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I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Reinhold James Dooley entitled "Herman Melville's Short Fiction: Ideology and the American Confidence Game." I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and 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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HERMAN MELVILLE'S SHORT FICTION:

IDEOLOGY AND

THE AMERICAN CONFIDENCE GAME

A Dissertation

Presented for the

Doctor of Philosophy

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Reinhold James Dooley

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ABSTRACT

Melville's short fiction of the 1850s constitutes a critique of a dominant American Ideology which was responsible for the demise of the American Dream. Melville registered his disappointment with and criticism of America's failed promise through subversive means: rather than attack outright, Melville put into practice within his texts as the form of his presentation that which he criticized, ideology. Through the ironic narrators of three tales, "The Two Temples," "The 'Gees," and "Benito Cereno," Melville reveals a confidence game of ideology. Each narrator embodies, in Marx's words, a "false consciousness," or in Althuserrian terms, a "lived relation to the real" which bolsters confidence in America's innocent self-image while it justifies and perpetuates an exploitative social order and one's place in it.

"The Two Temples," through the controlling metaphor of "acting," reveals how the narrator uses an ideologically-induced role of "democratic pilgrim" to delude himself to his elitist aspirations. As an actor within his own text, the narrator enacts the ideology of the dominant class and thus perpetuates the mindset

which facilitates aristocratic pretension under the guise of democracy and Christian communion.

"The 'Gees" centers around an ironic motif of eyes and sight and accordingly reveals how ideology functions as a camera obscura to distort the "real" economic relations which undergird American society. Under the guise of an innocent sketch about a "peculiar people," the narrator reveals the ideological maneuvering which passes off economic exploitation as legitimate capitalism.

The more far-ranging "Benito Cereno," reveals through the eyes and thought of Delano, that ideology is a multi-layered confidence game which deceives on all levels of reality. In particular, Delano's ideology bolsters his confidence in his lived relation to both the historical and linguistic representation of the world. Because of this confidence he remains deceived to the fluidity of meanings--represented through images of fixity and flux--aboard the San Dominick. Delano is thus blind to the flux of reality which in the tale is historically represented by the subversive slave revolt and linguistically by what poststructuralists have shown to be the straying, indeterminacy of language.

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ABBREVIATIONS

BC	"Benito Cereno" (1856)
B	"Bartleby, the Scrivener" (1853)
BT	"The Bell-Tower" (1855)
CDD	"Cock-A-Doodle-Doo!" (1853)
G	"The 'Gees" (1856)
HF	"The Happy Failure" (1854)
IC	"I and My Chimney" (1856)
JR	"Jimmy Rose" (1855)
LRM	"The Lightning-Rod Man" (1856)
PBTM	"Paradise of Bachelors and Tartarus of Maids" (1855)
RMPRMC	"Poor Man's Pudding and Rich Man's Crumbs" (1854)
P	"The Piazza" (1856)
TT	"The Two Temples" (submitted in 1854 but not published in Melville's lifetime)

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Recounting Melville's early life as a sailor and young writer, H. Bruce Franklin states,

> If Herman Melville had not fallen from a petty bourgeois family into the working class, if he had not labored in the most oppressive conditions inflicted on white workers in the mid-nineteenth century, and if he had not rebelled against these conditions with the crimes of desertion and mutiny [during his South Sea voyages], he might still have been an artist. But he would not be the artist we know as Herman Melville, an artist whose creative imagination was forged in the furnace of his labor and oppression, an artist who saw the world of nineteenth-century American society and its commercial empire through the eyes of its victims.[1]

Franklin's comment is particularly appropriate to the short fiction Melville began writing between the years of 1852 and 1856. With the failures of Moby Dick and Pierre, Melville felt completely rejected by his American public. He had financially failed as a writer in a capitalist society. From his oppressed and depressed vantage point he could now see all the more clearly the disparity between the South Sea cultures to which he was keenly attuned and his own "Promised Land"

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[1]H. Bruce Franklin, The Victim and Criminal and Artist: Literature from the American Prison (New York, Oxford University Press, 1978), 34.

of the United States, which had failed to live up to its promise not only for him, but for numerous other fellow Americans. Because of his peculiar perspective, Melville was released from the dominant ideas and mindset of his culture. Thus, he was not only better able to sympathize with the downtrodden, more importantly, he was better able to perceive the cause of their plight.

In Going Under, Marvin Fisher has shown that Melville's short fiction is a critique of the failure of the American Dream, that ideal vision of liberty and equality, individualism and community, opportunity and financial success, uniquely associated with the North American continent.[2] His title articulates both the technique and content of Melville's fiction. Melville went underground to criticize the "going under" of the American Dream. I will argue, however, that Melville goes even deeper than Fisher has noted. Not only does Melville criticize his society and its various manifested shortcomings, he criticizes a particular type of self-justifying mindset which precluded remedying these shortcomings. He was not critical simply of what his fellow Americans were doing, he criticized how they

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[2]Marvin Fisher, Going Under: Melville's Short Fiction and the American 1850s (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977).

were thinking. Ultimately Melville observed that the relations which constituted American society were actually a grandiose albeit unconventional "confidence game," a self-feeding delusion in which the participants deceived themselves about their own characters, about their society, and about the nature of the very "reality" which they "created" and inhabited.

It was significantly a confidence game in which the players were unaware of their self-deception. Instead, their consciousness was limited to the confidence that this self-deception engendered. They were thus able to view themselves as "innocent" Americans all the while they pursued the exploitative practices which subverted the very American Dream they espoused.

Melville reveals this variation of the confidence game--often in subtle fashion--through the ironic bachelor narrators he employs so frequently in the tales and sketches.[3] By adopting the perspective and the very mindset of these characters, Melville puts into practice the self-deluding process described above. This process we would today label "ideology."

From the outset, however, it is essential to note that my study is not itself an ideological analysis of

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[3]R. Bruce Bickley, Jr., The Method of Melville's Short Fiction (Durham: Duke University Press, 1975).

Herman Melville or of his work. It does not examine the ideological components which enter into the formal making of Melville's literature nor does it examine how Melville's literature participates in history as an ideological artifact.[4] Rather, I examine how Melville's work takes as its very subject matter that nebulous concept which has been termed "ideology" (and which I will shortly define). My approach, then, is ultimately a traditional one, although, in addition to historical analysis and the close readings associated with New Criticism, I take advantage of newer tools of critical explication ranging from Marxist literary perspectives to deconstructive and other post-structuralist methodologies.

My thesis is two-fold. First, I argue that in his short fiction of the 1850s Melville sharply criticized

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[4]Several studies have incorporated such analysis, including, Michael Paul Rogin, Subversive Genealogy: The Politics and Art of Herman Melville (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1983); Stephen Zelnick, "Melville's 'Bartleby, The Scrivener': A Study in History, Ideology, and Literature," Marxist Perspectives, 2 (1979-80), 74-90; Sandra Zagarell, "Reenvisioning America: Melville's 'Benito Cereno,'" Emerson Society Quarterly 30 (1984), 245-259; and in Sacvan Bercovitch and Myra Jehlen (eds.), Ideology and Classic American Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) the following articles: Paul Royster, "Melville's Economy of Language"; Emory Elliott, "Art, Religion, and the Problem of Authority in Pierre"; James H. Kavanagh, "That Hive of Subtlety: 'Benito Cereno' and the Liberal Hero"; Donald E. Pease, "Melville and Cultural Persuasion."

the socio-economic practices which were leading to degrading conditions for so many Americans in mid-nineteenth-century America. Melville's tales emphasize that the American Dream of liberty, equality, community, and opportunity was not being manifested in the United States. Secondly, and this constitutes my overriding argument, Melville registered his disappointment with and criticism of America's failed promise through a subversive means: rather than attack outright, Melville put into practice within his texts that which he criticized: ideology. In the short fiction it is ideology and the blindness that it engenders which fosters the Dream's demise. Melville recognized what in essence constitutes an unconscious ideological confidence game which was allowing the American Dream, in the words of Marvin Fisher, "to go under."

Before proceeding any further, however, it is best at this point to address the elusive term "ideology" and define how it will be employed in this study.

Ideology is a term whose meaning is much disputed. One scholar noted as early as 1969 that the rising popularity in the term's use has only been matched by its increasing obscurity of meaning.[5] The intervening

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[5]Giovanni Sartori, "Politics, Ideology, and Belief Systems," American Political Science Review 63 (1969), 398.

years and growth of ideological studies have merely exacerbated the problem of defining ideology. Even the briefest history of the term suggests the convoluted turns it has taken in its etymological journey.

The word was coined in Paris in 1796 by Destutt de Tracy as part of the program of the French Revolution's Institut de France. As an outgrowth of Enlightenment idealism, the word "ideology" "stood for a kind of psychology whose purpose was to reform thought and language on the basis of sensation and experience."[6] The ultimate result would be the reform of society itself. However, the free thinking of the "ideologues" eventually opposed directly the reactionary programs of the Napoleonic regime. Napoleon's subsequent abuse of the ideologues soon resulted in a deprecatory use of the word.

Appropriating the term, Marx and Engels completed this turnabout of meaning. Kenneth Minogue states:

> Instead of using ["ideology"] to describe a cure, they used it to describe the very disease it was supposed to cure. . . . "Ideological thinking" for Destutt de Tracy meant scientific thinking about confusions, while ideological thinking in Marx and Engels

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[6]Kenneth Minogue, "Bacon and Locke: Ideology as Mental Hygiene" in Anthony Parel (ed.), Ideology, Philosophy and Politics (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1983), 180.

> is thought riddled with those very confusions.[7]

The term "ideology" has since been used in both the positive sociological as well as pejorative senses and has undergone manifold mutations even among Marxist camps, which have been most often associated with the term. Various definitions have been offered by almost every scholar who has purported to discuss ideology since Marx and Engels, including such central figures as Lenin, Mannheim, Weber, and Althusser.

"Ideological literary criticism" has now appropriated the word, but unfortunately it fails to provide any real consensus about the term's meaning. Sacvan Bercovitch and Myra Jehlen in Ideology and Classic American Literature, their book dedicated to the concept, admit that no normative use has been arrived at by scholars.[8] For the purposes of this study then, I propose a hybrid definition, but one which is fundamentally based on the original Marxist definition. However, since the meaning of Marx's own definition is much debated, I offer up what is in one scholar's words, a "tolerable Marxist conception." Like this scholar, I

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[7]Minogue, 180.

[8]Bercovitch and Jehlen, 1-18, 418-42.

am "less concerned with the legitimacy of its Marxist pedigree than with its adequacy as a conceptualization of ideology."[9]

Marx and Engels offer meager evidence for assessing the precise definition of ideology.[10] However, a locus of such a definition can be found in Engel's phrase "false consciousness." The meaning of ideology hinted at in this phrase has four essential components as lucidly described by Gordon Graham, whom I will quote at length:

> Firstly, ideology is a certain sort of thought process, by which we arrive at our moral beliefs and concepts. Secondly, this process is intrinsically defective; it operates with an inadequate criterion of truth. Thirdly, the man who engages in ideological thinking is unaware of the motives which lead him to think in the way he does.

