable explanations for Bartleby's behavior and takes a paternal attitude (as opposed to fraternal democratic concern)[120] toward the scrivener, he exhibits the "anxiety" that the presence of dissent creates for the myth of concern.[121] Prior to his attempt to renounce all responsibility for Bartleby, the narrator resorts to "an application of the doctrine of assumptions" (p. 42) and, in accord with America's determined optimism, assumes even in the face of contrary evidence that the problem is gone.[122] The narrator even tries to bribe the scrivener, but Bartleby remains

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[119]See Widmer, p. 111; Deane, p. 505; and Marx, "Walls," pp. 620-21. Marx, "Walls," p. 621, also relates Bartleby's effect on society to Thoreau's idea of the power of the individual to bring about change in institutions; Herbert Smith, pp. 739-40, notes that the word "prefer" has special significance when used in the office of a Master of Chancery, since "Only in equity pleading is the preference of the plaintiff for one kind of restitution over another a consideration."

[120]Ostrander, pp. xix-xx, and Cohen, pp. 54, 274, discuss the importance to the ideal of American democracy of the concept of fraternity, or brotherhood between equals. Kaplan, pp. 45-47, characterizes this social development as "the deepest moral theme of American democracy" and suggests that it can be viewed as the antithesis of the authoritative, paternal political and social philosophy against which America revolted in its struggle for independence.

[121]Frye, p. 37.

[122]Widmer, p. 114, comments on the narrator's use of assumptions to explain away Bartleby's rebellion.

unmoved and it is the lawyer who is thrown into consternation and flees from the disturbing silence of his former clerk.

Though the narrator is troubled by the enigma Bartleby presents and though he does try in certain ways to befriend him (although the gestures he makes toward Bartleby seem motivated more by a desire to restore conformity and his own peace of mind than by selfless concern for the scrivener), it seems unlikely that he ever truly sees for himself "the reason" (p. 38) behind Bartleby's actions. That "some of the compassionate and curious bystanders" accompany Bartleby on his "silent" march to prison "through all the noise, and heat, and joy of the roaring thoroughfares at noon" (pp. 50-51) is a hopeful sign, but, in the end, Bartleby dies alone. The prison with its confining walls holds no secrets for Bartleby, and he tells the narrator, "I know where I am" (p. 51). The prison is simply an objectification of nineteenth-century America's Wall Street world, which holds men's spirits in bondage.

Some critics have felt Melville was condemning Bartleby for refusing to accept his share of social obligations,[123] but though Melville was very much concerned about the effects voluntary or forced isolation had on both the isolated individual and the community,[124] the criticism in this story is of the society which denied Bartleby

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[123]For example, see Oliver, pp. 431-39; and Marx, "Walls," pp. 626-27.

[124]See R. E. Watters, "Melville's 'Sociality,'" American Literature, 17 (1945), 37; and R. E. Watters, "Melville's 'Isolatoes,'" PMLA, 60 (1945), 1144, 1148.

personal fulfillment and left him capable of only a negative withdrawal.[125] Bartleby seems to be the victim of what Alexis de Tocqueville describes as the new "species of oppression by which democratic nations are menaced." In this new form of despotism, authority assumes a paternal role and consigns men to perpetual childhood. Under this authority, "the will of man is not shattered, but softened, bent, and guided; men . . . are constantly restrained from acting" by a force that "does not destroy . . . but prevents existence; it . . . compresses, enervates, extinguishes, and stupefies a people." Capitalizing on the ideal of equality, which has made men receptive to arguments of "common usage" and to repression when it assumes the guise of bestower of universal security and happiness, this despotic authority gradually "renders the exercise of the free agency of man less useful and less frequent; it circumscribes the will within a narrower range and gradually robs a man of all the uses of himself." The result is a "quiet" and "gentle" servitude that coexists with "some of the outward forms of freedom."[126]

In light of the legal background of the story,[127] another of de Tocqueville's observations on nineteenth-century America is also significant. In discussing the judges of the Supreme Court, the

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[125]Deane, pp. 505-06; Mason, p. 192, calls "Bartleby" "the most devastating criticism of society that could conceivably be made."

[126]de Tocqueville, II, 318-19.

[127]This background consists of both the description of the narrator's profession and the business of the law office and of the failure of the law to deal adequately with Bartleby.

highest legal authority in the land, de Tocqueville observes that "without them the Constitution would be a dead letter" (the ideal of freedom and justice for the individual is a dead letter for Bartleby)[128] but that the judges' power is ultimately "the power of public opinion":

> They are all-powerful as long as the people respect the law; but they would be impotent against popular neglect or contempt of the law.[129]

This then is the basic dilemma posed in "Bartleby": Will the idealistic dream of American democracy be converted into a new kind of despotism, deadly to the independent human spirit? Will a loss of respect for legal and social forms, a preferring not to, lead to a dissolution of society? Or will some way be found to restore the viability of the nation and the dream by improving the quality of individual life and achieving a balance between concern and freedom? Northrop Frye has said that though "a closed myth of concern" may provide easy answers to questions involving man's identity and his place in society, "these answers are . . . not genuine answers" and "only the questions can be genuine."[130] In "Bartleby," Melville poses some of the fundamental questions facing American society and leaves history to supply what answers it can. Judging from the fate of Bartleby, standing like "the last column of some ruined temple" (p. 40) in the midst of a hectic and depersonalized world, the outlook does not seem hopeful.

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[128] Widmer, p. 107, comments that for Bartleby the law has become a "dead letter"; Bartleby, of course, was supposedly employed for a time in a Dead Letter Office (p. 54).

[129] de Tocqueville, I, 151.

[130] Frye, p. 156.

"The Two Temples" is also concerned with the possibilities for individual fulfillment under the American system and with whether or not America is true to its traditional values. The story recounts the experience of a young American physician, a "true blue" Yankee,[131] who finds in a theatre in London the charity and brotherhood absent in the fashionable New York church from which he was excluded because of his apparent lack of social status. The story obviously deals with inadequacies and hypocrisy in religion,[132] but it also treats political themes.[133] Marvin Fisher in an essay in American Dreams, American Nightmares has analyzed the story in terms of its treatment of the American dream. Fisher identifies four tenets of the democratic dream which the narrator finds to be invalid in practice. The narrator is denied freedom of worship, the idea of a classless society proves a sham, and the principles of the separation of church and state and of the impartiality of the courts are both called into question.[134] The narrator considers being able to attend public services one of his

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[131]Herman Melville, "The Two Temples," in Prose Pieces, p. 189. Hereafter cited by page number in the text of the paper.

[132]See Frederick Asals, "Satire and Skepticism in 'The Two Temples,'" Books at Brown, 24 (1971), 7-18.

[133]Ray B. Browne, Melville's Drive to Humanism (Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue Univ. Studies, 1971), p. 208, says the story contains "criticism of America, in her snobbishness, her sham, her crassness, her forced isolation of people."

[134]Marvin Fisher, "Focus on Herman Melville's 'The Two Temples': The Denigration of the American Dream," in American Dreams, American Nightmares, ed. David Madden (Carbondale: Southern Ill. Univ. Press, 1970), pp. 77-78.

"natural rights" (p. 176), but the temple does not "entertain poor folks" (p. 174). While the beadle-faced man is "driving three ragged little boys" out "into . . . the street" (p. 175) and denying access to the narrator because of his slightly shabby appearance and inability to provide a bribe, the brightly bedecked servants and "flashing carriages" of the worshipers form an "aristocratic circle" (p. 174) outside. An American gentility seems to be developing that has more in common with English aristocracy than with the democratic ideal of equality. The text of the sermon, "Ye are the salt of the earth" (p. 179), is also ironic in this respect. In addition, the supposedly inviolate and impartial "Halls of Justice" provide a special hearing for the narrator because of his "gentlemanly appearance" and are perhaps also prejudicially influenced by "a Sunday night call" (p. 182) from the beadle-faced man. The narrator's satiric remark that "only after paying a round fine, and receiving a stinging reprimand, was I . . . pardoned for having humbly indulged myself in the luxury of public worship" (p. 182) suggests that social realities are circumscribing the freedom of worship granted by the First Amendment to the Constitution.

The London described in the second part of the story is "Babylonian" and "Tartarean" (p. 184), and London's churches--"first-class . . . ecclesiastical hotels" (pp. 185-86)--seem to be no more hospitable than those in New York. But in "the very maw of the roaring London" (p. 186), the narrator finds the human companionship lacking in his experiences in the New World. Though he reacts with what Melville has presented as typical American revulsion to taking charity when a workingman presents him with a theatre pass, the young doctor finally

concludes that in some way all men depend on the charity of others and resolves to partake of the evening's entertainment. The theatre is directly compared to the New York church, but here the warmth of brotherhood produces a genuine spiritual experience. The concept of the American dream is forcefully interjected into the second sketch when the theatre's ragged ale-boy asserts that his "dad's gone to Yankee-land, a seekin' of his fortin" (p. 189). Aside from the irony that the Yankee narrator is more impoverished than the boy, it is clear that the Promised Land with its prospect of unlimited opportunity and its emphasis on individual self-reliance may deny human fulfillment as well as material success. Fisher believes that here Melville is not questioning the essence of the American dream, but is suggesting that the ideals it holds out can be fulfilled in other societies as well.[135] This view accords with Melville's tendency to universalize the dream and suggests a necessary temperance of American arrogance, but in the final analysis, "The Two Temples" is a warning that in the United States the positive promise of the American dream, though still publicly proclaimed, is failing in reality.

In "Poor Man's Pudding and Rich Man's Crumbs," there is a similar comparison between conditions in America and England. Here the contrast focuses directly on poverty--on the difference between the potentially violent mob of London beggars shoving into the Guildhall to dine on the remains of a royal feast of "victorious princes"[136]

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[135]Fisher, p. 86.

[136]Herman Melville, "Poor Man's Pudding and Rich Man's Crumbs," in Prose Pieces, p. 203. Hereafter cited by page number in the text of the paper.

and the dignity of the rural American poor. The satire strikes at both the American attempt to romanticize the poor man's lot and the shortcomings and pomposity of English charities. In Melville's Drive to Humanism, Ray B. Browne expresses the opinion that the story depicts American poverty in a more favorable light than that of England since the "evil" of American poverty "is not viciously motivated."[137] But Melville clearly makes the point that poverty is more degrading and more of a mental burden for an American than it is for other peoples. America's vision of itself as a land of boundless opportunity in which every man had an equal chance to prosper reinforced the mid-nineteenth-century tendency to see poverty as the result of a lack of morals or initiative on the part of the poor, and Melville's understanding of the heavy consequences of this idea is clearly set out in the story:

> The native American poor never lose their delicacy or pride; hence, though unreduced to the physical degradation of the European pauper, they yet suffer more in mind than the poor of any other people in the world. Those peculiar social sensibilities nourished by our own peculiar political principles, while they enhance the true dignity of a prosperous American, do but minister to the added wretchedness of the unfortunate; first, by prohibiting their acceptance of what little random relief charity may offer; and, second, by furnishing them with the keenest appreciation of the smarting distinction between their ideal of universal equality and their grindstone experience of the practical misery and infamy of poverty--a misery and infamy which is, ever has been, and ever will be, precisely the same in India, England, and America. (pp. 201-02)

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[137]Browne, pp. 216, 219; Browne, pp. 201, 213-14, also says that the two sketches preview threats of "political revolution" brought on by a widescale disregard of political facts and social problems and comments that the 1815 setting supports this idea.

Melville's description of the Coulter family dramatically illustrates this situation, and he strongly rejects the popular tendency to justify poverty by calling the poor undeserving.[138] The specific details of the Coulters' situation also raise a number of subordinate social and economic issues. It has been pointed out, for example, that Coulter is a victim of laissez-faire economics and that society is using religion to help make the poor more contented.[139] The total view of the Coulters' position demonstrates that unless the American dream is made responsive to the realities of social and economic conditions, it will become a tool of injustice and oppression.