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[9]Kai Nielson, "A Marxist Conception of Ideology," in Anthony Parel (ed.), Ideology, 139. The problematic nature of Marx's own definition of "ideology" is suggested by Arne Naess, Democracy, Ideology, and Objectivity: Studies in the Semantics and Cognitive Analysis of Ideological Controversy (Oslo: Oslo University Press, 1956), 160, in his seminal work on ideology, states quite hesitantly that "one might venture to put forward an attempt to give a descriptive definition of "ideology' as this term is used by Marx in Die Deutsche Ideologie."

[10]For the sake of brevity I will refer only to Marx, even though Engels too contributed to the Marxist concept of ideology.

To these three components, Graham later adds the fourth, that ideology is always, according to Marx, in the interest of the ruling class--the bourgeoisie. In the following quotation, Graham explains how the process functions:

> If we think that an existing state of affairs is a necessary fact of human life, this precludes our taking steps to alter it; and the widespread acceptance of such a belief will serve the interests of those for whom the present state of affairs is advantageous, by inducing a quietistic attitude on the part of those to whom it is not. For example, if we believe that the feudal order is a natural, God-given order, then it is both pointless and wrong to seek its overthrow. The general acceptance of this belief is, therefore, in the interest of the land-owning class, which is dominant in feudal society. Consequently, so too is the inculcation of that belief, and in this way, on Marx's view, we may explain widespread political support for medieval Christendom.
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> Now Marx believed that the ruling ideas (those beliefs most widely held in a society at a given time) will always take this form, since they are the ideas of the ruling class which controls not only the means of material production but of mental production also. In short, ideological beliefs will always describe those states of affairs and prescribe those courses of action which are in the interests of the ruling class, in such a way that they appear to be unalterable facts of logic or nature.[11]

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[11]Gordon Graham, Politics in Its Place: A Study of Six Ideologies (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 31, 37.

Ideology is constituted of "beliefs, ideas, concepts, categories, propositions, forms of consciousness, theories, systems, attitudes, norms, and practices."[12] However, rather than emphasizing a systematized doctrine of ideas or theories as such, my definition focuses on "forms of consciousness," the "false consciousness" mentioned by Engels.

Furthermore, my emphasis is on the "dominant" form of consciousness which constitutes ideology. This dominant ideology is that form of consciousness which is perceived as the ruling or prevailing ideology of a given society and which is constantly being challenged, defended, and revised by alternative and oppositional perspectives. It is this dominant ideology, or the "American Ideology" which Melville critiques. Moreover, his critique is made possible only because he possesses an "emergent" ideology; that is, he possesses a new perspective or form of consciousness which challenges the residual dominant ideology.

The dominant ideology can thus be defined as pre-articulated thought or a preconscious mindset which creates and lives a reality parallel to that of the world of material relations. As Althusser indicates, in his extrapolation of Marx, ideology represents a lived

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[12]Nielson, 140.

imaginary relationship to the relations of production and serves to perpetuate them.[13] This imaginary relationship is, according to James Kavanagh,

> supported less by ideas than by preconscious images that "show" the subject a self-evident version of the social world and his or her place in it. "A society," Karl Mannheim says, "is possible in the last analysis because the individuals in it carry around in their heads some sort of picture of that society." To which Althusserian theory would add with some elaboration, "and of one's self."[14]

The image of self and society is acquired unconsciously through socialization. It is accepted without question by its subjects as a cultural given, a norm, as common sense, (i.e., that which is self-evidently obvious). But its real effect is to mystify the subjects' understanding of society and their place in it; it distorts their self-images and conceptions of how they ought to live and relate to each other.[15] Ideology thus tends to create a closed system of ideas (it promotes an inability to seek out discomforting evidence). The net effect is that the surrounding

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[13]Louis Althusser, "Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatuses," Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays, trans. Ben Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1971), 123-173.

[14]Kavanagh, 353.

[15]Nielson, 140.

culture and its material evidence come to function as "seeming mirrors to the self, in which the self can (mis)recognize itself, social reality and its place within that reality."[16]

Ideology thus seeks out and gives "itself the evidence with which to feel and live its ruthlessness as 'innocence.'" The end result is that ideology "sets an imaginary relation to the world in which one can 'feel' comfortable and innocent even while one is actively working to reproduce repressive social relations."[17]

Finally, I would note that despite my own "negative" definition of the concept of ideology, the term is not exclusively employed in such fashion. Ideology need not be defined as illegitimate and justificatory. Max Weber, for example, taking the perspective of the middle class (versus Marx's proletariat perspective), viewed the American capitalist ideology in positive terms.

> Whereas Marx had denounced ideology as mainly an apologia for the existing social system, Weber described it, in The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, as the positive

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[16]Terry Lovell, Pictures of Reality: Aesthetic, Politics, Pleasure (Tonbridge, Kent: British Film Institute, 1980), 40-41.

[17]Kavanagh, 357.

> force that had enabled and inspired the emergence of a new system."[18]

Nonetheless, the hybrid Marxist concept outlined above serves as the best definition for my purposes precisely because it is negative. For this definition of ideology has not been arbitrarily chosen nor is it a function of my own ideological (dogmatic or doctrinal) persuasion; rather, it derives from and serves as the best approximation of what may be found displayed in Melville's short fiction. It is thus simply a contemporary reconstruction of the ideological cognitive processes which Melville embodied in the narrators of his tales.

Like Marx, Melville's perspective is, as Franklin has suggested, that of the working class; therefore, he views the dominant ideology as purely justificatory and apologetic, as a means of deluding the laboring masses into quiescence and allowing the ruling class the self-serving delusion of an innocent self-image. Because Melville could separate himself from his civilization as illustrated in Typee and Omoo, and because he could sympathize with the downtrodden victims of that civilization as displayed in Redburn and White-Jacket, he was

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[18]Myra Jehlen, in Bercovitch and Jehlen (eds.), Ideology and Classic American Literature, 11.

ultimately able to transcend the dominant ideology of his society and to challenge it with his own emergent ideology.

The dominant ideology which Melville attacks I have labelled the "American Ideology." While this ideology is a preconsious mindset, it finds its expression in explicit ideas and practices which inform the tales to be analyzed later. Fundamentally these ideas, and subsequent practices, derive first from the American Dream and, second, from the physical continent of North America itself.

For example, liberty and self-reliance, basic elements of the American Dream, partially compose the American Ideology; however, as operative values of the Dream they are metamorphosed into excuses for aggressive, exploitative capitalism and for elitism and the establishment of economically-based hierarchies. Thus, the Dream's ideal values of egalitarianism and equal opportunity are negated.

The perception of the United States as an ostensibly "new" and "pristine" (i. e. "vacant") continent gave rise to another central component of the ideology, one which viewed the nation as providentially priviliged. The effect of this "favored" status set forth by the ideology resulted in an American

superiority complex expressed as chauvinism (in relation to a perceived "corrupt" Old World) and racism (in relation to the perceived "inferiority" of the darker races). These, then, are two of the broad, simplified components of the dominant American Ideology which, in the short fiction of the 1850s, Melville took as both his form of presentation and as the object of his criticism.

In the following chapters I will examine Herman Melville's "The Two Temples," "The 'Gees," and "Benito Cereno" and will present significant, and perhaps to some minds, radically departures from traditional readings of these texts. Each of the tales deals in its own way with ideology. In each case an ironic narrator embodies a "false consciousness" of which he is unaware; he puts into practice a system of beliefs about the self, the world, and one's relation to it which justifies the status quo.

Chapter 2 will set the stage for subsequent analysis of the dominant American Ideology as it is embodied and reflected in the various tales and sketches. It reveals that Melville's abiding criticism dealt with the failure of the American Dream, and precisely with the socio-economic practices which were

responsible for the degrading conditions forced upon a large portion of the American population.

Chapters 3 and 4 deal with the two parts of Melville's diptych "The Two Temples" and provide a thorough analysis of Melville's critique of the American Ideology. My reading reverses the prevailing normative interpretation of the tale by viewing the narrator not as sympathetic, but rather as one of Melville's many ironic narrators. This tale, through the controlling metaphor of "acting," reveals how the narrator assumes the ideologically-induced role of "democratic pilgrim" to delude himself to his elitist aspirations. As an actor within his own text, the narrator enacts the ideology of the dominant class and thus perpetuates the mindset which facilitates aristocratic pretension under the guise of democracy and Christian communion.

Melville's little known sketch "The 'Gees" is the subject of Chapter 5. Chronologically "The 'Gees" is one of Melville's latest pieces of short fiction, following "Benito Cereno" by almost three years. Because "The 'Gees" lacks the richness and scope of "Benito Cereno," it is less complicated to explicate its ideological implications; hence it precedes "Benito Cereno" within my analysis.

Only one critic, Carolyn Karcher, has written at any length about "The 'Gees." Taking her discussion as a starting point, my analysis proceeds in significantly new directions. I show that the sketch takes ideology as its primary emphasis. It appropriately centers around an ironic motif of eyes and sight and accordingly reveals how the dominant ideology functions as a camera obscura to distort the "real" economic relations which undergird American society. Under the guise of an innocent sketch about a "peculiar people," the narrator reveals the ideological maneuvering which passes off economic exploitation as legitimate capitalism.

Chapters 6 and 7 examine "Benito Cereno." Chapter 6 summarizes how two other studies, Sandra Zagarell's "Reenvisioning America: Melville's 'Benito Cereno'" and James H. Kavanagh's "'Benito Cereno' and the Liberal Hero," have successfully interpreted "Benito Cereno" in ideological terms. Kavanagh argues that the very subject of "Benito Cereno" is ideology itself, while both critics suggest that Delano's ideology speaks to the issues of slavery and racial oppression in general.

My study of ideology in Melville's fiction culminates in Chapter 7. Here I broaden the scope of Kavanagh and Zagarell to present a radically new reading of "Benito Cereno." Since ideology is a fundamental

component of all human cognition, it thus inundates all aspects of human affairs.[19] Therefore, in light of post-structuralist philosophical and linguistic criticism, I explore the implications of Delano's ideology in terms of history, metaphysics, and language itself. My analysis reveals that Delano's ideology constitutes a multi-layered confidence game which deceives him not only to the realm of history, as Kavanagh and Zagarell suggest, but to all aspects of reality. In particular, his ideology bolsters his confidence in his lived relation to both the historical and linguistic representation of the world. Because of this confidence he remains deceived to the fluidity of meanings aboard the San Dominick. (I take the images of fixity and flux which pervade the tale to be of central importance). Delano is thus blind to the flux of reality which in the tale is historically represented by the subversive slave revolt and linguistically by what the poststructuralists have shown to be the straying, indeterminacy of language.

Chapter 8 serves to formally conclude my study of Melville's short fiction.

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[19]Althusser, 123-173.

CHAPTER 2

FAILURE OF THE DREAM

Melville's concern with transcendent philosophical and metaphysical issues has been so well established as to become a given in Melvillean scholarship. Melville's concern for social issues, and particularly for socio-economic issues--those issues which accompany the day-to-day experience of living and getting a living in a material world--needs considerably more substantiation, if only because Melville's technique was oftentimes oblique and elusive in regard to these themes.

Until a few recent studies on "Benito Cereno," Marvin Fisher's Going Under was the only substantial work to place the tales in their cultural milieu. This chapter therefore examines Melville's criticism of American society and the socio-economic practices that were fostering degrading conditions for numerous Americans. It also provides the historical context which grounds these tales. Finally, in preparation for the chapters to follow, it intimates the presence in some of the tales not discussed at length later of what is ultimately Melville's overriding concern, the self-deluding thought-process or mindset--since labelled ideology--which was preventing the American Dream from

coming to pass. The chapter thus lays the foundation for examining the dominant ideology as it is embodied in the narrators and narratives of "The Two Temples," "The 'Gees," and "Benito Cereno."

In The Birth of Modern America: 1820-1850, Douglas T. Miller re-christens the Jacksonian Age as the Age of Innovation. He states that during this era "innovations affected almost all aspects of American society." By the end of the period in 1850, it became evident that

> life would no longer be simple, self-sufficient, rural, agrarian, decentralized, Anglo-Saxon, and Protestant. Both buoyant optimism and anxious uncertainties were generated as the country became more industrial, urban, centralized and stratified, but less homogeneous and communal. Rationalism was giving way to romanticism, self-sufficiency to capitalism, craftsmanship to mass production, sail to steam, European involvement to isolationist expansionism, deferential politics to demagogic democracy, traditional society to modern America. It was, in short, an Age of Innovation.[1]

Melville's fiction, coming at the height of antebellum innovation, addresses the fundamental issue of change itself as well as the major historical innovations which were undermining the Dream. Melville's tales thus focus on the new technology and

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[1]Douglas T. Miller, The Birth of Modern America: 1820-1850 (New York: Pegasus, 1970), 172.

new forms of economic organization, and their social ramifications, particularly in relation to class structure.

Change seems to be the fundamental undercurrent of all the tales. Most of the first-person narratives are told by complacent and conservative bachelors or by staid, domesticated family men, all of whom are trying to preserve the status quo. In "I and My Chimney" and "Jimmy Rose" in particular, the narrators display great recalcitrance to change with which the reader cannot help but sympathize. The narrator of "I and My Chimney" spends the entire tale staving off the indiscriminate attempts by his wife and her cohort Scribe to "modernize" their home. Significantly, this "progressive" modernization is in the form of razing the stately chimney with which the narrator equates his very being.

Interpreted as a political allegory, the tale is a commentary on the changing American society at mid-century. Hiram Scribe, whose interest in the chimney is purely pecuniary and whose very name implies that he is "for hire," represents the worst aspects of the changing economic system. The narrator's wife carries even more symbolic weight. According to one critic, "the wife's shortcomings parallel those of Melville's America; her

immaturity, her refusal to heed or revere the past, and her rejection of death itself are implicit chastisement of the transcendental idealism that characterizes America's disdain of history and the typically American unwillingness to accept empirical realities."[2] Here, as in almost all of the tales, is evinced the blindness symptomatic of an America stricken with the self-deluding disease of ideology.

"Jimmy Rose" is another tale about change and ideological blindness. Miller states that during the years of change and innovation preceding the Civil War, the

> institutions and values, inherited from Europe and adapted to the American environment through the two hundred years of the colonial and early national periods, were forced to adjust to rapidly altering conditions. In many cases accustomed organizations, beliefs, and practices proved inadequate and broke down or were sharply modified.[3]

Jimmy Rose, as a prototype of the backward-looking southern gentleman, displays such an inability to

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[2]Lea Bertani Vozar Newman, A Reader's Guide to the Short Stories of Herman Melville (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1986), 246.

[3]Miller, xi.

change.[4] He finds himself unable to cope with the newly emergent aggressive economic system. Having been reduced from riches to rags, with only the redness of his rosy cheeks to recall his former status, Jimmy Rose is now unwilling to acknowledge economic reality. He tries desperately to maintain the status quo by continuing the old social practices and rituals despite his destitution.

According to Fisher, Rose is "an anomaly in this practical, no-nonsense, progressive America." Because he is clearly out of place, a ghost from the past, he is "barely tolerated by an increasingly materialistic and mechanistic society."[5] Melville's ultimate criticism then is aimed not only at Jimmy Rose but at the society in which he lives. Both "I and My Chimney" and "Jimmy Rose" are thus unpleasant commentaries on an American society which equates indiscriminate change with progress.

America was, however, making great strides in its incorporation of new technology into the traditionally agrarian society, most notably in the form of the steam locomotive and the factory system. However, underlying

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[4]Ralph M. Tutt,"'Jimmy Rose'--Melville's Displaced Noble," Emerson Society Quarterly, 33 (1963), 29-32.

[5]Fisher, 139, 145.

the dream of technological progress was a covert fear of the machine, the intruder in the pristine Garden of America. As Leo Marx has shown, the technological society poses an entirely new relationship between people and nature:

> The society prefigured in the myth of the Garden would celebrate a passive accommodation to nature's law. There, survival would depend upon the organic production of growth. But on the other hand, the machine foretold an economy designed by man's brain, and it implied an active, indeed proud, assertion of his dominion over nature.[6]

Melville addresses this subconscious fear of disturbing humanity's allegiance to nature in "The Bell Tower." In this allegorical tale, the Renaissance "mechanician" Bannadonna aspires to "rival," "outstrip," and "rule" nature by creating an automaton, the "iron slave" Talus.[7] His human-like machine would be the ultimate laborer, "nothing less than a supplement to the Six Days' Work." However, his ambition to stock the earth with a "new serf"(BT, 233) is foiled when the

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[6]Quoted in Miller, 87.

[7]From Warner Berthoff (ed.), Great Short Works of Herman Melville (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), 234. All subsequent references to Melville's short fiction are from this edition. Page references will be given parenthetically in the text, keyed to abbreviations for the individual stories in this collection.

automated creature rises up out of "metallic necessity" to slay its creator, Bannadonna.[8]

Although the tale takes place in Renaissance Europe, it expresses the fears and doubts of Renaissance America, the fear that technology and the machine, through their utilitarian temptations would possess the souls of those lured into their service and then kill them, thus condemning them to perdition. Furthermore, it expresses the fear that, like the governors who sanction Bannadonna's expedient murder of a laborer for the sake of the creation and like Bannadonna himself, the society would delude itself about its obsession with the machine at the expense of humanity.

These fears are made more overt in "Cock-A-Doodle-Do," wherein a depressed narrator mentally associates the world's and his own problems with the machine. The failed revolutions of 1848 as well as his financial ordeal with his creditor are connected in his mind with technology in the form of the steam locomotive. His angry outburst expresses sentiments that are more often repressed by Americans eager for progress and success:

> Great improvements of the age! What! to call the facilitation of death and murder an improvement! . . . Hark! here comes that old

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[8]The phrase is taken from Melville's "Tartarus of Maids."

> dragon again--that gigantic gadfly of Moloch--snort! puff! scream!--here he comes straight-bent through these vernal woods, like the Asiatic cholera cantering on a camel. Stand aside! here he comes, the chartered murderer! the death monopolizer! judge, jury, and hangman all together, whose victims die always without benefit of clergy. For two hundred and fifty miles that iron fiend goes yelling through the land, crying "More! more! more!" (CDD, 77)

A more extensive attack is levelled against the effects of technology in "The Tartarus of Maids," Melville's tale of a rural paper mill which employs only young women. By mid-century the household system of production had begun to give way to factory production. Since the early twenties the northeast had become dotted with industry. The United States was at the peak of what Walt W. Rostow has called the "take off" period of the Industrial Revolution.[9] In fact, Melville's own Pittsfield, where he composed his tales, was depicted in drawings of the day with its own share of industry as a treeless, smokey landscape.[10]

Such radical development in a relatively short time span had been made possible in part because an America which viewed itself as "Nature's Nation" had managed to

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[9]Walt W. Rostow, The Stages of Economic Growth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960).

[10]The drawing described hangs at Melville's home at Arrowhead, in Pittsfield, Massachusetts.

allay its fears of the machine and of the anxiety over the degradation and poverty that seemed an inescapable accompaniment, at least in European models, of manufacturing. The reconciliation of the New Eden myth with the sudden emergence of the machine was the result of Boston industrialists like F. C. Lowell and Nathan Appleton. These men had set out to prove that industrialization was not corruptive, that "industrial employment did not inevitably result in physical and moral deterioration." In fact, they argued that the millennium would be ushered in by machines.[11]

Their celebrated showcase of New World industrialism was the manufacturing town of Lowell, Massachusetts. Because it had been assumed that the urban environment was responsible for the European degradation of the factory laborer, the Lowell factories would be located in the countryside, away from the corrupting influence of the city. In addition, this idyllically situated factory would employ only young girls, thus, it was argued, rescuing them from "idleness" and thereby turning a financial burden into an asset, and relieving society of a potentially immoral class.[12] These maids would be educated and their moral

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[11]Miller, 70, 85.

[12]Miller, 71.

edification ensured by an elaborate system of paternalistic supervision. Factories would replace domestic paternal supervision. "They would instill in the mill girls 'habits of order, regularity and industry, which lay a broad and deep foundation of public and private usefulness.'"[13]

Thus the Boston investors successfully created "a progressive industrialist image acceptable to agrarian America."[14] Unfortunately, Lowell did not long live up to its promise. By the mid-forties the system had begun to fall apart. The employees were working longer hours for less pay. Rather than being temporary laborers, as originally envisioned, they had been transformed into wage slaves. They now served an iron master, the machine, "mutely and cringingly as the slave serves the Sultan" (PBTM, 216).

The candid statements of the overseers of Lowell in the mid-forties testify to the decline and fall of Lowell. Said one mill manager:

> I regard my work-people just as I regard my machinery. So long as they can do my work for what

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[13]Rogin, 203.

[14]Miller, 72.

> I choose to pay them, I keep them, getting out of them all I can.[15]

In the interest of profit, Lowell, an ostensible industrial paradise, ultimately became the exploitative Tartarus which Melville wrote about in "Paradise of Bachelors and Tartarus of Maids." Melville quickly dispels the romantic images that had surrounded the Lowell experiment. His fictionalized version of Lowell as a paper mill sharply attacks the idealized view which blinded America to the truth of economic exploitation by allowing it to cling to moral virtue while it participated in industrialization.

In his tale the rural setting is named "Devil's Dungeon," and the mill is powered by "Blood River." In a factory reminiscent of Blake's "satanic mills," the narrator discovers the paper-making machine which dominates the factory and drowns out human voices. He states that "the human voice was banished from the spot"(PBTM, 215). Awestruck by the "great machine," the narrator also reveals covert American fears:

> Always, more or less, machinery of this ponderous, elaborate sort strikes, in some moods, strange dread into the human heart, as some living, panting Behemoth might. But what

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[15]Quoted in Miller, 94.