"The Piazza" is another tale that rejects romantic and picturesque illusions about poverty. The narrator's anticipated "fairy-land"[140] retreat proves to be lonely and decaying and the inhabitants are a sleepless, "pale-cheeked girl," who sews by the light of a "fly-specked window, with wasps about the mended upper panes" (p. 10), and her overworked brother, whose life will inevitably follow the harsh cycle of "the bench, the bed, the grave" (p. 11). The house that glimmers invitingly from a distance is old, and those who built it "went West" (p. 12) long ago.

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[138]Fogle, Tales, p. 45.

[139]Browne, p. 211; Beryl Rowland, "Sitting Up with a Corpse: Malthus According to Melville in 'Poor Man's Pudding and Rich Man's Crumbs,'" Journal of American Studies, 6 (1972), 69-83, relates the story to Malthusian economic theory.

[140]Herman Melville, "The Piazza," in Piazza Tales, p. 9. Hereafter cited by page number in the text of the paper.

"The Paradise of Bachelors and The Tartarus of Maids" is another story that develops an English-American contrast,[141] but here the emphasis is on the effects of American industrialism.[142] Gilman Ostrander has expressed the opinion that, the slavery issue notwithstanding, the severest challenge to American democracy in the mid 1800's was the growing industrialization of the nation, especially of the northeast. He suggests that though the industrial advances were still rather limited as compared to the great development that would follow the Civil War, the changes wrought by industrialism in the 1840's and 1850's were "in some ways more disturbing to society" than those of any later time because "they constituted a more radical break with the past and were new to this period as to no later one." He further contends that America's faith in decentralized government and commitment to the Jeffersonian ideal of an agrarian society encouraged a prolonged adherence to "bucolic political institutions"

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[141]There is some controversy about the thematic relationship between the two parts of the story, but it appears that Melville intended both a contrast and a comparison. The refined and indulgent life of the bachelors is certainly very different from that of the factory girls in their snowbound boarding houses, but, on the other hand, each is a sterile way of life. In their seclusion and decline from the purposeful existence of the old Templars, the bachelors' sedate lives are as humanly unproductive as those of the maids who are being pressed down beneath the active American industrialism. See W. R. Thompson, "'The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids': A Reinterpretation," American Quarterly, 9 (1957), 38, 44-45. Taken together, the two sections of the story seem to suggest that, despite surface appearances of vitality and energetic productivity, the rapid pace of life and determined drive toward goals in the new world have at least as negative an effect on human existence as the stagnating society of the old.

[142]See, for example, Thorp, cxii; Thompson, p. 42; and Marvin Fisher, "Melville's 'Tartarus': The Deflowering of New England," American Quarterly, 23 (1971), 80, 83.

so that

> of all those nations . . . which passed through the industrial revolution . . . none was as ill-arranged politically to control the new development as America was.[143]

Because America failed to deal realistically with the spreading industrialization, American workers found themselves reduced to "wage slaves" and confronted with a loss of status and independence and with working conditions that threatened the belief in human dignity and individual rights inherent in the American dream.[144]

The pale girls who work in the paper mill are victims of monotony and poor working conditions. Those in the rag-room will probably die of consumption as a result of breathing the lint-filled atmosphere, but they are "their own executioners,"[145] sharpening at regular intervals the knives that send "the fine, poisonous particles" (p. 247) into the air. The position of the girls in the finishing room makes clear the plight of all the workers; each is a "slave" to the machine that should have been a "slave of humanity" (p. 245). The machinery is drawing the vitality out of the girls. The roses taken from their cheeks are stamped on the paper they make, and the river that runs the mill is blood red. The mark that the humanity-denying process is leaving on the workers is clearly dramatized as the lining machine

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[143]Ostrander, pp. 294-96; also see Douglas C. North, The Economic Growth of the United States, 1790-1860 (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1961), pp. 204-05.

[144]Ostrander, pp. 299-300.

[145]Herman Melville, "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids," in Prose Pieces, p. 248. Hereafter cited by page number in the text of the paper.

rules both the paper that passes through it and the brow of the girl who operates it.

Cupid's comment that because of demand foolscap is turned out more often than "cream-laid and royal sheets" (p. 251) has been interpreted as showing Melville's dissatisfaction with "a democracy of quantity,"[146] but a clearer understanding of Melville's concern might be gained by noticing that the following paragraph discusses Locke's concept of a tabula rasa. Presumably all kinds of possibilities exist for the average man in America, but the influence of the industrial system, instead of developing character and mind, is draining away the human virtues so that "blank-looking girls . . . blankly [fold] blank paper" (p. 244). In fact, the metaphor of the tabula rasa is reversed, and instead of experience imprinting ideas on the initially blank paper of the human mind, the factory is producing paper that seems to have human souls, in the "tormented" and "pallid" faces (p. 253) of the maids, imprinted on it.

The sexual and procreative allusions in the story reinforce the idea that this mechanically dominated existence is destructive to human life.[147] The descriptions of the narrator's trip to the

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[146]Fisher, "Tartarus," p. 100.

[147]For various views on the relationship between the sexual and mechanical or industrial elements of the story, see Fisher, "Tartarus," pp. 79-100; Thompson, p. 35; H. Bruce Franklin, Future Perfect: American Science Fiction of the Nineteenth Century (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1966), p. 146; and Beryl Rowland, "Melville's Bachelors and Maids: Interpretation Through Symbol and Metaphor," American Literature, 41 (1969), 389-405. As an example of the criticism that fails to recognize the connection between the two aspects, see E. H. Eby, "Herman Melville's 'Tartarus of Maids,'" Modern Language Quarterly, 1 (1940), 95-100.

mill and the paper-making process parallel sexual intercourse and gestation and birth, but with a terrible irony. This is a mechanized method of production that destroys humanity instead of creating it. The women here are all maids, and both the surrounding landscape and the interior of the mill emphasize their barrenness.[148] "The strange innocence of cruel-heartedness in [the] usage-hardened boy" Cupid (p. 249) further demonstrates that love[149] (and childhood) cannot survive here.[150] Even the manager has been adversely affected by the industrialization. He is a bachelor, also lacking in vitality.

Although an alternative method of production is suggested in the story by the description of the old sawmill, which is symbolic of independent individual workmanship, the mill is a "rude wooden ruin," a reminder of a "primitive" time (p. 239) now as separated from the present as feudalism. The modern world seems to be at the mercy of the "inflexible iron animal" with its "metallic necessity" and "unbudging fatality" (p. 252). The unresisting girls, like the paper pulp, serve "the autocratic cunning of the machine" (p. 253).

In discussing the impact of the machine on American life and thought, Leo Marx explains the fundamental conflicts produced by industrialization:

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[148]Thompson, p. 36.

[149]Fisher, "Tartarus," p. 97.

[150]From a limited point of view, Cupid could be seen as an example of the results of child labor just as, on one level, the position of the maids in the factory could be seen as a comment on problems connected with women labor in industry.

> Within the lifetime of a single generation, a rustic and in large part wild landscape was transformed into the site of the world's most productive industrial machine. It would be difficult to imagine more profound contradictions of value or meaning than those made manifest by this circumstance.

Marx points out that Americans tried to cling to the pastoral ideal early associated with the promised land of the American dream even after the advance of industrialism. This delusion "enabled the nation to continue defining its purpose as the pursuit of rural happiness while devoting itself to productivity, wealth, and power," and "it remained for our serious writers to discover the meaning inherent in the contradiction."[151] Melville directly illustrates this contradiction in two ways in "The Tartarus of Maids." The frozen and sterile whiteness of the mill's location is surrounded by "bright farms and sunny meadows, nodding in early June with odorous grasses" (p. 238). And the life-producing seeds of the seedsman, which are to be distributed in all regions of the country, will come sealed in paper produced by a system that is life-denying.

Melville's concern with the consequences of America's industrialization is also evident in "The Bell-Tower," where the mechanism designed to relieve man of his baser labors first isolates and undermines the humanity of its creator and then literally destroys him. As in "The Tartarus of Maids," the "new serf," intended to "further . . . the universal conveniences and glories of humanity,"[152] makes man its

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[151]Marx, Machine, pp. 343, 226.

[152]Herman Melville, "The Bell-Tower," in Piazza Tales, p. 219. Hereafter cited by page number in the text of the paper.

slave and victim. The sacrifice of the industrial worker to the demands of production is also portrayed here, and again sexual symbolism is used to suggest the dehumanizing effect of a machine culture.[153]

However, the scope of vision is widened in this story, and the creation of the tower and its mechanism is a response to intense nationalism. The Renaissance republic in which the story is set has been identified with the progressive America of the 1850's,[154] where "industrialism was treated as a value in itself . . . [and] encouraged . . . as . . . the Renaissance encouraged art" in the belief that "the activity . . . made for a higher civilization."[155] The story clearly shows the popular and governmental support given the endeavor; in fact, the influence of Bannadonna is so great that he manipulates the elected officials in a way that suggests that industrial technology can enslave the state as well as individuals.[156]

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[153]Charles A. Fenton, "'The Bell-Tower': Melville and Technology," American Literature, 23 (1951), 224; see Franklin, pp. 143, 146, 148, for interesting comments on the idea of creating an automaton in order to avoid sexual reproduction; Fogle, Tales, p. 63, says the story is an allegory showing man being conquered by the machine.

[154]Fenton, pp. 220-21, 224. Bannadonna's devotion to "common sense" and his nature as a "practical materialist" (p. 220) link him to certain aspects of the typical American character.

[155]Mumford, p. 40.

[156]Bannadonna's manipulation of men to serve his ambitions as they fuse with those of the state, his efforts to control nature (p. 220) and truth (see Baird, p. 399) and his attempt to create the mechanical man who would move in a regular clockwork world could be viewed as totalitarian traits, though the political significance of the story would seem to be more concerned with national pride, industrial and bonded slavery, and the pitfalls of technological progress.

The end creation seems so worthwhile that Bannadonna's murder of the frightened workman is forgiven by both church and state, "judge" and "priest" (p. 210), in the ruthless and impatient drive to build the new Tower of Babel. In the outcome of the endeavors, when the master inventor lies dead at the foot of Truth, whose face he tried to alter, Melville seems to be suggesting the dangers of following a distorted version of the American dream and allowing the concepts of progress and nationalism to trample the human rights of equality and dignity.[157]

The human-like qualities of the manacled Haman introduce the idea of black slavery into the story in what Marvin Fisher has called its "double thrust."[158] And the flaw in the "great state-bell" (p. 209), which critics frequently compare to the Liberty Bell,[159] may represent the threat to political security posed by the slavery in the South and by the enslaving qualities of industrialism in the North and East.[160]

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[157]It is interesting to note that it is Bannadonna acting as artist who is killed by the mechanism; this fact could be interpreted in terms of the observation by Marx, Machine, p. 202, that in the 1850's the supporters of the machine were beginning to question the importance of the impractical arts. The method of Bannadonna's death also suggests the inevitability of the functioning of the machine once it is set in motion (an idea also present in "The Tartarus of Maids," pp. 252-53; see Browne, p. 256).

[158]Marvin Fisher, "Melville's 'Bell-Tower ': A Double Thrust," American Quarterly, 18 (1966), 201-02; also see Franklin, p. 148, who compares the relationship of Bannadonna and Haman to that of the blacks and whites in "Benito Cereno"; and Browne, p. 170, who says the story shows the threat slavery poses to the Renaissance that should be possible for America.

[159]See Franklin, p. 149; Fisher, "Bell-Tower," p. 206; and Charles Nicol, "The Iconography of Evil and Ideal in 'Benito Cereno,'" in Studies in the Minor and Later Works of Melville, ed. Raymona E. Hull (Hartford: Transcendental Books, 1970), p. 26.

[160]Franklin, p. 148; Browne, p. 258, says both "The Bell-Tower" and "Benito Cereno" seem to imply that slaves have an obligation to a higher power to rebel.