> made the thing I saw so specially terrible to me was the metallic necessity, the unbudging fatality which governed it. (PBTM, 221)

The ultimate fear of the machine was based on its ability to dehumanize, to which end Melville constructs an elaborate sexual metaphor. With the production of paper as his vehicle, Melville replicates the entire reproductive process, from conception to birth. He thus dramatically illustrates how the machine has usurped the very life-giving powers of the barren maids.

The completeness of the maids' dehumanization is suggested by the narrator's own observation that the girls "did not so much seem accessory wheels to the general machinery as mere cogs to the wheels" (PBTM, 216). Here Melville anticipates Marx's statement that the division of labor had converted "the workman into a living appendage of the machine."[16] Furthermore, like Toqueville before him, Melville recognized what Marx called "alienation of labor." Describing the phenomenon, Toqueville stated:

> When a workman is unceasingly and exclusively engaged in the fabrication of one thing, he ultimately does his work with singular dexterity; but at the same time he loses the general faculty of applying his mind to the

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[16]Quoted from Rogin, 203.

> direction of the work. He everyday becomes more adroit and less industrious; so that it may be said of him that in proportion as the workman improves the man is degraded . . . When a workman has spent a considerable portion of his existence in this manner, his thoughts are for ever set upon the object of his daily toil; his body has contracted certain habits, which it can never shake off: in a word, he no longer belongs to himself, but to the calling which he has chosen.[17]

Similarly, Melville's narrator espies "at rows of blank looking counters . . . rows of blank-looking girls, with blank, white folders in their blank hands, all blankly folding blank paper" (PBTM, 215).

This same alienation and dehumanization of the work force is illustrated in the capitalist center of the United States, the Wall Street of "Bartleby, the Scrivener." Bartleby's "blank wall reveries" suggest the sterile existence of the laborer partaking of the endless repetition of assembly line production or, in this case, the endless routine of copying legal documents. Bartleby resembles the brother of the mournful Marianna in "The Piazza," whose life is dictated by his wearying work:

> The brother was absent the entire day, sometimes the entire night. When at evening, fagged out, he did come home, he soon left his

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[17]Quoted in Miller, 113-14.

> bench, poor fellow, for his bed; just as one, at last, wearily quits that, too, for still deeper rest. The bench, the bed, the grave. (P, 392)

Similarly, Bartleby's entire "forlorn" existence is circumscribed by his labor. He has no identity other than that dictated by his labor. He has no family, no home, no history; even his name is incomplete. Any tie that he might have had with another human being or with life itself has been replaced by the cash nexus. He thus epitomizes Marx's alienated laborer.[18]

"Bartleby" is Melville's greatest indictment of American commercial society, of a laissez faire economy whose unimpeded development had resulted in an exploitative capitalist system.[19] Scott Donaldson suggests that in the Wall Street office one finds the northern wage slave counterpart to the southern chattel slave plantation. The menial employees are treated as property, compared with beasts of burden, and kept subservient not only by a subsistence wage, but by the same ideological strategies used by southern slavery

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[18]See, for example, Louise K. Barnett, "Bartleby as Alienated Worker," Studies in Short Fiction, 11 (1974), 379-85.

[19]See James C. Wilson, "'Bartleby': The Walls of Wall Street," Arizona Quarterly, 37 (1981), 335-46.

apologists.[20] Like chattel slaves, the clerks are dehumanized with such names as Turkey, Nippers, and Ginger Nut. Their lot is presumed compatible with their character: after offering Turkey a cast off coat to improve his office appearance, the lawyer notes that Turkey "was a man whom prosperity harmed." And finally, the lawyer even adopts the "white man's burden" argument; he believes that Bartleby must have been sent by Providence as his special burden. Ultimately then, the lawyer, despite his attempts at a somewhat humane form of paternalism, is as guilty as southern slave owners of placing human beings in bondage and profiting from their labor as wage slaves.

The lawyer is equally guilty of encouraging the growing distance between the classes that was developing in the era of aggressive capitalism. As Michael Gilmore states,

> "A Story of Wall Street" is Melville's significant subtitle, and Wall Street, as the financial hub of American capitalism, is the center from which radiate the many walls dividing society and segregating its members.[21]

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[20]Scott Donaldson, "The Dark Truth of The Piazza Tales," PMLA 85 (1970), 1085-1086.

[21]Michael T. Gilmore, Romanticism and the American Marketplace (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 132.

Gilmore notes that twenty years before the publication of "Bartleby," Toqueville had already commented on the aristocracy of capital:

> There is no real bond between [the rich] and the poor. . . .
> The territorial aristocracy of former ages was . . . bound . . . to come to the relief of its serving-men and to relieve their distresses. But the manufacturing aristocracy of our age first impoverishes and debases the men who serve it and then abandons them to be supported by the charity of the public. . . . Between the workman and the master there are frequent relations, but no real association.

Gilmore continues, stating,

> Toqueville's observations on the chasm between the rich and the poor, and the lack of contact between them, find their correlative in Melville's emphasis on walls. The Wall Street office of his story, with its high brick walls without and its folding screens within, corresponds to the social and spatial divisions generated by advanced capitalism and responsible for the mutual ignorance between the classes.[22]

The lawyer is oblivious to his own complicity in engendering class stratification, despite his ongoing attempts to subjugate Bartleby and despite the tangible evidence of the screens and walls he has erected in the

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[22]Gilmore, 138-39.

work-place in order to "isolate Bartleby from my sight" (BS, 46).

The growing stratification of the classes was also the result of aristocratic aspiration, for the Wall Street capitalists were motivated not only by economic incentives but by social rewards as well. By mid-century, wealthy northerners in particular were becoming obsessed with status, and "the lack of permanent hereditary distinctions made material success all the more important."[23] (In fact, this obsession with money-getting and the American dream of success is satirized in Melville's "The Happy Failure," when the old uncle realizes that "happiness comes with unselfish mediocrity.")[24] In Melville's society, money had become the ultimate criterion of social status. As noted earlier, this materialistic calculus was enacted in Melville's "Jimmy Rose" when Rose's friends, who were all too eager to dine with him formerly, desert him as soon as he loses his fortune.

Miller quotes Francis Grund, an astute observer of American culture, who in 1839 asked:

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[23]Miller, 122.

[24]Newman, 225.

> Is it not strange . . . that in a country which more than any other convinces one of the vanity of human pursuits,--in which wealth, honour, and distinction are mere bubbles floating on the surface of society,--men should be more eager after aristocratic distinctions, than where these are founded on an historical basis, and in accordance with the customs of the people?

Grund went on to say that America was "characterized by a spirit of exclusiveness and persecution unknown in any other country."[25] Such "exclusiveness and persecution" were the precise subject of Melville's "The Two Temples" (which will be discussed at length later). Melville targeted his satiric attack at two very prominent Christian institutions, Grace and Trinity Churches of New York. His attack was too blatant for the editors of Putnam's, who rejected it in order to avoid "offending the religious sensibilities of the public . . . to say nothing of Brown [the notorious church sexton], and the congregation of Grace Church."[26] Apparently Melville was encroaching on more than religiously sacred ground in his criticism of a society which in striving for superficial aristocratic distinctions was failing, as

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[25]Miller, 138-39.

[26]Jay Leyda, The Melville Log: A Documentary Life of Herman Melville, 1819-1891 (2 vols.; New York: Gordion Press, 1969), 487.

witnessed in "Jimmy Rose," to live up to its egalitarian ideals.

The greatest threat to egalitarian ideals, which had until Melville's time conveniently been overlooked by the North as well as the South, was of course the legalized institution of chattel slavery. Melville necessarily addressed this single most important issue then being debated in pre-Civil War America, for it brought to a head all of the economic and social issues of the day. "The Bell Tower," as noted above, examines the issues of technology but also confronts the issues of wage and chattel slavery. The murder of a laborer is overlooked in the interest of profit and progress, echoing the sanctioned maltreatment of wage slaves; while the manacled iron slave Talus, the very symbol of black slavery, rises up out of his bondage to slay his master. "Benito Cereno" also deals with slave revolt as well as the subversion of the status quo and hegemonic notions of order. It will be examined at length in the concluding chapters.

Melville had earlier criticized slavery in chapter 157 of Mardi, cynically recalling that at the harbor of his analogue to America, Vivenza, a statue to liberty was inscribed with the noble words, "In this republican land all men are born free and equal," to which is

appended the undermining phrase, "Except the tribe of Hamo." In the novel, Babbalanja perceptively states, "There is not so much freedom here as these freemen think" [emphasis added].[27] Ominously, in "The Bell Tower" and "Benito Cereno," Melville presages the inevitability of the Civil War should America continue to "think" as it has and thus remain ideologically blinded to its own subversion of the American dream of universal equality and opportunity.

Melville's tales of the 1850s all address in one fashion or another the interrelated changes in technology, economic organization, and society which were radically transforming pre-Civil War America. But in each case Melville does not limit his criticism to the actual shortcomings depicted in the given tale. Instead, as in "Benito Cereno" and "The Bell Tower" above, Melville also suggests that the resolution of the various problems was being thwarted by a buoyant optimism and overly self-assured mindset which in reality constituted an ideological confidence game. This self-deluding game of deception asserted, in the face of a contradicting reality, that the telos of history had indeed been manifested in America.

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[27]Herman Melville, Mardi, and a Voyage Thither, ed. G. Thomas Tanselle (New York: Library of America, 1982), 1169-1170, 1178.

Two other tales reveal that Melville's interest was not exclusively with the socio-economic problems of his society, but rather with the dominant ideology which justified and perpetuated them. In the already discussed "Bartleby," the title character's tag phrase, "I prefer not to," and his preference not to copy or work at all, reveal his complete and utter rejection of his capitalist society. He thus threatens the very foundation of Wall Street, its ideology. To the narrator's astonishment, Bartleby does not subscribe to the fundamental tenant of capitalism, self-interest. Wall Street takes this doctrine for granted as a self-evident given.[28] The lawyer's whole existence is founded on such principles. It is the capitalist doctrine of self-interest which undergirds and justifies the lawyer's maltreatment of his employees and his very "right" to the products of their labor.[29]

In order to preserve his "snug" existence and "safe" self-image, he must "reclaim" Bartleby into the

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[28]The upshot of Melville's tale, of course, is that it is precisely the vigorous pursuit of self-interest justified in the name of capitalism, progress, and self-reliance which is actually endangering America.

[29]In the lawyer's defense it should be noted that his self-interest, while always his primary concern, never takes the blatantly aggressive form of his idol Astor. Nevertheless, the lawyer remains fundamentally unable to transcend the dominant ideology which he shares with Astor.

capitalist system and thus affirm his ideology.[30] His strategy throughout his actual tenure with Bartleby is to induce him to acknowledge the lawyer's "rights" under the terms of capitalism. But to all of the lawyer's "common sense" questions, Bartleby steadfastly responds, "I prefer not to." Failing to persuade Bartleby, the lawyer's alternate tactic is to appeal to his readers, whose assumed sympathy he takes as confirmation of the dominant ideology's legitimacy. Since Bartleby will not capitulate, the reader is lured by the lawyer's ideology into the imprisoning walls of Wall Street.

Thus all the lawyer's attempts at communication and communion with Bartleby and ultimately his very reason for telling the tale are exposed as self-serving attempts to vindicate himself and his ideology. "Bartleby" ultimately reveals that the dominant ideology prevents America from recognizing that benevolent capitalism is nothing less than a contradiction in terms.

Ideology is particularly significant to another of Melville's tales which has not yet been mentioned, "Poor Man's Pudding and Rich Man's Crumbs." As its title suggests, the tale addresses the inequity between the rich and poor. However, its primary focus is the

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[30]Rogin, 198.

dominant ideology which justifies and perpetuates that inequity. The narrator himself states:

> 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 [emphhasis added]. (PMPRMC, 172)

Those "peculiar sensibilities" constitute the American Ideology. As indicated by Marx, this sensibility or dominant ideology is in the service of the ruling class. The wealthy are "dignified" by the ideology while the unfortunate masses are kept in their "wretchedness" by it.

The American Ideology maintains the status quo of the poor by means of the doctrine of "self-reliance" and the hope and optimism offered by the American Dream which prohibit the poor from accepting charity. Furthermore, as John McWilliams succinctly states, "The

Poor Man's assumption that he is the equal of the rich impedes equality of condition." [31] While the forlorn Bartleby is imprisoned within physical walls, the impoverished Coulters of "Poor Man's Pudding" are surrounded on all sides by the imprisoning walls of the dominant ideology which perpetuates their destitution.

Even their religion has an ideological function. The narrator notes that the only book in the Coulter household is "an old volume of Doddridge." Reverend Doddridge, author of the renowned The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul (1745), popularized a sentimentalized form of compensatory Christianity which encouraged accepting hardships as blessings. Here, religion, which Marx described as the "opiate of the masses," is employed by ideology to ensure the subservience of the poor. In fact, Jimmy Rose himself denounces such religious panaceas as "Poor Man's Plaster."

Melville's tale also reveals how the dominant ideology succors the ruling class. Even though their status exists at the expense of the exploited masses, the ruling class retains its "dignity" through an ideology which allows it to skim over the reality of the

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[31]John P. McWilliams, Jr., Hawthorne, Melville, and the American Character: A Looking-Glass Business (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 176.

poor, to deny their very existence as do the lawyers of "Bartleby" and "Paradise of Bachelors." In "Poor Man's Pudding," the narrator's friend, Blandmour, reveals the strategy of self-delusion when he attempts to convince the narrator that the impoverished William Coulter is actually well provided for through "the blessed almoner, Nature," which is "in all things beneficent"(PMPRMC, 165). According to Blandmour's metaphoric outlook the snow which falls on the fields is metamorphosed into "Poor Man's Manure; and when melted it becomes "Poor Man's Eye Water." Similarly, rainwater is glorified as "Poor Man's Egg"(PMPRMC, 165-66). When the narrator astutely notes that the wind drives the snow drifts from poor Coulter's two acre patch onto that of the rich Squire Teamster's twenty acre field, Blandmour is only momentarily taken aback. He responds, "Ah! to be sure--yes--well; Coulter's field, I suppose, is sufficiently moist without further moistenings. Enough is as good as a feast, you know" (PMPRMC, 166).

As scholars have shown, Melville here parodies the optimistic transcendentalist doctrine of compensation. What has not been noted is that such transcendentalist doctrine is the handmaiden to the dominant ideology; it comprises one of its many components. When the narrator samples the "Poor Man's Pudding" touted by Blandmour and

discovers its rancid and moldy taste, he fully realizes the self-deluding rationalizations and labels which allow Blandmour to justify his own uncharitableness and the self-serving status quo.

Blandmour is thus revealed to be an abuser of language. William Dillingham, in fact, rightly states that "Poor Man's Pudding" is a story about language.[32] Thus it is significant that Blandmour is a poet. He is someone who should know how to use language in its truest form. However, he uses it instead as his society uses it, that is, as his ideology allows him to (ab)use it. The implication is that ideology transforms everyone into ersatz poets. As such, life is not viewed in its real material form but rather metaphorically, as "a lived relation to the real."

Such poets view the world through eyes that have been treated with the ideological equivalent to that placebo cure for weak eyes, "Poor Man's Eye-Water." And it is precisely such ideologically induced blindness which constitutes the focus of the tales to follow.

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[32]I adapt the argument of William B. Dillingham, Melville's Short Fiction: 1853-56 (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1977), 120.

CHAPTER 3

"THE TWO TEMPLES": "TEMPLE FIRST"

Marvin Fisher, in Going Under, his book on the short fiction of Herman Melville, states that "The Two Temples" is a "double-edged critique of hypocrisy in American piety and American society." He expands on this observation, stating that

> The temple is first of all a symbol of what American piety has become and, second, like the Wall Street law office in "Bartleby," a symbol of what American society has become. The dream of Christianity has been its promise of salvation for the meek and humble, and one segment of the American Dream has been liberty and equality within a system where special privileges based on class had no place.[1]

Fisher goes on to demonstrate convincingly that "The Two Temples," rather than simply being a satire on religion--as it was first interpreted by the publishers who rejected it--actually has political significations as well. This political aspect of the tale speaks directly to the set of democratic ideals which, conjoined with the American Puritan heritage, had become

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[1]Fisher, 52.

"mystified" into what is now called the American Dream. Fisher notes in his analysis of the tale that

> beneath the apparently living tissue and virtuous pronouncements of mid-nineteenth-century American society was a spiritual deadness, a startling insensitivity to the communal needs of the individual. By going deeper than the conventional American self-appraisal, [Melville] asserted that the basic rights and values that defined America were in fact going under.[2]

While Fisher is certainly correct to note the theme of the demise of the American Dream, the truly operative phrase in his assessment of the tale is "American self-appraisal," for here we shall see lies the true focus of Melville's tale. In "The Two Temples" Melville reveals that the American self-appraisal, the projected image of of an idealized self and society, is in actuality an act.

Thus "The Two Temples" takes as one of its central metaphors that of the theater. In fact, the entire diptych revolves around the two central questions which the enlightened narrator poses at the end of the tale: "Hath mere mimicry done this? What is it then to act a part?" These two questions are essential to a proper understanding of the text because they focus the tale's

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[2]Fisher, 51-52.

theme; they draw our attention to the idea of rhetorical manipulation, to an awareness of the power of an "act" or "mimicry" to alter our view of reality. Thus in my examination of the tale I will show that in "The Two Temples" Melville deals with the "mimicry" of self-deluding rhetoric and with the "act" of self-deception.

"The Two Temples" reveals Melville's ongoing concern with what we would label as "ideology." Marx described ideology as an apologia for the social and economic status quo, as an instrument of mystification which veils the actual relations of the social and economic world. We can thus view it as the system of ideas or mindset which simultaneously deludes workers into quiescence while it provides rationale for hegemonic oppression. In "The Two Temples" Melville explores ideology as the mechanism of self-deception which he perceived was so effectively being used to conceal the disparity between the American Dream and American reality.

Therefore, as I have suggested, it is appropriate that Melville employ the theater metaphor to develop the theme of "Temple First." The theatrical parallels between the church and theater have been thoroughly explored by critics, but one of the most significant of these parallels is that between priest and actor.

Melville's narrator clearly equates the priest with an actor:

> But now the curtain rises, and the robed cardinal advances. How marvelous this personal resemblance! He looks every inch the self-same, stately priest I saw irradiated by the glow-worm dyes of the pictured windows from my high tower-pew. (TT, 164)

As a result of this association the emphasis falls upon what the priest achieves through "mimicry." His sermon is thus of paramount importance in revealing the ideology at play or what we shall see is literally a "play of ideology."

While we are not given the whole sermon, it is apparently epitomized by the crucial phrase, "Ye are the salt of the earth." The narrator notes that the text, "repeated at the outset, and often after quoted--I could not but plainly catch" (TT, 155). The irony of such a text is, of course, so trenchant that the rest of the sermon need not be included by Melville. The congregation to whom the message is addressed could not be further removed from the "salt of the earth" appraisal. Theirs is a church of exclusion and privilege in which grace is bestowed on those who have literally earned it; that is, their judgment and acceptance of members into the fold is based purely on

wealth and status. The arbitrary privilege which they invoke is clearly both unchristian and anti-democratic.

But the "salt" sermon is quite appropriate to Melville's point in that it conveys the precise image that the dominant American Ideology cultivates for subscribers to the American Dream. As "rightful" citizens of the "Messiah of Nations" they could not think of themselves as anything less than the very salt of the earth. Fisher concludes that the irony of the minister's text is "simultaneously an indictment of Christian ethics and democratic practice, and the narrator, from his unaccustomed vantage point, gazes down not at the Promised Land of the American Dream but at an image of reality permeated by hypocrisy and social pretension."[3]

He in fact is viewing a dramatic performance, for in Melville's diptych the church and theater are inverted. In accord with the political perspective which Fisher has suggested, this church-theater thus enacts a performance not only of Christian communion but of democratic communion as well. But it is only a performance, not the real thing. Actual democratic communion is not available in this America, suggests Melville, and its unavailability is covered up by

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[3]Fisher, 55.

ideology. The congregation simply "acts" as if Christian and democratic communion did exist, as if charity as established in the Bible and democracy as espoused in the Constitution were manifested in the church.

The salt sermon is thus an essential part of an ideological script designed to suppress reality. That the irony of the sermon goes unnoticed by those participating in the performance illustrates just how deceptive and successful the American Ideology has become. The narrator mindfully notes the oratorical and manipulating appeal of the sermon: "By the melodious tone and persuasive gesture of the speaker, and the all-approving attention of the throng, I knew the sermon must be eloquent" (TT, 155). When oft-repeated and eloquently delivered from a sanctioned pillar of the Dream--the church--the rhetoric is soon accepted and genuinely believed by the participants to be the true state of affairs.

The fallacious logic behind the American Ideology is, of course, the assumption that affirmation of democracy is equivalent to its manifestation. This belief is grounded in the underlying and almost universal assumption about America as the culmination or telos of history. And, as Robert Clark surmises, "if

one believed that America was already perfect what function could the mind [and its manifestation in the pulpit] have but affirmation."[4]

Melville's use of the church-theater as a metaphor for American society at large suggests that the performance witnessed here indicates a self-perpetuating and grandiose act of national proportions which buttresses itself and perpetuates the myth of America. The inappropriate content of this sermon thus suggests that the American Ideology is itself a set of affirmations which is no longer being put into practice. The disparity suggested by the sermon indicates an ideology or myth that has been thoroughly moralized and legitimated even though its reality no longer exists, if indeed it ever did. Instead of inspiring the "manifestation" of the Dream, it is now used, first, to suppress the contradictory truth that its reality (its signified) is nonexistent and, second, to comfort the self while perpetuating oppressive social systems.