The weakness in the bell could also be symbolic of "a moral weakness in the political structure" resulting from over-zealous national ambition being carried out at the expense of the individual.[161]

The dangers of excessive national optimism are also depicted in "Cock-A-Doodle-Doo!" and the effect of industrialism on American life is again considered here. The story is set in March, the time of the year when winter and spring seem to be at war, and the setting symbolizes the conflict of change being felt in America. The narrator says: "All round me were tokens of a divided empire. The old grass and the new grass were striving together."[162]

It is against the train and the steamship, those supposedly "great improvements of the age" (p. 146), that the narrator levels his invective in the first part of the story. Since "the revolution in transportation was the key to the new industrialism"[163] and since the train was the main symbol of the nation's industrial progress,[164] it seems appropriate that the unsettling effect of the revolutionary "locomotive and steamer" (p. 144) is first mentioned in conjunction with a reference to the world political upheavals of 1848. That the train is a threat not only to the quietude of the "vernal woods" (p. 146) but to the quality of human life and to life itself is certainly

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[161]Fisher, "Bell-Tower," p. 206.

[162]Herman Melville, "Cock-A-Doodle-Doo!" in Prose Pieces, p. 144. Hereafter cited by page number in the text of the paper.

[163]Ostrander, p. 296.

[164]Marx, Machine, pp. 27, 190.

made clear. The description of a wreck involving the iron monsters depicts the kind of mechanical usurpation of human vitality that is portrayed in "The Bell-Tower" and "The Tartarus of Maids." In an inversion of the life-giving cycle, the colliding trains "climbed and clawed each other's backs; and one locomotive was found fairly shelled, like a chick, inside of a passenger car in the antagonist train" (p. 145). Among the victims are "a bride and her groom, and an innocent little infant," and still the "iron fiend" rushes through the land "crying 'More! more! more!'" (p. 146). In fact, things seem so out of control that the narrator in a fit of melodramatic passion suggests that perhaps a "Dictator in North America" might be able to straighten out the "villains and asses" who manage the "railroads and steamboats, and innumerable other vital things in the world" (p. 146).

The narrator is concerned with a number of social, political, and economic injustices, including his own monetary misfortunes and the plight of the poor, until he is exposed to the crowing of the "Marvellous cock" (p. 149). Then suddenly the narrator is filled with boundless optimism. His former concern over the disease and misery that lie beneath the cloud of "condensed smoke" that hangs "like a pall" (p. 145) over the distant landscape changes to aesthetic admiration of "the azure smoke of the village," which he compares to "the azure tester over a bridal-bed" (p. 150). And he finds that now he can think over his own troubles and

> over the unlucky risings of the poor oppressed peoples abroad, and over the railroad and steamboat accidents, and over even the loss of my dear friend, with a calm, good-natured rapture of defiance. (p. 153)

The danger involved in the deluding optimism inspired by the cock becomes fully obvious in the scenes showing the cock's influence on Merrymusk.[165] Merrymusk is the epitome of the rural American poor, proud and respectable, with qualities that would have made him an "excellent man for President of the United States" (p. 162), a possibility that cannot be seriously considered, however, despite the American ideal of equal opportunity. But this honest, hard-working man cheerfully watches his wife and children grow ill and dies content with his lot and his fate as a result of the deluding influence of the forever "rejoicing crow" (p. 170). Even the "tantalising" sights the railroad brings past the shanty do not make Merrymusk discontented, though the travelers from a more secure life rush by "as if that part of the world were only made to fly over, and not to settle upon" (p. 163). Even though the narrator is seized by "an awful fear" (p. 171) at Merrymusk's death, the crowing of the cock finally erases all his doubts, along with his sense of realistic responsibility, and from then on he meets all circumstances with "a continual crow" (p. 172).

The implications for America seem all too clear. Myopic national optimism and canting assertions of the ideals of the American dream may so obscure the realities of the situation as to make the achievement of the dream's goals an impossibility. The tendency to base the hope for freedom, equality, and happiness on technological progress[166] may

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[165]However, the comparison of the cock to "a bugle worked by an engine" (p. 153) has earlier suggested an unwholesome mechanical quality instead of life-giving vitality.

[166]Marx, Machine, p. 192.

lead to a disregard of human values, and the uncritical celebration of American achievement may obscure and distort actual circumstances. It is a tragic indication of the failure of the American dream of equality and human dignity that the poor can feel worthwhile and poor children can gain the status of the "children of emperors and kings" (p. 171) only through a delusion that cripples both the victim and the observer's ability to gauge the reality of the circumstances. For the optimistic rapture induced by the cock's trumpeting cannot obliterate the harsh actuality of death. And it is incongruous to celebrate "the glorious victory of New Orleans" (p. 148) while the free men for and by whom the battle was fought are crushed beneath a false assumption of universal prosperity and progress.

Although Melville was probably reacting against the general spirit of overreaching optimism, the introduction of the rooster as the emblem of the Democratic Party in the early 1840's[167] could indicate a more pointed allusion.[168] At any rate, this representative

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[167]Edward C. Smith and Arnold J. Zurcher, Dictionary of American Politics, 2nd ed. (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1968), p. 326.

[168]In fairness, it should be said that the role assumed by the cock in the story might be more in keeping with typical Whig philosophy rather than Democratic ideas; see D. E. S. Maxwell, American Fiction: The Intellectual Background (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1963), pp. 143-45. But contemporary cartoons depicting politicians as cocks further suggest political implications for the story; see, for example, William Murrell, A History of American Graphic Humor (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1933), I, 172, illus. 166, which shows a cock-like politician ready to crow over his accomplishments. In Mardi, pp. 472-73, the boastful people of Vivenza (the United States) are described as "an army of spurred and crested roosters" who "chanticleered at the resplendent rising of their sun."

segment of political oratory, delivered by James Buchanan in 1852 on behalf of the Democrats certainly takes on ironic overtones when read in relation to "Cock-A-Doodle-Doo":

> And now, fellow-citizens, what a glorious party the Democratic party has ever been! Man is but the being of a summer's day, whilst principles are eternal. The generations of mortals, one after the other, rise and sink and are forgotten; but the principles of Democracy, which we have inherited from our revolutionary fathers, will endure to bless mankind throughout all generations.[169]

But the magnificent jubilant cock dies--a somber warning that parties or democracies which support the people in principle and oratory and deny them in actuality cannot endure.

America's naive optimism is also treated in "Benito Cereno" as Melville further explores America's national character and destiny. Captain Amasa Delano is often identified as a representation of the typical American or of America itself,[170] and Melville's recurrent references to the captain as "the American"[171] support this view. Delano reflects the optimistic outlook[172] and benevolent rationalism[173]

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[169] Quoted in History of American Presidential Elections, 1789-1968, ed. Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1971), II, 1001-02.

[170] For example, see Chase, pp. 158-59; Widmer, p. 82; and Max Putzel, "The Source and the Symbols of Melville's 'Benito Cereno,'" American Literature, 34 (1962), 193, 196. James Miller, Jr., Reader's Guide, p. 154, differs from the usual recent critical analyses by taking a very positive view of Delano's traits, though he does say Delano is too "naive."

[171] Herman Melville, "Benito Cereno," in Piazza Tales, pp. 60, 68, 73, etc. Hereafter cited by page number in the text of the paper.

[172] Barry Phillips, "'The Good Captain': Amasa Delano, American Idealist," Texas Studies in Literature and Language, 4 (1962), 193.

[173] Widmer, pp. 62, 76.

frequently associated with America. He also displays "republican" (p. 95) attitudes in the way he dispenses the water on the slave ship, and he shows himself to be a man of action and self-reliance as he first gives orders on the Spanish ship and later initiates its capture. In contrast, Benito Cereno and the San Dominick represent the decadent Old World of Europe.[174] The ship is compared to "superannuated Italian palaces" which preserve "signs of former state" while "under a decline of masters" (p. 57), and the decay of Cereno, involving the loss of both personal surety and command authority aboard his vessel, is accentuated by allusions to Charles V of Spain and James I of England.[175] In this sense, therefore, the story establishes a traditional confrontation between the corrupt and declining despotism of Europe and the fresh innocence of democratic America.[176]

In this confrontation, the American's "native simplicity" (p. 75) keeps him from realizing the true state of affairs on the Spanish ship. Delano's attempts to explain rationally the incongruities

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[174]See Putzel, p. 194; Fogle, Tales, pp. 128, 130; James Miller, Jr., Reader's Guide, p. 156; and Robert Forrey, "Herman Melville and the Negro Question," Mainstream, 15 (Feb. 1962), 29.

[175]H. Bruce Franklin, The Wake of the Gods: Melville's Mythology (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford Univ. Press, 1963), pp. 143-44.

[176]Chase, p. 158; see also Putzel, p. 201. Browne, p. 169, suggests that the confrontation is also between the American North (Delano) and the slave holding South (Cereno); on another level Browne, p. 257, says the story concerns the "relationship between the despotism of the Old World--symbolized by Spain--and the commercial and human despotism of the New World--epitomized in New England shipping interests and Southern slavery."

he encounters on the San Dominick are doomed because of his romantic view of the natural goodness of man[177] and of nature[178] and because of certain other prejudices. Delano's descriptions of the blacks and his reactions to them reveal the stereotyped view of blacks prevalent in nineteenth-century America.[179] For example, he ascribes the clashing of hatchets by the sentries posing as "hatchet-polishers" to "the peculiar love in negroes of uniting industry with pastime" (p. 60) and patronizingly observes how graciously blacks fill roles of servitude.[180] His occasional uneasiness concerning the actions of the blacks and his fleeting thought that they might be part of a plot against him are rejected because the blacks are obviously "too stupid" (p. 90) to be involved in such a scheme.[181] In addition his distrust of the haggard Spanish crew is reinforced by an American habit of mind that "while disconnecting pain and abashment from virtue, invariably link them

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[177]Kaplan, p. 191.

[178]See, pp. 87, 155, 139.

[179]See Seelye, Melville, p. 19; Widmer, p. 64; Joseph Schiffman, "Critical Problems in Melville's 'Benito Cereno,'" Modern Language Quarterly, 11 (1950), 322; and Sidney Kaplan, "Herman Melville and the American National Sin: The Meaning of 'Benito Cereno,'" Journal of Negro History, 42 (1957), 17-18.

Melville changed the date of his source from the nineteenth to the eighteenth century as he wrote the story. Browne, p. 169, suggests this was done to take advantage of the eighteenth century as a revolutionary era; the change also offered a better perspective on contemporary problems.

[180]For example, see pp. 62, 100.

[181]Charles I. Glicksberg, "Melville and the Negro Problem," Phylon, 11 (1950), 209; see also Richard E. Ray, "'Benito Cereno': Babo As Leader," in Studies in the Minor and Later Works of Melville, ed. Raymona E. Hull (Hartford: Transcendental Books, 1970), pp. 33-34; Forrey, p. 29; Schiffman, p. 322.

with vice" (p. 86).[182] Unable to penetrate the apparent situation and realize the mutinous condition of the ship[183]--or, in metaphysical terms, unable to discern the evil surrounding him[184]--Delano falls back on his "confidence" in the genial common-sense approach to life, dismisses his forebodings as unfounded, and concludes that since "his conscience is clean" and "there is someone above" (p. 92), all must be right with the world. Even after the deceptive situation is unmasked, Delano, who is not given to "the imputation of malign evil in man" (p. 55), never fully understands the real significance of the events on the San Dominick. It is little wonder that the American captain's own ship is named the Bachelor's Delight (p. 71), since for Melville bachelorhood was usually associated with stultifying naiveté.

While it is Delano's innocent good-naturedness that saves him in his encounter with the decadence of the San Dominick[185] (it might be noted, however, that he lays his ship open for attack by trustingly answering questions about its armaments and crew strength), the general import of the story would seem to be that America's age of innocence is drawing to a close and that if the nation expects to survive and grow in the modern age, it must be prepared to face the harsh realities

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[182]See Widmer, p. 83.

[183]Franklin, Wake of the Gods, p. 145, compares the rebellion on the San Dominick to the slave rebellion that brought Toussaint L'Ouverture to power in Santo Domingo.