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[4]Robert Clark, History, Ideology, and Myth in American Fiction, 1823-52 (London: Macmillan, 1984), 22. Clark notes that "Even before the term 'Manifest Destiny' was coined, the idea of the United States as the most perfect form of society yet to appear on earth, indeed as the end point of human history, was providing the nation with a sanctified mission to extend what Jackson called 'the area of freedom' into lands occupied by supposedly backward peoples," 4.

The extent of the corruptive power of the American ideology is further suggested by the relation of the priest to his congregation. Ann Douglas's study of the status of the clergy in nineteenth-century America is particularly instructive on this point. She notes that the clergy and their Mayflower forbearers were once the defenders of democracy, but even as their Puritan forefathers were unable to resist corruption, so too the clergy gradually lost power and authority. Douglas refers to this phenomenon as "clerical disestablishment," which she notes is part of a complex historical process that has its roots in "the general democratization and industrialization of American culture. The result of the disestablishment process was an apparent triumph for the competitive, commercial, and individualistic spirit." She notes that

> Between 1820 and 1875, the Protestant Church in this country was gradually transformed from a traditional institution which claimed with a certain real justification to be a guide and leader to the American nation to an influential ad hoc organization which obtained its power largely by taking cues from the non-ecclesiastical culture on which it was dependent.

Thus she concludes that "The new voluntary system meant that the church itself, as well as any given minister, must curry favor in order to survive."[5]

This very process of disestablishment is suggested by the priest's complicity with the congregation in perpetuating the myth of America, as exemplified by the rhetoric of the "salt of the earth" sermon. In this instance, the priest merely mimics the self-image which the congregation would like to project, rather than convicting them of their very real sins. In fact, according to the narrator, the sermon is "well-adapted to an opulent auditory" (TT, 155). As such, Douglas's analysis is suggestive because, like the New England clergy on which she reports, Melville's priest, in order to preserve some role for himself as well as some form of status, had to capitulate to popular desires and to popular images created and perpetrated by the American Ideology.

In fulfilling the form of his position and enacting the role cultivated by his congregation, the priest is in total complicity with the American Ideology. Spout-

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[5]Ann Douglas, The Feminization of American Culture (New York: Knopf, 1977), 24. Douglas cites Lyman Beecher on the imminent disestablishment of the Connecticut church, who "predicted grimly if extravagantly that, under its dispensation, 'we shall become slaves, and slaves to the worst of masters.'"

ing what is only too obviously in this case empty and purely self-serving rhetoric, the priest becomes the perfect counterpart of the actor in "Temple Second," and more specifically of the self-serving Richelieu who is the subject of the play in that half of the diptych.

The congregation too finds its counterpart in "Temple Second." For example, like the paying theatre-goers of "Temple Second," the congregation must pay for admission by bribing the beadle-faced man who guards the church entrance. The narrator also indicates that the church does not "entertain the poor" [emphasis added] (TT, 152). This comment suggests the more damning similarity between the two temples in that through its expulsion of the poor, the congregation reflects a more rigid hierarchy of privilege than the one suggested by the gallery and box seating of "Temple Second." This is further corroborated by the lamentable spectacle of the beadle-faced man "driving three ragged boys into the street" (TT, 153), thus disregarding Christ's injunction to "suffer the little children to come unto me" and further exposing the church and congregation's anti-democratic sentiment.

Not less significant are the differences between the two audiences of the two temples. Unlike the conventional viewing audience of "Temple Second," the

congregation is actually part of the performance being enacted and thus actively participates in the masquerade. Rather than responding sincerely, "right from the undoubted heart," they listen "motionless" to the simultaneously Christian and democratic text, but fail to put it into practice (TT, 164). The superficiality of the congregation is further attested to by the narrator's telling imagery as he describes their exit: "In three freshets . . . the gilded brooks poured down the gilded aisles" [emphasis added] (TT, 155).

The first temple is thus as much if not more of a theater than the actual theater of "Temple Second." Through the theatrical analogs Melville reveals how the American Ideology functions--whether couched in religious or economic terms--to maintain the status quo of the hegemonic forces. Through their fragile but effective "comp[act],"[6] in which they reinforce one another's roles, the priest maintains a semblance of authority while the congregation has its elitist status sanctioned at the same time that its innocent self-image is promoted as the inviolable and sacred truth. With this understanding of the "theatrical" performance in "Temple First," Melville's question "What is it then to

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[6]Throughout this section of the paper I take the liberty of employing Derrida's method of punning as a means of emphasizing the "act" staged within the tale.

act a part?" begins to resonate with its proper meaning. This meaning is borne out through the narrator of the tale.

Within the grandiose drama being enacted in the Christian "theater," it is necessary that the narrator play his proper role. He is labelled "scoundrel" by the church and "disturber of the Sunday peace" by the state. Thus the two institutions conspire to foist upon the narrator the role of sinner and scapegoat (TT, 158). Invoking reverberations from America's puritan past, the narrator's poverty becomes the equivalent of sin. As a result of the puritan corruption of the doctrine of the elect, impoverishment is considered a manifestation of God's disfavor. Thus the congregation subtly justifies both its expulsion of the narrator (at the hands of the sexton) and its own hegemonic position as God's elect and as the rightful citizens of the Promised Land. This logic provides further convenient justification for the expulsion of the narrator: his excommunication is essential because his very presence manifests the failings of the Dream and thus threatens the precarious balance established by the comp[act] between priest and congregation.

The overall theatrical "performance" of "Temple First" thus represents a national strategy of self-

deception and is characteristic of the American response to the confusion resulting from having gained wealth and status through rhetorically sanctioned competition but at the unsettling expense and exploitation of fellow democratic citizens. As Douglas suggests, such [act]ions by Americans characterize "the self-evasion of a society both committed to laissez-faire industrial expansion, and disturbed by its consequences." But as Douglas further notes, while

> many nineteenth century Americans in the northeast acted every day as if they believed that economic expansion, urbanization, and industrialization represented the greatest good [, and while] it is to their credit that they indirectly acknowledged that the pursuit of these "masculine" goals meant damaging, perhaps losing, another good, one they increasingly included under the "feminine" ideal . . . the fact remains that their regret was calculated not to interfere with their actions.[7]

Thus the American Ideology becomes the convenient mechanism for concealing exploitative laissez-faire competition in order to insure the pleasures of consumption. It is only by continually reinventing and reinforcing the desired self-image of the "good" American, that fears over the failure of the Dream

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[7]Douglas, 12.

stemming from contradictory actions can be reconciled. Only then can the hegemony and other subscribers to the Dream continue to function comfortably (if blindly). What is evidenced by Melville's tale in its efficient conjoining of the religious and political aspects of American society is an elaborate socio-psychological attempt to repress not only the reality of exploitative social and economic relations, but also to deny the selfish, fallen nature of humanity, which despite the best of hopes must corrupt even this American Eden. It is ultimately then a desperate attempt to conceal the truth that America is not the telos of history after all.

Now that we have discerned the emphasis on ideology within Melville's diptych, we can properly begin to assess the character of our narrator. At this point I depart from the standard view taken of the narrator by other readers. As is the case with so many of Melville's tales, readers must be careful not to emphasize the plot at the expense of ignoring the narrator, nor must they be too quick to accept the narrator at face value. Only one critic, Beryl Rowland, has strayed from the generally positive assessments of the narrator. She states that "he is singularly unaware of his own situation," and thus she believes that the

"story ultimately demonstrates that while men frequently enact the pattern of the Christian myth in their lives, love of self causes them to remain imperceptive and inadequate."[8] Rowland and I basically agree in the most general sense, although as we have seen I would add to this theme, emphasizing its political and ideological aspects.

In my view then, the tale's focus on ideology ultimately exposes the unredeemed, fallen nature of the narrator. As a voyeur to what unfolds below and through his various [act]ions, he reveals that he is in fact a secret sharer in the guilt of the priest and congregation. In "The Two Temples" Melville uses the same technique for characterization as he does in "Bartleby" and "Benito Cereno." We are led to sympathize with the protagonist, but our sympathy is a literary mantrap. In the same way that further analysis reveals the culpability of the lawyer and American sea captain, so too a careful examination reveals the narrator's subtle complicity with those he criticizes. By the end of "Temple First," the narrator stands convicted not of disturbing the Sunday peace, as he is charged, but of fallacious self-appraisal. He is guilty of prideful

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[8]Beryl Rowland, "Melville Answers the Theologians: The Ladder of Charity in 'The Two Temples,'" Mosaic, 7 (Summer, 1974), 9, 8.

hypocrisy, of engaging in the play-act of ideology, for he, like the church, has partaken of the same ideology in order to suppress his anti-Christian and anti-democratic sentiment and practices.

Melville's theater metaphor then applies not only to the priest and congregation, but very specifically to the narrator as well. In this tale of acting, all characters are performers. Like the priest and the congregation, the narrator too performs an act of repression; but as his self-consciousness suggests, it is produced for the benefit of the "self as audience" in order to conceal his own desire to join the elite congregation and partake in their hegemonic privilege. The narrator thus resembles Amasa Delano of Melville's later work, "Benito Cereno," in that he believes naively in the American Dream; but it is a purely rhetorical rendition of the Dream--one which professes that inequality like slavery is reprehensible, all the while it actually conspires to continue the oppression. The narrator is ostensibly filled with regret and remorse for having been unjustly banned from Christian and democratic communion. Yet, very much like the Americans commented on by Douglas, the regret is calculated not to interfere with his ultimate selfish desires and ambitions. The Dream, then, has in effect been reduced

to an elaborate ideological "act," literally a "play" of ideology, one whose benefits are self-contradictorily reserved solely for the privileged hegemony.

The narrator's act begins with his entrance center stage of his own personal production. He opens the first act with a soliloquy of sorts, establishing his "character":

> This is too bad . . . here have I tramped this blessed Sunday morning, all the way from the Battery, three long miles, for this express purpose, prayerbook under arm; here I am, I say, and, after all, I can't get in. (TT, 151)

The nature of his journey and the conspicuous prop of a prayerbook reveal the narrator to be playing the role of a pilgrim.[9] However, because of the tale's dual focus, which conjoins both the religious and political, he can be more accurately viewed as a democratic pilgrim, that is, one who is en route to a shrine dedicated to both Christianity and democracy--as "Temple First" has symbolically been shown to be. This particular shrine is in actuality, however, a perversion of both Christianity and democracy and thus of the American Dream itself. Appropriately enough, the narrator as "democratic pilgrim" is similarly perverted in that his

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[9]Rowland, 8.

role too is ingenuous. The narrator has merely devised a self-justifying, ideologically pure character behind whom he can conceal his real and selfish desires. His "character" thus parallels the "salt of the earth" role which the congregation has fashioned for itself.