[184]Phillips, p. 189, points out that part of the story's message is that life in general is mysterious and truth ambiguous, but Delano's lack of perception makes him unable to comprehend and deal with such a world or with the darker side of reality.

[185]Widmer, p. 86.

of the world which it will inevitably encounter. It might be remembered that young Cereno too had been naive, and learning too late the lesson of "the negro" (p. 140), he was destroyed by it.

One internal American evil which urgently demanded realistic consideration at the time "Benito Cereno" was written was slavery. Alexandro Aranda's attempt to combine latitude and oppression by allowing his slaves to roam the decks unshackled reveals the dangers of partial solutions to the problem. The story suggests that solutions based either on naively optimistic benevolence or dehumanizing stereotypes are doomed to failure and may lead to disaster.[186]

The pressing need for America to modify its self-righteous view of itself as a chosen land untouched and untouchable as far as the problems of the Old World of Europe are concerned is strikingly symbolized by means of the figurehead of the San Dominick. There "the image of Christopher Colon, the discoverer of the New World" (p. 129) of hope and promise has been replaced by the image of death and violence, a change symbolic of the New World's movement toward the corruption of the Old or perhaps symbolic of the historic link between the two.[187] "Benito Cereno" implies that America must realize

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[186]The reversal of authoritative roles on the Spanish ship and the reversal of the black-white, slave-master roles on the mysterious device adjacent to the ship's coat of arms (p. 58) suggest that, appearances to the contrary, the institution of slavery is becoming an enslaving and dominating force in the policy of America as a whole. Delano brings up a more specific danger when he observes that "slavery breeds ugly passions in man" (p. 105).

[187]For comments on the similarities involving corruption, slavery, and violence, see Levin, pp. 189-90; Edgar A. Dryden, Melville's Thematics of Form: The Great Art of Telling the Truth (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1968), p. 205; Julian C. Rice, "The Ship as

that its refusal to come to terms with human and historic reality represents a national blindness but cannot obscure the figurehead behind which the nation sails. The ringing of the San Dominick's "flawed bell" (p. 114), reminiscent of the dulled ring of liberty in "The Bell-Tower,"[188] is a reminder that the time for change is running out, and Atufal's punctual reappearance is a challenge to open the symbolic padlock and remove the chains of slavery—chains that signify the physical human bondage of the black and oppressed and the spiritual bondage of a nation incapacitated by a simplistically romantic view of its heritage.

Among the stories that embody political commentary on the contemporary American scene, "I and My Chimney" is perhaps the most intriguing. Because it is rich in suggestiveness, the story has been interpreted in numerous ways, some of which involve a political reading.[189] For example, the conflict between the narrator and his

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Cosmic Symbol in Moby Dick and 'Benito Cereno,'" Centennial Review, 16 (1972), 151; and Widmer, p. 87.

The relationship between the Old World and the New is also hinted at in the following statement of Delano's thoughts: "There was a difference between the idea of Don Benito's darkly pre-ordaining Captain Delano's fate, and Captain Delano's lightly arranging Don Benito's" (p. 83). America liked to feel it was free from the influences of Europe's past and that it could in some ways act as savior to the world. Delano's actions therefore bring up the question of how America is to right the world's wrongs if it cannot understand them.

[188]Nicol, p. 26.

[189]Merton M. Sealts, Jr., "Melville's Chimney, Reexamined," in Themes and Directions in American Literature: Essays in Honor of Leon Howard, eds. Ray B. Browne and Donald Pizer (Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue Univ. Studies, 1969), pp. 80-102, summarizes the most significant criticism of the story, ranging from autobiographic to various symbolic readings.

wife has been seen as an allegorical representation of the struggle between Colonial America and England[190] or as a historical depiction of the South.[191] While the other levels of meaning in the story should not be neglected, it would seem that a number of its references and events as well as its apparent utilization of the symbolic nation-house support the idea that "I and My Chimney" is at least partially devoted to an analysis of certain historical and contemporary American issues.

In the widest view, the story represents the age-old clash between conservatism and the forces of change.[192] On a more specific level, the actions of the wife can be seen as a critical representation of the various reform movements being undertaken in the United States at this time.[193] With her "alacrity for improvement, which is a softer name for destruction,"[194] she follows with perhaps more impatient enthusiasm than foresight the motto that "Whatever is, is wrong; and . . . must be altered; and . . . must be altered right away" (p. 288). In addition to her ceaseless activity and her continuous schemes for improvement or progress, the wife's preference for newness and her refusal to recognize her mortality suggest other aspects of the

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[190]Browne, p. 260.

[191]William J. Sowder, "Melville's 'I and My Chimney': A Southern Exposure," The Mississippi Quarterly, 16 (1963), 129.

[192]See Browne, p. 260.

[193]For a general discussion of reforming efforts in the North and the South, see Boorstin, pp. 43-48 and 212-14; also see Ostrander, pp. 233-43.

[194]Herman Melville, "I and My Chimney," in Prose Pieces, p. 310. Hereafter cited by page number in the text of the paper.

American spirit.[195] Part of the vitality of the American dream rested on the idea that America was somehow immune to the cycles of history (or that, as even the more practical asserted, the days of historical decline were too far off to be concerned about).[196] Americans tended to feel that they had escaped the bounds and burdens of history and like the wife in "I and My Chimney" did not "believe in old age," but felt the country was to "be inexhaustible forever" (p. 288).

The chimney's magnitude and central position in the house, which is supported by the chimney rather than the other way around, suggests that it symbolizes the Constitution of the United States or (and perhaps simultaneously) the strong central government and continuing union of the states for which this document provides. The house itself is wide rather than tall and stratified, symbolic of democratic equality, and the land around it is "dirt cheap" and plentiful, promoting the construction of "wide houses" (p. 279) just as the abundance of land, especially in the West, promoted democracy in America. The allusions to royalty used in describing the chimney suggest that in America law is the king and sovereign (p. 284).[197]

One of the primary issues considered in the story would seem to be that of states-rights, an issue that had been present since the country's birth and had lately become central to the slavery-

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[195]See Paul Deane, "Herman Melville: The Quality of Balance," The Serif, 7 (June 1970), 16; Stuart C. Woodruff, "Melville and His Chimney," PMLA, 75 (1960), 289.

[196]Baritz, pp. 94-95.

[197]For an opposing view, see Sowder, p. 132.

free soil question, both in terms of possible Southern secession and in terms of personal liberty laws passed by certain states in defiance of the Federal Fugitive Slave Act.[198] The narrator contrasts his unified house and his central chimney with its flues all "grouped together in one federated stock in the middle of the house" (p. 278) with certain disturbing tendencies in modern architecture. For example, the current movement to give each fireplace its "separate flue" results in "honeycombed" walls which are "almost anywhere, treacherously hollow, and, in consequence, more or less weak" (p. 278). Also, while in the unified house the fireplaces all face outward into the chambers surrounding the central chimney so that those who warm themselves, "though at the time they may not be thinking so, all . . . mutually look towards each other, yea, all their feet point to one centre" (p. 285),[199] in the "double" houses,[200] which are divided into two sides by a hall, the fireplaces are built so that

> while one member of the household is warming himself at a fire built into a recess of the north wall, say another member, the former's own brother, perhaps, may be holding his feet to the blaze before a hearth in the south wall--the two thus fairly sitting back to back. Is this well? (p. 277)

It is true that if the great central chimney were not so "mighty in

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[198]See Parkes, p. 341.

[199]The chimney, or central government, also offers protection to the several states and their inhabitants since by its thick smoke it reminds would-be assailants that candles and muskets may be quickly lighted in case of an emergency (p. 285).

[200]Browne, p. 261, says the double house symbolizes America in the 1850's; although Sowder, p. 132, sees the single house as representing only the South, he does identify the double house as the United States and the hall as being symbolic of the break between North and South.

its magnitude," the "chambers" surrounding it would have "been larger" (p. 285), the individual states would have had more power,[201] but it is the chimney that gives the house its strength and distinction. The house with its "mere joists and rafters" does not support the chimney; the chimney, "as a free citizen of this free land, stands upon an independent basis of its own" (p. 281)--upon the concept of natural rights supported by history and tradition. The narrator dreams of the "bygone day" when into the "gloom" of "primeval woods," "the light of heaven entered, as the masons laid the foundation-stones" (p. 283) and the American experiment brought new hope to the nation and the world.[202] And he concludes that as "the one grand permanence of this abode," "if undisturbed by innovators, then in future ages,

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[201]An approach that would add another level to the political comment in the story would be to consider the use of "chambers" as a reference to the division of legislative houses. It is interesting to note that the description of the irregular shapes of the chambers on the second floor of the house (p. 306) suggests the geographical arrangement of the original New England states.

[202]This description of the chimney along with its pyramid shape suggests that the title of this story may have a political source rather than, or in addition to, a personal one. The shape of the chimney and its role in the story suggest the uncompleted pyramid on the back of the Great Seal of the United States. Made of thirteen layers of stone to represent the original states, the pyramid stands for "strength and duration--the building for the future of the Union." And above the pyramid, in a triangle surrounded by a burst of light, is a great eye--the "'All-seeing Eye' of God or Providence, indicating that 'the spiritual is above the material.'" Given the nature of the chimney's function in the story and the fact that Melville elsewhere used the pun of "I" and "eye" (there is an example in Pierre, for instance), it does not seem completely improbable that Melville may have had this symbolic seal in mind when naming the story. For the information on the Great Seal, see Maymie R. Krythe, What So Proudly We Hail: All About Our American Flag, Monuments and Symbols (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), p. 29.

when all the house shall have crumbled from it, this chimney will still survive--a Bunker Hill monument" (p. 294). The concept of government based on law and freedom, the foundation of the American dream,[203] can be the nation's lasting legacy to history.

In the narrator's efforts to preserve the chimney, he faces a severe challenge from the schemes of his wife, whose plans for altering or removing the chimney fail to take into account either architectural reality or the chimney's distinctive contribution to the house. It might be possible to suggest political and historical parallels for the wife's particular renovative plans; for example, her plan to remove the chimney from the first floor, and thus create a division between stories, could be compared to the establishment of the boundary between free and slave territory as a result of the Missouri Compromise;[204] her "modified project" (p. 291) of tunneling through the chimney, "carefully avoiding dangerous contact with the fireplaces, and particularly steering clear of the great interior flue" (p. 292), could be likened to the Compromise of 1850; and her final plan to "abolish the chimney" (p. 294) would suggest the dissolution of the Union. But at any rate it is clear that her projects threaten the stability of the house and the nature as well as the existence of the great chimney.[205]

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[203]A deep respect for fundamental law, which provided the basis for the written Constitution, was always an important feature of American democracy; see Gabriel, pp. 14-19, on this point.

[204]Sowder, p. 137, suggests that the repairs on the chimney parallel the Missouri Compromise.

[205]Following a historical interpretation, the wife's obviously impossible plan to let the chimney "rest on the second floor" (p. 287)

The wife is assisted in her schemes by Mr. Scribe, "a master mason" (pp. 294-95) whose name and whose efforts to reduce the magnitude and mystery of the chimney to practical terms is a reminder that in the United States the Constitution is interpreted by the judiciary, and Scribe's insistence that there may be a secret closet in the chimney could refer to the unspecified powers in the Constitution.[206] However, Scribe's profit-motivated participation in the wife's reckless schemes and his susceptibility to a bribe reveal the same failings of the law as those depicted in "The Two Temples" and "The Bell-Tower." Melville may also have intended a criticism of the popular election of judges when he has the narrator observe that the hardly impartial Scribe was "elected" by the wife (p. 309).

The question of minority rights is continually in focus throughout the story as the narrator, supported only by his belief in the chimney, with his position protected by the chimney's imposing size, faces the combined opposition of his wife, daughters, and neighbors.

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after its foundation is razed suggests both that the Northern states cannot survive and maintain the national principles if the South secedes and that the nation cannot endure if the principles of liberty are not upheld throughout the national "house." In a similar vein, the wife's efforts to grow flowers on "the north side of the house" (p. 290) is not only representative of determined American optimism (see Sealts, "Chimney," p. 86), but also implies that the North may not be totally self-sufficient (perhaps especially in terms of agricultural output).

[206]For a different interpretation of Scribe's activity and an interesting view of the meaning of the story, see Dorothee Metlitsky Finkelstein, Melville's Orienda, Yale Publications in American Studies, No. 5 (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1961), pp. 141-43.

It has been suggested that both the wife and narrator hold extreme positions--the one too eager to dismantle tradition, the other too slow to change--and that the best approach would be a median position.[207] The story seems to bear out the suggestion that it is the spirit of the wife that keeps the "old man" from "stagnating" (p. 290). It appears likely that Melville is opposing not change, but irresponsible change, and recognizing that if the nation as well as the dream is to survive, its "backbone" (p. 294) must remain intact. The narrator is determined that "I and my chimney will never surrender" (p. 311), but it is ominous that the daughters take after their mother, and the narrator has to give up all expectations of his own in order to spend all his effort "in unequal resistance of the undue encroachment" (p. 289) of the wife's ambitious schemes, not to mention the anarchic ones of the "meddlesome architectural reformer, who, because he had no gift for putting up anything, was ever intent upon pulling down" (pp. 310-11).

Several of Melville's other short stories have been given political interpretations. For example Ray B. Browne believes "The Happy Failure" deals with the American "political situation during the 1850's." Browne sees the old inventor as a typical Yankee, committed to the ideas of progress and American opportunity. According to Browne, the old man's faltering invention is the American

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[207]Marie A. Campbell, "A Quiet Crusade: Melville's Tales of the Fifties," in Studies in the Minor and Later Works of Melville, ed. Raymona E. Hull (Hartford: Transcendental Books, 1970), p. 11.

system of political organization and the nephew's hope that a "section" of it can be saved[208] reflects a desire to save the North despite the dissolution of the Federal Union.[209] Browne's interpretation and the old man's advice that his nephew "never try to invent anything but--happiness" (p. 218) bring to mind Carlyle's observation that nineteenth-century man seemed to believe that all political and social problems could be solved and happiness secured if only the right mechanisms (systems or institutions) could be found.[210] Browne sees the failure of the old man, symbolic of the inadequacy of America's past philosophy, as making possible a promising and peaceful future in which the former slaves, represented by Yorpy, will be incorporated into a free society.[211] This optimistic reading is somewhat qualified, however, by the nephew's realization that his once enterprising uncle now follows "the universal drift of the mass of humanity toward utter oblivion" (p. 218).[212]

In "Jimmy Rose," the conflict between the conservative narrator and his progressive household is similar to the domestic struggle in

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[208]Herman Melville, "The Happy Failure," in Prose Pieces, p. 217. Hereafter cited by page number in the text of the paper.

[209]Browne, pp. 237-38.

[210]Thomas Carlyle, "Signs of the Times," in Critical and Miscellaneous Essays, Vol. VII of Collected Works, Library ed. (London: Chapman and Hall, 1869), pp. 324-26.

[211]Browne, p. 240.

[212]It might also be noted that in this story, as in others discussed previously, the machine is an enslaving force, sucking up the independence and vitality of human life (see especially p. 218, with respect to the "shrivelled" expression of the uncle).

"I and My Chimney." Here American life is depicted as becoming increasingly commercialized and materialistic. And there have been attempts to link Jimmy Rose and the old house to specific national issues. For example, one critic suggests that the decay which divides the room of the peacocks into a northern and a southern side represents the decay of nineteenth-century America.[213]

The most common interpretations of "The Lightning-Rod Man" are that the story has a religious theme[214] or that it is Melville's response to modern science.[215] However, it is also possible to identify the lightning rod salesman with any extreme political opportunist or fanatic who seeks to exploit man's fears of tumultuous situations.[216] The thunderstorm represents a "time of terror"[217]

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[213]Browne, p. 243. Also see Ralph M. Tutt, "'Jimmy Rose'--Melville's Displaced Noble," Emerson Society Quarterly, No. 33 (1963), 28-32, which relates Jimmy's plight to the nature of American society; and see Marvin Fisher, "Melville's 'Jimmy Rose': Truly Risen?" in Studies in Short Fiction, 4 (1966), 3-5, 7, which, while presenting a primarily religious interpretation of the story, also mentions the political and social significance of Jimmy Rose, his house, and the narrator's attitude.

[214]See Levin, p. 188; Hershel Parker, "Melville's Salesman Story," Studies in Short Fiction, 1 (1964), 154-58 (also includes a brief account of earlier interpretations); Hillway, Melville, p. 50; and Browne, pp. 229-37.

[215]Deane, "Quality of Balance," pp. 14-15.

[216]The fact that Benjamin Franklin was famous in the mid-nineteenth century as the man who was responsible for protecting homes "from the lightning of heaven" (see Miles, p. 124) and the fact that his grandson Benjamin Franklin Bache, who was embroiled in political controversy, was nicknamed "Lightning Rod Junior" (see Miles, p. 120) allow further speculation about the story's political significance. Also see Bernard Fay, The Two Franklins: Fathers of American Democracy (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1933).

[217]Herman Melville, "The Lightning-Rod Man," in Piazza Tales, p. 143. Hereafter cited by page number in the text of the paper.

in which man's uncertainties make him prey to immoderate influences, and the description of the Lightning-rod man as Jupiter Tonans suggests that he may be creating the storm as well as profiting from it.[218] Certainly his frantic attitude serves to intensify the anxious situation, and despite the narrator's sane reaction to his visitor's exhortations, "the Lightning-rod man still dwells in the land; still travels in storm-time, and drives a brave trade with the fears of man" (p. 148), promoting distrust instead of community spirit and insisting that the only safe spot in this "danger-time" (p. 147) is his "own one stand-point" (p. 145).

The Confidence-Man (1857)

In The Confidence-Man Melville returns to the ship-microcosm device for a disturbing overall look at the contemporary American scene.[219] Emblematic of the melting-pot diversity of democratic

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[218]Since the lightning rod salesman is referred to both as "Jupiter Tonans" and as "the Thunderer" (p. 142), it is interesting to note that these names, especially in the latter form, were associated with the London Times beginning in the early 1840's. The term was popularized by writers such as Carlyle and seems to have originated in descriptions of the impassioned editorial comments by Edward Sterling. See "The Thunderer" in Eric Partridge, A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English, 7th ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1970); also see "The Thunderer" in the Making, 1785-1841, Vol. I of The History of The Times (New York: Macmillan, 1935), pp. 393-95. At the end of the story, the Lightning-rod man does threaten to "publish" the narrator's "infidel notions" (p. 148, italics added). Parker, "Salesman Story," p. 157, points out that allusions to Jupiter Tonans were also used in accounts of political activities appearing in American newspapers.

[219]For examples of those viewing the novel as a criticism or analysis of America, see Chase, pp. 185-86; Mason, p. 204; Perry Miller, p. 338; Lebowitz, p. 6; Walter Dubler, "Theme and Structure in Melville's The Confidence Man," American Literature, 33 (1961), 307-10, 318-19; Elizabeth S. Foster, ed., "Introduction," The Confidence-Man: His

America, the Fidèle carries passengers of various nationalities, occupations, and social standings.[220] As it hurries down the Mississippi, the central commercial artery of the developing nation, the steamship is swept along by a "cosmopolitan and confident tide" (p. 6) representative of the optimistic faith in progress and success widely proclaimed in mid-nineteenth-century America. The novel is a complex one and can be read on several levels, but the distinctive nationalistic setting cannot be overlooked; and if the final implications of the book seem to be directed at mankind in general as well as Americans in particular, it may be because America--as "an Anacharsis Cloots congress of all kinds of that multiform pilgrim species, man" (p. 6), which saw itself and was seen by many in Europe as a redeeming new start for humanity--was also the last New World on which man could base his hopes for improvement in the human condition.[221]

This analysis of American civilization is set along the central divider between the civilized and settled East and the Western frontier.

Masquerade, by Herman Melville (New York: Hendricks House, Inc., 1954), pp. xvi-xvii; Nathalia Wright, "The Confidence Men of Melville and Cooper: an American Indictment," American Quarterly, 4 (1952), 266-68; R. W. B. Lewis, ed., "Afterword," The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade, by Herman Melville (New York: The New American Library, 1964), pp. 261-76; and Marius Bewley, The Eccentric Design: Form in the Classic American Novel (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1959), p. 191.

[220]See Herman Melville, The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade, ed. Hershel Parker (New York: Norton, 1971), p. 6. Hereafter cited by page number in the text of the paper.

[221]Baritz, pp. 330-31; see also James Miller, Jr., Reader's Guide, p. 241.

The setting is significant not only in certain specific episodes but in the general development of the novel. The West was traditionally considered the stronghold of democracy, and Melville had earlier associated the West with the best hopes of the fulfillment of the American dream.[222] In a basic sense this novel represents the introduction of a sophisticated and commercial Eastern spirit into an open and honest West.[223] Whether "West" is taken to mean the western United States or the United States as opposed to the East of the Old World of Europe, the concept of the progressive movement of certain forces of civilization remains basically the same.[224]

Arriving "from the East" (p. 1), the Confidence Man reveals the true nature and dilemma of nineteenth-century America in two ways. In his interaction with the other passengers, he exposes the greed and blind optimism that have developed out of the American belief in inevitable progress--identified in large part with material success--and individualism. He also calls attention to a loss of faith in mankind and in the orderly and reasonable nature of the world that is directly threatening the democratic stability of the nation. The two treatments of confidence overlap, though the second is probably more obvious in the last half of the novel.[225]

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[222]For example, in Israel Potter, p. 198; see Chase, p. 98.

[223]Daniel G. Hoffman, Form and Fable in American Fiction (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1961), p. 295, associates the Confidence Man with the American East.

[224]See Baritz, p. 95, for a discussion of the popular conception of the American West as a rejection of the civilized East of America or Europe.

[225]Among those who see the novel as divided into two parts,

The danger of Americans' overconfidence in national growth and prosperity and their belief in the abundant chances for economic success available to the individual[226] is perhaps most clearly illustrated by the ease with which the Confidence Man finds gullible new stockholders for the Black Rapids Coal Company. The sophomore's refusal to invest in the New Jerusalem (this could be taken as a reference to America as well as in a more strictly religious sense) demonstrates the possible consequences of the self-interest of laissez-faire economics since the youth is declining to invest in the human community. Other references throughout the book comment upon the ruthless commercialism of the day.[227] The Puritan's belief in the prosperity of the elect has been perverted into a competitive "selfishness" (p. 147)[228] in which each man elects himself and tries to eliminate the other.

The "Wall Street spirit" (p. 35) even pervades charitable humanitarian endeavors, and the man in gray's proposal to organize a "World's Charity" (p. 33) reflects the popular idea, fundamentally based on an optimistic perception of the perfectibility of social and political institutions, that any problem could be solved with the

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one satirizing too much trust and the other a cynical lack of trust, are Howard, p. 228; and Foster, p. xvi.

[226]See Taylor, p. 13.

[227]See, for example, "The Story of China Aster," ch. 40; note especially, pp. 183, 189.

[228]Kaul, pp. 20-21, notes that the "sense of mission" present in the Puritan settlement of America gave way with the rise of "economic individualism" and that this situation set up a continuing conflict in American attitudes.

correct organization. From this point of view, it seemed reasonable that a charitable "confederation might . . . be attended with as happy results as politically attended that of the states" (p. 32). The "charity business" has also produced the "Protean easy-chair," an invention that in "almost" proposing to supersede heaven by offering relief for the "most tormented conscience" (p. 33), demonstrates confidence in the ability of modern science[229]--and especially the machine--to solve all problems. This kind of extended optimism is harshly rejected by the realistic western "Titan in homespun" (p. 72), who denies that any medicine can cure all pain. It is, of course, misplaced optimism as well as greed that permits the success of the Confidence Man, just as the false optimism of Captain Delano and of the narrator of "Cock-A-Doodle-Doo!" prevents them from seeing impending dangers or recognizing evils they do not want to face.