The narrator's frustrations at not having his "humble petition" (TT, 151) and democratic expectations met suggest initially that he genuinely espouses the ideals of the American Dream; nonetheless, his motives for attending the church are soon revealed to be far from democratic. For example, rather than protesting the church's elitism and garish opulence in order to assert his own and his fellow citizens' "natural rights," the narrator has journeyed three miles out of his way for the express purpose of partaking in what he knew to be an elitist service (TT, 153). He would in fact have been "arrayed" in the costume of the aristocratic congregation had it not been for "the false tailor" who failed to keep his promise to deliver the narrator's "new coat" (TT, 152). One can only speculate as to how ardently the narrator might have joined in with the congregation's elitist "communion" had he been apparelled in a suitable coat.

The narrator further exposes his hypocrisy by revealing that, despite his later appraisal of the

congregation as "'miserable sinners,'" he is not beyond sharing in their corruption by considering bribery. He states that by "tickl[ing] the fat-paunched, beadle-faced man's palm with a bank-note, then, gallery or no gallery, I would have had a fine seat" (TT, 152).

The narrator's true motivations for attending are further displayed in the reasons for his disappointment, which seem to stem not so much from being unable to worship as from his not being <u>seen</u> in the "marble-buttressed, stained-glass, spic-and-span new temple," with its "splendid new fashion gothic" style (TT, 152). Ironically, despite the narrator's apparent knowledge of architecture--as suggested by his descriptive vocabulary and by his recollection that such churches often have windows in the tower--he is unaware of the anti-democratic nature of the gothic style, and its negative associations with an aristocratic and decadent Europe. Instead, the narrator clearly views the church as the latest fashionable place to be seen. This accounts also for his excessive self-consciousness and thus adds to the theatrical atmosphere being suggested, for the narrator is overly aware of an audience of onlookers.

Having been recently "excommunicated," the narrator is particularly sensitive to his present setting and situation and thus feels compelled to

perform his role all the more vigorously. He now no longer performs for himself alone, but for the special benefit of the nearby lackeys who attend the opulent carriages of the congregation. As if on stage, he soliloquizes: "Well, here I am in the porch, very politely bowed out of the nave. I suppose I'm excommunicated; excluded, anyway" (TT, 152).

Those around him have become peculiarly threatening. The lackeys, for example, are viewed as "gossipers" who seem more than ready to jeer at his misfortune. Even the horses, he notes, have "a haughty curve to their foam-flecked necks." But despite his purported democratic ideals, he does not sympathize with these exploited servants who are similarly excluded from the church. Rather than joining them in true democratic communion, the narrator instead takes note only of their costumed finery: "See the gold hat-bands, too, and other gorgeous trimmings . . . If I were in England now, I should think those chaps a company of royal dukes, right honorable barons, etc." (TT, 152). Unlike the young girl and the man with the theatre ticket in "Temple Second," who are both perceptive enough to recognize the narrator's plight, the narrator is unable to penetrate the physiognomy of the lackeys. He does not recognize them as fellow citizens nor does he realize that their

"royal" costumes belie the fact that they do not share in their masters' affluence. He does not realize that they are merely role-players themselves--their roles having been dictated by their masters and designed to reflect their masters' wealth and thus evoke in their audience the very envy that the narrator feels.[10]

The narrator instead denigrates them as "glossy gossipers" and as "only lackeys" [emphasis added]. He even frowns on his own "lackeyish appearance" (TT, 152). However, by sitting in judgment of the lackeys, he has effectively ostracized them from his sympathy and grace by invoking a hierarchy which places him in the superior position. Without realizing it the narrator has actually mimicked the very congregation that has excommunicated him. He has exposed his ideological affiliation with them by similarly negating any possibility for democratic or Christian communion with the lackeys. While the narrator is denied communion by the congregation, he in turn denies it to the lackeys and thus reveals his unacknowledged need for redemption.

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[10]See R. H. Byer, "Poe's 'Man of the Crowd," in Bercovitch and Jehlen (eds.), Ideology and Classic American Literature, 227, for an analysis equally applicable to "The Two Temples." In "The Two Temples" the narrator fails to realize that he is actually witnessing a dramatic "spectacle of commodities and abstract humanity"; for under the hieroglyph of the congregation lie the social and economic relations that produced it.

As in "Bartleby" and other tales, Melville employs the first-person point-of-view for a specific purpose. Combined with the present tense narration which is used through much of "Temple First," he makes the narrator's act visibly apparent. The reader is thus able to judge the narrator properly by gauging his moment-by-moment performance as he acts and more significantly as he thinks about acting. As a result, a rather casual aside, for example, becomes very meaningful in the way it displays the narrator's self-consciousness: "By the way, here I dodge about, as if I wanted to get into their aristocratic circle" (TT, 152). This we recognize immediately as nothing more than an attempt at repressing the truth, a rhetorical ploy designed to dodge appearances that smack too much of reality.

The narrator continues to indict himself as he analyzes the scene: "In fact, it looks a sort of lackeyish to be idly standing outside a fine temple, cooling your heels, during service." Mentally blocking the scene as it should be played he concludes, "I had best move back to the Battery again." However, he adds the conspicuously pious detail "peeping into my prayer-book as I go" (TT, 152). The narrator's self-consciousness as revealed by his mental scenarios ultimately illustrates his repressed desire to join the

congregation's elitist circle, and thus exposes his disguise--the projected self-image of the democratic pilgrim dictated to him by the American Ideology.

Rather than exiting his "porch" stage, however, the narrator notices and enters a narrow door leading to the church tower. This "very low and very narrow vaulted door" through which "no one seems to go" (TT, 152) resembles Bunyan's "Wicket Gate", in Pilgrim's Progress, which leads to the straight and narrow path that Christian must travel to gain the Celestial City.[11] Ironically, however, Melville's pilgrim is actually more reminiscent of Hawthorne's hypocritical pilgrim in "Celestial Railroad." Like Hawthorne's pilgrim, the narrator is on a path in "Temple First" which he mistakenly assumes leads heavenward as he climbs the "Jacob's Ladder" in the church tower (TT, 153). Instead, like Hawthorne's guilty pilgrim he is actually travelling to Vanity Fair, for the church is a hieroglyph of vanity, of the theatrically superficial and of all that is worldly: fashion, opulence, aristocracy, elitism, exploitative capitalism.

After entering the narrow door into the tower, the narrator finds himself on yet another stage (the first

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[11]Of course, the image also suggests Christ's declaration, "Narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, few there be that find it" (Matthew 7:13).

of a series that he will perform on in the "huge square tower"). It is a "blank platform" surrounded by "three gigantic Gothic windows of richly dyed glass" which simultaneously form a pyrotechnical backdrop and light the stage with "all sorts of sunrises and sunsets, lunar and solar rainbows, falling stars, and other flaming fire-works." The narrator attests to the theater-like atmosphere by stating: "I seemed inside some magic lantern." The stage, however, faces a "dead wall," for the only audience available to the narrator is his conscience, or the imaginary projection of self as created by the American Ideology (TT, 153). The narrator's performance, however, is quite unconvincing, for despite his intent to display the role of the devout democratic pilgrim, he actually enacts the role of pharisee (an identity which he ironically associates with the congregation).

As the narrator looks down upon the congregation from his isolated vantage point, his hypocrisy is first made evident when, notwithstanding such statements as "beggars must not be choosers," and "I won't complain," he clearly contradicts himself by being very choosy and by complaining quite fervently about his present situation inside the tower. He indicates that the tower

is not as pleasant a place as he had hoped. He bemoans his "scorched and frozen back," and complains that the

> furnace which makes the people below there feel so snug and cosy in their padded pews, is to me, who stand here upon the naked gallery, cause of grievous trouble. (TT, 154)

Tangentially, Melville's point, of course, is that the congregation's comfort, or rather the comfort of the elite, is at the expense of those who are excluded from the church communion and by extrapolation are denied full participation in democracy. This comfort, which translates as status or authority, is the result of exploitative behavior by those in power, the hegemonic forces who strive to maintain the status quo, and thus victimize less fortunate citizens such as the lackeys, the narrator-as-pilgrim, or, as Melville graphically depicts with ironic allusion to the New Testament, the urchins who are driven away by the beadle-faced sexton and not suffered to approach the temple. The narrator, however, is oblivious to these socio-political implications and makes his poorly concealed complaints solely out of concern for his own self-comfort. Similarly, his later assertion that he will not be "defrauded of [his] natural rights" (TT, 153) is revealed here to be selfishly not politically motivated.

He thus dispels any illusions which might remain about his professed democratic sympathies.

The narrator continues to indict himself through his appeals to the dramatic. Although he piously asserts that "Here . . . is a fitter place for sincere devotions where, though I see, I remain unseen" (TT, 154), he conspicuously announces during his worship that he is in "the very posture of devotion" [emphasis added] (TT, 155) and thus reveals the staged nature of his activity and his pharisee-like concern for outward appearance (that very concern that had prevented his entrance into the church, without a properly tailored coat). In fact, within the same breath that he will go on to associate the congregation with the Pharisees, he further implicates himself as one. He states, "Depend upon it, no pharisee would have my seat" (TT, 154). However, his use of the imperative mode, with its implied "you" audience, reveals just how keenly self-conscious he is toward his ur-self and just how aware he is of being constantly watched. Moreover, he ultimately finds his "pew to be quite satisfactory, not because it is conducive to worship, but because it "commands" a "glorious bird's eye view of the entire field of operations below." Here the narrator, whose identity constantly vacillates as it attempts to avoid the true

self, momentarily adopts the role and language of a military strategist, but one who is ultimately concerned with social maneuvers rather than spiritual victory. Ultimately, the narrator has forgotten the simple fact that he is not in the tower out of his own desire. For his initial intention was to worship in public in a fine suit and in a "fine seat" (TT, 152) amidst the very congregation he now condemns.

Finally, the narrator compounds the counts against him when, according to Beryl Rowland, "full of hate, he presumptuously allies himself with the company of spirits as he looks with envy, injured pride, and fear at the congregation in the pews beneath him."[12] He says of his high place,

> I like it, and admire it, too, because it is so very high. Height, somehow, hath devotion in it. The archangelic anthems are raised in a lofty place. All the good shall go to such an one. Yes, Heaven is high. (TT, 154)

The narrator presumes that "height" itself is equivalent to godhead and that he himself, not unlike Banadonna in Melville's "Bell-Tower," is possessed of it by virtue of his physical position atop the tower.

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[12]Rowland, 9.

By this time, however, the reader recognizes the narrator's praise of height as a code for his own suppressed desire for status and authority. In fact, the narrator had earlier noted his usurpation of the beadle-faced man's power, having "set at naught his high authority" [emphasis added] (TT, 153). The reader, of course, as observer of the narrator's dramatic production, is all too aware of the narrator's affiliation with the beadle-faced man and his appropriation of his role as keeper of the tower and enforcer of the church's exclusionary practices. In addition, by being exposed as a counterpart to the beadle-faced man, the narrator has further consolidated his affiliation with the elitist congregation.