Two results of this tendency to accept surface appearances over harsher realities are a weakened sense of morality and an inability to deal effectively with serious problems because they go unacknowledged. The satiric portrait of the "good" man who keeps his hands clean by letting his "negro" deal with the "dirt" one inevitably encounters in the "soot-streaked" (p. 30) world is an indictment of the superficial values of modern America. The herb-doctor's bland statement that he would not oppose the abolition of slavery as long as no one else minded--supposing, of course, that such suffering exists at all--is an example

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[229]See Dubler, p. 312.

of the "moderate" (p. 97) American's paralyzing desire to overlook disruptive influences and concur in the safety of majority opinion. And the "soldier of fortune" (p. 79) finds that the squalor of his true story and the aspersions it casts on the American ideal of justice must be suppressed in favor of the exploits of "Happy Tom" (p. 83), hero of Buena Vista, who is proud of his contribution to the glorious history of his country--for most people refuse to believe the dismal truth.

This excessive materialistic national optimism is counterpoised by an underlying loss of confidence that threatens to erode the basic climate of security upon which democracy rests.[230] The endurance of American democracy is dependent not only upon the degree to which the political system is able to translate into practice ideal democratic principles but also upon the extent to which a belief in the moral discernment and possible moral improvement of man[231] and in a rational and orderly natural world enables men to cope with the rapid change that characterizes a free and open society.[232]

The soldier of fortune, formerly "a great patriot" (p. 81), expresses a profound lack of confidence in the government of "free Ameriky" (p. 84), which subverts the concept of equal justice by showing favoritism toward the rich and influential. Other directly

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[230]See Barbu, pp. 5, 22, for example.

[231]See Kaul, p. 34, and Ostrander, pp. 208, 219, with respect to the importance of the idea of the moral improvement of the individual to nineteenth-century Americans.

[232]Barbu, pp. 13-14, 20-22.

political comments in the novel suggest that the supposed nation of free men is becoming one of commercial slaves and that even the "Presidency" (p. 97) is for sale. Also at issue in modern America are the legitimacy of the free press and the ability of the democratic majority to speak with "the voice of truth" (p. 142).

The lack of confidence in the political institutions of the nation, which is of course in contrast to the general public espousals of confidence--now being voiced by the Confidence Man, is matched by a lack of confidence in the world of nature. This lack of confidence in nature is specifically revealed, for example, as the herb-doctor converses with the invalid passenger and with Pitch, the Missouri bachelor,[233] and the divers opinions expressed suggest that it may be impossible to discern the truth about the workings of the natural universe. If nature is irrational as Pitch suggests or if its true quality is undiscernible, how can man's efforts at rational organization possibly succeed and upon what fundamentals can he base his beliefs and actions? This uncertainty shakes the psychological foundation of democracy.[234] Whatever may be said about the involuted meanings or morality of John Moredock's Indian-hating, at least Moredock and the backwoodsmen, who led American civilization through the wilderness

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[233]Foster, pp. lix-lxi, identifies the object of satire in the sections dealing with the herb-doctor as nonrealistic views of nature.

[234]See Barbu, p. 20.

as Moses led the Hebrews "in the Exodus" (p. 126), had a definite view of nature--the Indian being part of the natural wilderness of the frontier[235]--upon which to found their philosophy.

The question of confidence in man in general also comes up in Pitch's discussions with the herb-doctor and in his dealings with the representative of the Philosophical Intelligence Office.[236] Having given up the prospect of finding an honest, diligent boy to work for him, Pitch has resolved to find a machine that can serve his needs instead. Echoing the current faith in the limitless possibilities of the machine, Pitch carries the doctrine to a seemingly absurd extent--suggesting machines might deserve to "go to heaven" (p. 100), but the underlying idea, that in comparison with modern mechanical perfection the fallible human being must take second place, focuses on a dilemma posed by the machine age. Pitch explains the avalanche of "new inventions" as a reaction to the basic lack of trustworthiness in the working man now acknowledged by "all thinking minds" (p. 100). By seeking moral perfection in machines and denying the moral improvement of men, Pitch is displaying a lack of confidence in man that denies the basic democratic faith in humanity. The logical fallacies in the arguments used by the man with the brass plate (and the fact that he is apparently undeserving of confidence) serve to further call into question the worthiness of man, and considering the

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[235]See Baritz, p. 100.

[236]Foster, pp. lxiii-lxiv, identifies the P. I. O. agent with the philosophy of trust in man and notes that the "doctrines of progress and perfectibility" and the "validity of human reason" are called into question at this point in the novel.

outcome of the discussion, the P.I.O. agent's self-serving appeal to "confidence in human reason" (p. 107) can be taken as a challenge to the rational basis of democracy.[237]

In addition to exposing a general mistrust of man, the Confidence Man's endeavors also reveal the extent to which excessive emphasis on individual self-reliance is disrupting democratic fraternity. This aspect of the loss of confidence is brought out in the discussions of friendship between Charles Noble and the cosmopolitan, Frank Goodman, and between Goodman and Egbert. Translating into practical terms Mark Winsome's transcendental ideas on friendship (Winsome and Egbert are often loosely identified as Emerson and Thoreau respectively), Egbert establishes a utilitarian view of friendship that makes a heartlessly sharp distinction between business friends and social friends--or, reminiscent of the dichotomy found in Plinlimmon's pamphlet in Pierre, between "terrestrial" and "celestial" (p. 174) friends. The stories of Charlemont and China Aster and the intellectual duel that takes place between Egbert and Goodman[238] illustrate the decline of democratic fraternity and the resulting isolation of the individual. Egbert indicates how the doctrine of self-reliance may have encouraged the breakdown of fraternal feelings when he reaffirms the American belief, based on the idea that the national prosperity

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[237]See Barbu, pp. 19-22.

[238]For these episodes, see chs. 34, 40, and 38-41, respectively.

was universally available to the deserving, that "there is something wrong about the man who wants help" (p. 177).

The loss of confidence in government, in nature and reason, and in human nature and fraternity is accompanied by a loss of spiritual faith which is seen throughout the book but is perhaps most evident in the opening and closing chapters. In the opening chapter the lamb-like mute can be seen as a Christ-figure,[239] thus representing a different kind of Eastern spirit from that of the Confidence Man;[240] and the opposition to his appeal to charity, signified by the "No Trust" (p. 3) of the barber and the hostile attitude of the crowd, can be seen as a reminder that though it began as a Christian nation and still professes to be one, the true spirit of Christianity has been expelled from America.[241] In the final chapter a satanic boy--a

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[239]For three different views of the mute, see Foster, pp. xlviii, li; Hoffman, pp. 294-95; and Dryden, p. 161.

[240]It is also interesting to remember that in America the idea of the West had been Christianized through association with the concept of the new promised land or the earthly kingdom of God; see Bartiz, p. 93.

[241]See Browne, pp. 308, 311; Barbu, p. 65, observes that one of the most significant "weaknesses of modern democracy" is "the conflict between Christian ethics and the individualistic ethics of competition" since this conflict suggests an upsetting of the balance between absolute and empirical values that is needed in a democracy.

Although "In God We Trust" did not begin to appear on American coins until after April 22, 1864, the idea suggested by that motto was commonly accepted before and during the 1850's (see Krythe, pp. 33-38), and the first chapter of The Confidence-Man might be seen as an ironic comment upon the real depth of America's trust in God. The great popular faith in the American experiment as expressed by Dr. Richard Price, a friend of Benjamin Franklin, also serves as an ironic comment on this chapter and on the relation of Christianity and America seen throughout the novel:

> Perhaps I do not go too far, when I say that, next

miniature confidence man who is both the victim[242] and victimizer of society--represents the product of a civilization that has lost its faith.[243] A belief in both the transcendental side of life and in "an immanent order of life established by human reason" has traditionally been considered a basic necessity in a democracy, and it has been said that "the democratic man possesses the strongest system of security; faith in God and faith in man."[244] But in the America depicted in The Confidence-Man, there is faith in neither God nor man. The lack of such basic confidence results in isolation and fear (as seen in the old miser, for example), which are contrary to the sense of security and openness necessary for the survival of democracy.[245] The serene old man who appears in the last chapter of the book[246] expressing faith in the Creator and therefore in his

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to the introduction of Christianity among mankind, the American Revolution may prove the most important step in the progressive course of human improvement. (quoted in Literary History, p. 197)

The comment in James Miller, Jr., Reader's Guide, p. 180, that the novel demonstrates that Christ's doctrine of charity will not work in the practical world has some support in The Confidence-Man, but it might be noted that Christ did not promise that the charitable would get rich quick.

[242]Foster, p. lxxxvi.

[243]Franklin, Wake of the Gods, p. 157, suggests that the boy's coat is the remains of the once cream-colored coat of the mute. The boy peddler would also seem to have some affinity with the concept of the wise-fool.

[244]Barbu, p. 257.

[245]Barbu, pp. 5, 13, 63, 92.

[246]Foster, p. lxxxvi, says he represents the best of men in general; Dubler, p. 318, suggests the old man represents America's past and the boy represents its present; Chase, p. 205, says that on one level the old man can be associated with Uncle Sam.

creatures is at last led away into darkness in frightened and doddering uncertainty, having transferred his trust in man to a Counterfeit Detector and a money-belt and his trust that God will safely bring the microcosmic ship and its community of passengers to port to a selfish reliance on a ludicrous "life-preserver" (p. 216).

The Confidence-Man thus examines two ways in which confidence is a threat to the realization of the ideals of the American dream. The danger comes from too much shallow confidence or optimism concerning the inevitable greatness and material success of the nation and too little confidence in those things on which democratic security is fundamentally based. America has entered an age of superficial geniality:[247]

> . . . we golden boys, the moderns have geniality everywhere. . . . We have genial senators, genial authors, genial lecturers, genial doctors, genial clergymen, genial surgeons. . . . (p. 153)

And the future holds the horrifying prospect of "genial hangmen" (p. 153) and "a new kind of monster," the "genial misanthrope" (p. 154), who, with his determined surface gaiety covering the darkness of extreme and dehumanizing mistrust, will embody the final decay of the substance of America. If the severe loss of confidence continues, it seems clear that the genial smile will be covering something quite different from the ideals of democracy with which the American experiment began.

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[247] See Merton M. Sealts, Jr., "Melville's 'Geniality,'" in Essays in American and English Literature Presented to Bruce Robert McElderry, Jr., ed. Max F. Schulz, William D. Templeman, and Charles R. Metzger (Athens: Ohio Univ. Press, 1967), pp. 3-26, for a discussion of Melville's use of the word and concept of "geniality" in The Confidence-Man and elsewhere.

An Overview

Thus from Mardi to The Confidence-Man Melville's analysis of American democracy ranges from optimistic praise of the American dream to severe criticism of the American reality which is turning its back on the precepts of the dream. He is especially disturbed that many Americans are being denied true freedom and equality and dignity because the country's increasingly rigid materialistic social order is lacking in human concern or because the nation's excessive optimistic faith in its destiny blinds it to social injustices. He is also disturbed by the effect the developing technology and industry seem to be having on the quality of life for the individual. In addition, contemporary issues such as the growing division between North and South and the slavery question are also considered. But regardless of the severity of his criticism of America as it is, Melville never rejects the essence of the American dream or ceases to hold it up as an ideal.

CHAPTER VI

POLITICAL STABILITY AND THE RIGHTS OF MAN, A FINAL VIEW: BILLY BUDD, SAILOR

Thirty years after The Confidence-Man, Melville produced his final fictive comment on politics. In Billy Budd, Sailor (1891) he uses the ship microcosm to probe once more the conflict between individual freedom and social stability that runs throughout his works. But while the earlier ship societies of White-Jacket and Moby-Dick examined this conflict with regard to symbolic rulers who acted from essentially selfish, though very differently motivated, causes, Billy Budd analyzes the effect of benevolent authoritarianism on the lives of ordinary men. The political order represented by the Bellipotent can be generally likened to an enlightened despotism;[1] the welfare of the sailors, "the people," is considered, but supreme importance is given to the maintenance of order, or to the stability of the state. However, the political dilemma is couched in such basic terms that the situation on the Bellipotent has a strong resemblance to any political system that ranks strict social and political stability above individual freedom, whether that system be a regressive liberal democracy or what is sometimes called a totalitarian democracy.[2] In one sense, Vere's

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[1] See John G. Gagliardo, Englightened Despotism (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1967), pp. 92-96.

[2] For a brief definition of the terms "liberal democracy" and "totalitarian democracy," see Talmon, pp. 1-3. In terms of American democracy, the novel has been variously interpreted as a warning to

extreme reliance on rationalism as the means by which to preserve the "ordered forms" that control the ship's crew is also suggestive of the excessively rational basis of communist ideology.[3]

Billy Budd is set in 1797, a time of political confrontation and upheaval. The rise of radical democracy in revolutionary France and the subsequent clash between the new French republic and the traditional monarchies of continental Europe and England seemed to many to represent a crucial stage in the world's political development. Incidents such as the Spithead and Nore mutinies that struck the English fleet while England was vulnerable to attack by the French emphasized the confrontation between the ideal of personal freedom and the concept of political order that characterized the era. Reacting to political tendencies he saw developing near the end of his own century, Melville used this significant historical perspective to examine the broad issue of the conflict between the individual with his natural rights and the larger society with its need for general stability--an issue both contemporary and enduring.

The clash between inherent human rights and the demands of an ordered society is brought out in two ways in Billy Budd. The Rights-of-Man and the Bellipotent symbolize the two sides of the issue, just as

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America of dangerous national trends--see Wayne Charles Miller, pp. 47-48; Charles A. Reich, "The Tragedy of Justice in Billy Budd," Yale Review, 56 (1967), 389; and Karl E. Zink, "Herman Melville and the Forms--Irony and Social Criticism in Billy Budd," Accent, 12 (Summer 1952), 131-33; as a despairing view of the decay of American democracy--see Bercovitch, pp. 226-28; or as a shining tribute to American ideals--see Browne, p. 393.

[3]See Barbu, pp. 6, 89, 145, 235-38.

the Bellipotent's conflict with the Athée suggests the parallel contrast between democratic freedom (and the excesses to which it may lead) and the rigid conventionalized order represented by H.M.S. Bellipotent.[4] The issue is most fully examined, however, on the decks of the Bellipotent itself as the warship world is confronted by the innocence of Billy Budd. In this novel, as elsewhere in Melville's writings, natural human rights are oppressed less by established governmental creeds than by abuses of these regulations. And the specific tragic incidents of Billy Budd occur mainly because Captain Vere assumes an authority in excess of what the legal forms prescribe.

Vere's abrupt decision that "the angel must hang"[5] is followed by careful maneuvers to insure that his judgment concerning the necessary course of action will be carried out. It is true that under the Articles of War Billy's act is punishable by death, but such punishment was

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[4]Browne, pp. 378-79, says that "on a strictly political level Billy Budd is a search for the best form of government--autocratic versus democratic" and points out that the conflict could be seen as an enactment of the contrasting views of Hobbes and Rousseau or as a presentation of Burke's and Paine's contrary views on the French Revolution; Jon M. Kinnamon, "Billy Budd: Political Philosophies in a Sea of Thought," Arizona Quarterly, 26 (1970), 166-71, also describes the conflict between the Rights-of-Man and the Bellipotent in terms of the contrasting ideas of Rousseau and Hobbes and notes that the Bellipotent reflects Burke's belief in the importance of stable institutions; John B. Noone, Jr., "Billy Budd: Two Concepts of Nature," American Literature, 29 (1957), 249-62, also discusses the novel in terms of the ideas of Rousseau and Hobbes.

[5]Herman Melville, Billy Budd, Sailor (An Inside Narrative), eds. Harrison Hayford and Merton M. Sealts, Jr. (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1962), p. 101. Hereafter cited by page number in the text of the paper.

supposed to be inflicted only after a general courtmartial had been called by "the commander of a detachment, a squadron, or a fleet."[6] And though naval tradition ultimately allowed a captain to do almost anything he regarded as necessary to the preservation of his command,[7] this same naval latitude would also have allowed for leniency in Billy's case.[8] The drumhead court the captain convenes is sanctioned only by usage, and the speed and secrecy with which the court is established and the rapidity with which the execution is carried out are contrary even to this.[9] The court itself seems more of a formality used to give some semblance of authority to the excessive steps Vere is taking than a true tribunal, though the captain is said to have preferred to avoid the "perils" of taking sole "moral responsibility" (p. 104) for the decision that is soon to be made. In his selection of the members of the court, Vere also "perhaps deviated from general custom" (p. 104); and, in fact, he selects men whom, though of good general reputation, he knows he can lead to concur in his decision that Billy must die. Vere dominates the court's proceedings, instructing the deliberating officers to concern themselves only with the "consequence" of Billy's

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[6] C. B. Ives, "Billy Budd and the Articles of War," American Literature, 34 (1962), 33.

[7] Ives, pp. 33-34; Browne, p. 385, links this situation to Burke and Paine's argument over whether an unwritten constitution, like England's, could fully protect men's rights.

[8] Ives, p. 34. Carl A. Bredahl, Jr., Melville's Angles of Vision, University of Florida Monographs, Humanities No. 37 (Gainesville: Univ. of Florida Press, 1972), p. 69, points out the unnecessary absolutism of Vere's attitude.

[9] Ives, pp. 35-36.

act, not with "motive" or "provocation" (p. 107), and insisting that reason, not emotion, must guide their decision. When the court proves hesitant in reaching a verdict, Vere convinces its members that they must subordinate their natural or conscientious scruples to their duty as "the King's officers" (p. 110) and forcefully suggests the breakdown in discipline that could result if Billy is not summarily executed. By keeping the issue on a simplistic plane--"We must . . . condemn or let go" (p. 112)--and by focusing on the possible mutinous consequences of a lenient decision, Vere forces the court to agree with his "prejudgment" (p. 108) of the case.

Such a response to Billy's action might have been expected from a man with Vere's character and intellectual background. Somewhat isolated socially because of his serious turn of mind and his inclination toward pedantry, Vere has devoted much time to reading and speculation. As a result, he has developed certain unshakable ideas concerning the importance of maintaining conventional forms. Deprived of the "social converse" that might have encouraged some flexibility in his outlook, Vere has "found confirmation of his own more reserved thoughts" in "books treating of . . . history, biography, and unconventional writers like Montaigne" (p. 62). His "settled convictions [are] as a dike against those invading waters of novel opinion social, political, and otherwise, which carried away as in a torrent no few minds" (p. 62) in the unsettled days when revolutionary uprisings were challenging the traditional modes of life. Just as Vere "disinterestedly" opposes the revolutionaries because their philosophy seems "insusceptible of embodiment in lasting institutions" and at odds with peaceful existence and

with what he believes to be "the true welfare of mankind" (p. 63), he objectively decides that the innocent Billy must die to preserve order on the Bellipotent.[10]

But though Vere reveals a personal abuse of forms in dealing with Billy, his basic intention of preserving order even at the expense of the innocent individual reflects the priorities of the regularized society represented by the Bellipotent. The generally repressive nature of that system is clearly evident in its effect on the lives of the ship's crew. Existing under a system of discipline that rigidly subordinates the rights of the individual to the stability of the overall society, the men of the Bellipotent have lost their independent initiative. They have been reduced to a dehumanized mass, whose reactions--mechanical and preconditioned--are deftly controlled by those in authority.[11]

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[10]Vere's manipulation of Billy's case so that the sailor is really condemned not for Claggart's murder but because in Vere's mind his execution has become necessary to the maintenance of consistency and order is similar to the way a totalitarian society "objectively" creates crimes and criminals to help insure the system's progress toward its ideological goals; see Arendt, p. 473.

Arendt, pp. 298-99 notes that "the crimes again human rights, which have become a specialty of totalitarian regimes, can always be justified by the pretext that right is equivalent to being good or useful for the whole in distinction to its parts" and that these crimes are the result of "a conception of law which identifies what is right with the notion of what is good for--for the individual, or the family, or the people, or the largest number." Describing the general status of the rights of man in the modern world, Arendt, pp. 267-302, observes that with the growth of nationalism the rights of man are proving to be less universal rights than rights dependent on national recognition of a person. Thus anyone outside the system, as Billy is, has no "rights."

A striking real-life parallel to Billy's situation is the case of Alfred Dreyfus, which began three years after Melville's death, in which the idea of the rights of man also came into conflict with the belief that the individual should be sacrificed for the benefit of the state; see Douglas Johnson, France and the Dreyfus Affair (New York: Walker, 1966), pp. 218-19.

[11]Barbu, p. 246, notes that depersonalization is the main process

The degree to which strict routine reinforced by "arbitrary discipline" (p. 112) can be effectively used to control men and destroy their ability to take original, decisive action[12] is clearly demonstrated by the crew's response to the announce of Billy's sentence and to his execution. After Vere informs the crew of Billy's fate, "a confused murmur [goes] up," but "instantly, then, at a sign, it [is] pierced and suppressed by shrill whistles" (p. 117) and the men obediently turn to the routine business of the ship. Similarly, directly after Billy's execution and again after his burial in the sea, the mass of sailors gathered to witness the events demonstrate a marked uneasiness over what has taken place, but in each case the crew's instinctive but inarticulate[13] display is quickly controlled by the use of a "mechanism of discipline" (p. 126) to which the sailors have long been conditioned.[14] When the "drum beat to quarters" has dispersed the crew after Billy's burial, the narrator observes that "true martial

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of a communist society, just as individualization is the main process of a democratic one.

[12]This inability to act is a characteristic result of totalitarianism, and in many ways the political order of the Bellipotent resembles "popular totalitarianism," which is characterized by a diffused and rather willingly accepted repression. Such a society often grows out of a "mass society" in which men tend to take a passive and accepting view of the extension of government control. The citizen in a popular totalitarian state believes he is acting spontaneously, but in reality, as is the case at Billy's trial, "both governed and governers [are] caught in the same silken web of oversimplified alternatives." The above information is taken from Moore, pp. 80, 86.

[13]The crew's inarticulateness hampers their ability to act effectively, just as Billy's speech defect hampers his.

[14]Zink, pp. 134-36; John W. Rathbun, "Billy Budd and the Limits of Perception," Nineteenth-Century Fiction, 20 (1965), 20-21, discusses the way "usage" on the Bellipotent has led to an almost mechanical obedience.

discipline long continued superinduces in average man a sort of impulse whose operation at the official word of command much resembles in its promptitude the effect of instinct" (p. 127). In a sense, then, the instinctive morality upon which the rights of man are theoretically based is being replaced by a conditioned instinctive respect for authority. As a result, the decision of what is best for the average man is no longer determined by his private conscience or even by the concurrence of a democratic majority, but is the sole responsibility of Captain Vere, who believes that "with mankind . . . forms, measured forms, are everything" (p. 128).[15] The self-perpetuating and widespread effect of this pattern of discipline is strikingly revealed when Vere, arguing against clemency for Billy, reminds the members of the drumhead court that even if their "official position" would allow them to explain the mitigating circumstances to the crew, "they, long molded by arbitrary discipline, have not that kind of intelligent responsiveness that might qualify them to comprehend and discriminate" (p. 112).[16] In effect, the officers must do what they have conditioned "the people" (p. 112) to expect them to do in such a situation. Obviously, under such a system true freedom at all levels ceases to exist.

Following his usual pattern, Melville judges the political system represented by the Bellipotent in terms of its effect on the men involved

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[15]Vere's strictly rational approach to the dilemma posed by Billy's crime and his belief that the mass of men must be firmly organized and led by a dominant few link him to the communist movement, which was gaining strength in the second half of the nineteenth century; see Barbu, pp. 177-78.

[16]It must of course be remembered that this is only Vere's assessment of the crew's probable response.

in it, especially the average man. The emphasis on social stability and the use of repetitive mechanical discipline to maintain this stability seem both to deprive men of their true freedom of thought and action and to encourage a general trend toward human "mediocrity."[17] Billy Budd, who on one level represents the truly innocent and good man, must be destroyed because his exceptional nature makes him a threat to a society based on sameness.[18] And though Claggart, the evil antithesis of Billy's goodness, is protected by the ship's society while he adheres to its outward forms,[19] the fact that at the end of the novel he too no longer exists may imply that such a society can assimilate the extremes of neither good nor evil.[20]

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[17]Wendell Glick, "Expediency and Absolute Morality in Billy Budd," PMLA, 68 (1953), 107; Glick, p. 107, notes that the crewmen who do retain some individuality, such as the Dansker, typically retreat into cynicism.

[18]See Harold Beaver, ed., "Introduction," Billy Budd, Sailor and Other Stories, by Herman Melville (Baltimore: Penguin, 1967), p. 41; Kinnamon, p. 169, notes that Billy's virtue "places his conduct above that which the law is designed to govern." This situation could also be related to the democratic process of "leveling."

[19]Zink, p. 139.

[20]Rathburn, p. 27, suggests that the novel shows that the conventional world can understand neither true innocence nor "satanism"; Hannah Arendt, On Revolution (New York: The Viking Press, 1963), pp. 77-83, says that through Billy Budd Melville explored the implications of the concept of the natural goodness of man that was espoused by the leaders of the French Revolution and concluded that natural innocence would be at least as violent a force in society as evil; it is interesting to consider Claggart's nature in view of the description of totalitarianism (Arendt, Totalitarianism, p. 459) as a "radical evil" that is difficult for Western culture to understand because "absolute evil" cannot be explained by traditional motives such as self-interest.

The anguish which accompanies Vere's assumption of total responsibility for the fate of his officers and crew is also examined by Melville. But any positive benefits that might be found in Vere's authoritarian role in the ship society are negated by his death. He is killed by the anarchical forces he had fought to destroy, and the repeated comparison between Vere and Nelson and the reference to Nile and Trafalgar that occurs in the description of Vere's death are a reminder that just as Nelson's death placed command in inadequate hands and led to the destruction of the fleet, Vere leaves behind no one of equal stature to govern the Bellipotent.[21] Even if one assumes that Vere's vision of right was better than that of other men, Vere had reduced his "people" to a mechanical, reflexive mass. His will had directed them; his death left a void which men made virtually incapable of independent thought or action could scarcely fill.

It would seem then that there is little to support the view that the Bellipotent represents Melville's vision of the most suitable political order for man.[22] Billy's graceful acquiescence in his death sentence and the blessing he bestows on Vere are sometimes seen in a positive light.[23] But Billy's actions frighteningly resemble those of political prisoners in totalitarian states, who willingly agree to sham confessions of guilt even though such confessions lead to sentences of

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[21]Stern, Fine Hammered Steel, p. 209, comments on this point.

[22]For an example of this view, see Glick, pp. 104, 110; and Carpenter, pp. 80, 82.

[23]For example, see Watters, "Melville's 'Sociality,'" pp. 48-49.

death. Billy's terror of the corporal punishments used on the Bellipotent, his status as an alien in the warship world (the official news account of the affair uses this word to describe Billy), along with his reverence for Vere and his need for acceptance create the same psychological atmosphere that leads men under totalitarian systems cheerfully to allow themselves to be sacrificed--like Billy--for the good of the state.[24] And while Melville does not endorse the excesses of the French revolution any more than he approves of the rigidity found on the Bellipotent, he does suggest that passivity may be more dangerous than rebellion; for while on one level Billy is the harmless victim of a repressive system, on another level he too is guilty. In the open society on the Rights-of-Man it was easy for Billy to achieve leadership, but qualities that were admired on the free-spirited commercial vessel became a handicap in the harsher reality of the warship world. Like Delano in "Benito Cereno," Billy Budd was too innocent, and his incapacity to save himself is a further degradation of the Bellipotent's society.[25] Melville seems to suggest that if those who have been privileged to enjoy the rights of man will not or cannot defend those rights in the face of oppressive circumstances or maintain them in the rigors of war, Billy's farewell to the rights of man may become a permanent one for all.

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[24]See Arendt, Totalitarianism, pp. 381-82; 381, n. 103; 382, n. 104; also see pp. 472-73. Widmer, p. 27, comments that "rather than being not of this world, Billy Budd is a pathetic case of over-conformity to it."

[25]See Bernstein, p. 211; James E. Miller, Jr., Reader's Guide, p. 241, suggests that Billy's fate showed the danger of America's innocence.

At the end of the novel the benevolent leader is dead, and the rights of the individual have been suppressed by a preoccupation with order and form. The zealous effort to maintain the status quo has led to a mediocre society in which men are unable to think or act for themselves. Billy's shipmates are left with a lingering adoration for the Handsome Sailor, now perfected in death, but they never question the authority that took his life. And how with their blunted wills are they ever to discover the truth when the official version of Billy's crime and death describes not the situation as it really occurred, but the only reality an inflexible society dares to face—one that vindicates its own values. Finally, Melville broadens the implication of his "inside narrative" by suggesting through the false newspaper account and the sailor's equally misleading though well-intended ballad[26] the universal difficulty of knowing the truth and the slavery that attends ignorance or denial of it.[27]

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[26]See Dryden, p. 215; and Zink, p. 138. Rathbun, p. 34, also notes distortions in the ballad.

[27]Leyda, II, 647, records a comment Melville wrote on the front cover of Germany by Madame De Staël (purchased March 4, 1862); the comment offers insight into the underlying meaning of Billy Budd:

> "It is not French": said Napoleon's Minister of Police, and suppressed this book.--There it is. The Minister said but the truth, &, from his point of view, the suppression was just.--
>
> "You are modernising the laws and are dangerous to the young" said the judges to Socrates. They said the truth, & from their point of view, were just in condemning him.--
>
> What then?
>
> Why, as a self-constituted agent for the conservation of useful persuasions,--I suppress the inference.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

Throughout his writing career--from Typee to Billy Budd--Melville persistently examined various methods of political organization, searching always for the best form of government possible to man. He scrutinized the traditional system of monarchy, analyzed and criticized American democracy, and in the ship societies of Moby-Dick and Billy Budd examined other forms political states might take in the modern world.

In his study of political systems, Melville typically employed a questioning, critical outlook, and in this respect his political viewpoint was more consistent than is sometimes realized. For example, it is frequently asserted that on the issue of American democracy he moved from unquestioning praise in his early works to a deep despair in the later ones. It is true that the early novels, particularly though White-Jacket,[1] tend occasionally to slip into exuberant national lyricism. But the critical perspective was present from the first, beginning, in a general sense, with the criticism of Western civilization in Typee and strongly in evidence in the Vivenza section of Mardi. It has been mentioned previously that some of the apparent inconsistencies in Melville's attitude can be explained as a reaction to the contemporary acceptance of America as a great political experiment whose direction

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[1]This same tendency is found in Moby-Dick, but there the focus of such passages tends to be more universalized, as in the famous passage that praises God as "the centre and circumference of all democracy" (p. 104).

could still be changed by thoughtful criticism. And it should be noted that if Melville's view of the current state of American affairs became more negative in his later works, he always judged the realities of the American scene in terms of the nation's ideal aspirations. He never rejected the American dream; he objected to America's failure to live up to its basic principles. James E. Miller, Jr., has said that Melville had "a lover's quarrel with America: he would not have bothered to scold had he not so intensely cared."[2] Melville's ambivalent attitude toward his native country was probably much the same as that expressed by his friend Hawthorne when he said, "I love America, but do not like it."[3]

Melville's ability to distinguish between patriotism and blind nationalism enabled him to take a rather open-minded look at various political systems. This open-minded analysis was encouraged by the idea that America was an uncompleted political experiment. Because of this the patriot need not feel obligated to defend America's status quo and in fact was stimulated to consider the relative merits of different political alternatives as well as the possible outcome of America's political evolution. Hershel Parker has observed that on political issues both Melville and his brother Gansevoort had "the ability to express convincingly ideas in which they did not always 'believe'--the ability to play with the implications of various approaches to a

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[2]James Miller, Jr., Reader's Guide, p. 241.

[3]Letter to Longfellow, quoted in Lawrence Sargent Hall, Hawthorne: Critic of Society, Yale Studies in English, No. 99 (1944; rpt. Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1966), p. 71.

question."[4] This skill, which Parker suggests may have been the result of early debating experience,[5] allowed Melville to examine effectively the varied characteristics of the different governmental forms considered in his fiction. For example, in Mardi he presents positive and negative attributes of both monarchy and democracy, and in Billy Budd he depicts the dual aspects of the book's political dilemma so vividly that readers have become divided over which side of the issue the author himself endorsed. But regardless of what political system he was considering, Melville's basis of judgment was consistently the general ideals associated with the American dream. He tested each system according to its effect on the average man, condemning any that did not recognize the basic equality of men, protect the rights and insure the dignity of each man, and allow freedom for individual thought and action and growth. This is not to say that he was convinced that American democracy could uphold these values. He realized that tyranny could exist under the guise of democracy if it would but

> [wear] a hat like the rest of us, and [be] careful to put on that same humble deference toward the People, which all kings and emperors scrupulously profess for Him Whom--with exemplary meekness ignoring themselves--they officialy denominate the Supreme Arbiter of Events.[6]

And the repression found on the Pequod and the Bellipotent suggested pitfalls to which America as well as other nations might succumb. But for Melville the fundamental ideals of the American dream represented the conditions to be sought in a political state.

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[4]Parker, "Gansevoort," p. 145.

[5]Parker, "Gansevoort," p. 146.

[6]Herman Melville, "The Cincinnati," in Prose Pieces, p. 380.

Melville's search for the best political system--like his search for metaphysical truth, like Taji's search for Yillah--led to no definite answers. The final solution to man's political needs is not established in Melville's fiction. In one sense, as Nathalia Wright has said, Melville was "no nearer saying what he had to say at the end than he was at the beginning."[7] But this is because he refused to accept easy or partial answers. And though the form of the best political state was not determined by Melville, its characteristics were made clear: it must reconcile order and freedom while insuring the individual integrity promoted by the American dream. And if his search did not reach its goal, at least it was courageously pursued and the difficult or unpleasant questions not avoided. Perhaps in the end it is the questions that are most important; as Eleanor Metcalf has said, "Unborn generations will be fired by [Melville's] spectral meanings to ask the age-old questions that, having no final answer, yet lead toward wisdom."[8] Leon Seltzer relates the honesty of Melville's world view to his technique as a novelist:

> [he] felt that [his] aim . . . should not be to set up a problem and then fashion an artistically coherent solution for it, but rather to work doggedly with some resistant question and in so doing suggest its ramifications. Even if in the end [he was] obliged to leave the question open, [he] might yet define it with new vividness and force. Matters that could not be neatly resolved might still be satisfactorily explored through a created world designed to accommodate their truest and most unrelenting complexity.[9]

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[7]Wright, Melville's Use of the Bible, p. 173.

[8]Eleanor Melville Metcalf, Herman Melville: Cycle and Epicycle (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1953), p. 295.

[9]Seltzer, pp. 62-63.

Melville's fiction clearly shows that he was aware of the complexities that make the realization of a just political order difficult, but he did not suggest that men should reconcile themselves to partial solutions in the political realm any more than he suggested they should stop seeking the truth about the nature of the universe. The answers might not be at hand, but it was part of the human condition that the search must go on. The importance of the search for the best political system was unintentionally summed up by the cook in Moby-Dick, who declared, "All angel is not'ing more dan de shark well goberned" (p. 251).

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