Ultimately, Melville makes it clear that despite the narrator's assumed proximity to heaven, only a staged fabrication consisting of artificial pyrotechnics is available to him. The narrator thus confirms his pharisee-like blindness because despite his lofty position he lacks clear perspective; his vision is distorted by the "wire-woven screen [which] had the effect of casting crape upon all [he] saw" (TT, 154). His overly dramatic assessment that "it was but a gorgeous dungeon" is not entirely inaccurate, but it is ultimately insincere because it does not reflect the

narrator's true disposition and thus does not mitigate his vanity. The narrator does not realize that despite the heaven-ward height he has attained, Heaven is higher still, and thus he remains all the more in need of redemption.

The narrator then pinpoints his and the congregation's problem when he states, "Only by making allowances for the crape, could I gain a right idea of the scene disclosed" (TT, 154). Fisher is right to note that the narrator

> tries to discount the dark view of circumstances through the screen. He will not admit--though the reader is supposed to recognize--the power of blackness to delineate some of the less pleasant aspects of life in mid-nineteenth-century America.[13]

This blindness to reality is symptomatic of the American belief in the Myth of America, and is, as I have shown, ideologically imposed. The American Ideology is the means which permits the narrator to make allowances for his own contradictory behavior. As Fisher states, "the narrator, believing still in the benignity of things as they are (or as he thinks they are)" remains unable to totally condemn the

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[13]Fisher, 55.

congregation, for this would mean self-condemnation ultimately.[14] Thus he makes allowances for the reality of the congregation below by envisioning them as a leveled and homogeneous democratic mass:

> Down I gazed upon the standing human mass, far, far, below, whose heads, gleaming in the many colored window stains, showed like beds of spangled pebbles, flashing in a Cuban sun. (TT, 154)

But this democratic vision is negated by the desire for status and power implicit in the congregation's "invoking cry--'Govern them and lift them up forever!'[Melville's emphasis] (TT, 154).

Furthermore, just as earlier the narrator had been blind to the true status of the lackeys, he now refuses to acknowledge how the congregation itself conceals the social relations that produced it. For the congregation is not merely a religious body reflecting spiritual aspirations, it has in this case, to adapt an argument by R. H. Byer, become "a social form mediating the material basis of capitalist society." Byer notes a "double life" led by Americans deriving from an

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[14]Fisher, 55.

> "imaginary universality" of republican citizenship [and Christian fellowship which] stands opposed to the mutal [sic] isolation of "egoistic" interest that dominates the material life of capitalism."[15]

Adapting Byer's argument to "The Two Temples" would suggest by extrapolation that when within the political and religious community, the congregation regard themselves as communal beings; but when in civil society, they act as private individuals, treating others as means, and ultimately reducing themselves to means as well.[16] Furthermore, the rhetoric of the sermon and the impression of Christian communion suggested by the congregation as a religious form

> conceals the privacy of self-interest and creates the illusory picture of a homogeneous, even organic mass of humanity that mediates, and seems to mirror, the consciousness and self-consciousness of its members.[17]

The congregation thus manifests those contradictions between Christian and democratic values and the interests of capitalistic material life which

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[15]Byer, 226. I will be adapting Byer's analysis of "crowd" to my discussion of the congregation.

[16]Byer quotes Easton and Guddat's The Young Marx, 226.

[17]Bercovitch, 227.

necessitate the compensatory mechanism of the American Ideology.

When the service is finally over, the narrator attempts to make an inconspicuous exit. However, he discovers that the door to the tower has been locked, thus trapping him within. He considers knocking upon the door in order to alert the public, but initially rejects this variation of Christ's similar injunction "to knock that it may be opened" for fear that the beadle-faced man should discover him: "if he sees me he will recognize me, and perhaps roundly rate me--poor, humble worshipper--before the entire public" (TT, 156). Here the narrator again inadvertently reveals his masquerade because his self-deprecating interjection that he is "humble" is clearly belied by his fear of being rated as less than the aristocratic congregation, as well as by his fear of having his pride hurt by being publicly humiliated.

The narrator finally resolves that despite the disadvantageous suspicion that his "inglorious detection" will invite, "nothing will serve me now but the reckless confidence of innocence reduced to desperation" (TT, 157). By appealing to his confidence in his own "natural innocence," the narrator typifies a characteristic American response. He is participating

in an American confidence game, a national strategy of self-deception premised on rhetorically and ideologically induced confidence. This confidence game constitutes the legitimating strategy to which America too often resorted in times of contradiction as is most prominently evidenced, for example, by Captain Delano's retreat into his own recollected innocent identity as "Jack of the Beach."

At the conclusion of "Temple First," the narrator is conducted to the "Halls of Justice" and "represented as a lawless violator, and a remorseless disturber of the Sunday peace" for having rung the bells to attain his release from the church tower. Implicit within the state's unfair treatment of the narrator is the need to marginalize, or liminalize, that which poses a threat to the "Sunday peace" (TT, 158). It banishes anything that threatens to expose the seams in the veil of illusion which constitutes the imaginary relationship to reality that has been established by the American Ideology. The legal institution's corrupt enforcement of the peace thus indicates that the church is not alone, but that all institutions conspire with one another in

reinforcing the status quo and the imagined relationship with the world.[18]

But as we have seen throughout, the narrator is himself just as much in complicity with the corruption of the Dream. The sins of the church and state are the sins of the narrator, for all are victims of the "act" of self-deceit. At the conclusion of "Temple First" the narrator is brought before judge and convicted:

> Spite of my coolest explanations, the circumstances of the case were deemed so exceedingly suspicious that only after paying a round fine, and receiving a stinging reprimand, was I permitted to go at large, and pardoned for having humbly indulged myself in the luxury of public worship [emphasis added]. (TT, 158)

This conclusion is, of course, ironic to the reader privy to the tale's emphasis on ideology. While it implicates America, it also implicates the narrator himself. For as we have seen, the circumstances surrounding the narrator's [act]ions are indeed

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[18]The pervasiveness of the Dream's corruption is suggested by the "privilege" afforded to the narrator, for he notes that his "rather gentlemanly appearance procured me a private hearing from the judge" (TT, 158). The extent of societal complicity in a national conspiracy is suggested in both "The Bell Tower" and "Benito Cereno" by the fact that church and state sanction oppression--whether it be slavery in "Benito Cereno" or murder (translated as either slavery or economic exploitation) in "The Bell Tower."

"exceedingly suspicious" (TT, 158). In fact, his profession of humbleness has been completely undercut by his complicity with the proud congregation. That he should be pardoned is also ironic. The state pardons him for trespassing, but he remains in need of redemption from his aristocratic pride and his hypocritical ideology. The final irony, however, is that the narrator's experience in the church marks the end of his acting career and the beginning of an authentic pilgrimage to democratic communion in a London theater in "Temple Second."

CHAPTER 4

"THE TWO TEMPLES": "TEMPLE SECOND"

In "Temple Second" Melville inverts the theater-church imagery so that it is the theater not the church which becomes genuinely sanctified as an ironic temple to democracy. Through this inverted pairing of church and theater Melville will ultimately work out the process of redemption of an American guilty of "acting" a part, rather than "living" what he espouses.

The narrator begins "Temple Second" by calling himself a "stranger" in London. The comment is significant because he is now a man without a country. As we have seen, by the end of "Temple First" he has been rejected by both church and state. Even "the paternal, loving town of Philadelphia" (TT, 158), the narrator's final American refuge, proves itself a misnomer. For in this "city of brotherly love," he is "dismally cut adrift" (TT, 159) by the two Philadelphia women who employ him there as a physician.[1] This dismal condition has been foreshadowed earlier in the first half of "The Two Temples."

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[1]Rowland, 10. Rowland also suggests that these rich employers "seem to exemplify the sickness of America itself, doomed, as the names Cleopatra and Charmian imply, to self-destruction."

His future is suggested by the vision he beheld in the empty church of "Temple First." There he states:

> I seemed gazing from Pisgah into the forests of old Canaan. A Puseyitish painting of a Madonna and Child, adorning a lower window, seemed showing to me the sole tenants of this painted wilderness--the true Hagar and her Ishmael. (TT, 156)

This image of Ishmael may now be appropriately associated with the narrator himself. He is now "forlorn, outcast, without a friend"--a true Ishmael, but without even the protection of his Hagar (TT, 159).

Because of this alienation, the narrator feels himself adrift in a London which he equates to Leviathan and to a hostile ocean of sharks. Actually, he has in essence been set adrift from both his country and his ideology. Technically, he has been liminalized. Both the legal and religious institutions, the keepers of the "normal" and the "legitimate," have forced the narrator to the edge of society. But ironically, it is from the edge that he will be better able to view the boundaries and limitations of his society. As an Ishmael he will be privy to the naked functioning of the American hierarchy and its actual system of social relations. Thus he resembles Bartleby, who was able to recognize the truth of Wall Street by removing himself from its

ideological confines. It is also worth noting that he is the antithesis of Merrymusk and of the Coulters, of "Cock-a-Doodle-Do" and "Poor Man's Pudding," respectively, who remain at the bottom of but within the hierarchy and ideology, and thus blind to its anti-democratic reality. Having been expelled from his imaginary privileged position within the hierarchy, the narrator is finally able to assess his true status within the system of social relations. Thus, in light of his role in "Temple First," he is significantly transformed into a spectator rather than actor, and therefore is en route to becoming a more objective witness to the elitist nature of the dream as it is presently being enacted in America.

Because of his new perspective from without--literally and mentally--the narrator is now prepared for complete ideological independence, or in the theological terms which apply in this half of the diptych, he is prepared for redemption from his elitism and pride. He is indeed already a remarkably changed man.

This is suggested from the outset by the fact that even though the narrator is now en route to a genuine theater, he is no longer an actor. He significantly notes his "damaged character" (TT, 158). While this phrase first reminds us of the narrator's blinding pride

which had allied him with the congregation, the phrase also suggests--recalling the theater metaphor of "Temple First"--that his identity as an actor playing a character is no longer intact. He had earlier adopted the role of "democratic pilgrim" in order to disguise the fact that he was using the church as a showcase for his pride. Now, however, the character is no longer necessitated for he actually lives the part; he has in fact become a democratic pilgrim. Henceforward his emotions and actions will be "from the undoubted heart" (TT, 164).

Quite unlike the narrator of "Temple First," the narrator now has a redemptive purpose for his pilgrimage, for he is in genuine need of salvation. Redemption had not been offered to him at the church and, as we have seen, the sincerity of his conviction was itself in every way made suspect by his ingenuous role-playing. But now his need and desire for redemption are real. Rowland corroborates this need for redemption by presenting a typological reading of the narrator. She notes that when the narrator saw the ladder in the tower of "Temple First," he was Jacob; when he finds himself across the ocean in the Leviathan of London as he describes it, he is Jonah; "the final avatar is Richelieu whom Lytton 'apotheosises' as the

saviour of France." Thus Rowland concludes that the narrator is the type of Christ and as such is to be viewed as "clearly in a spiritual and physical hell from which he must be saved or resurrected."[2]

Down and out in London, the narrator finds himself "weary," his spirits "jaded." However, the physician is very precise about the type of remedy that he requires: "What I wanted was not merely rest, but cheer." This "cheer," however, is expressly identified with "the making one of many pleased and pleasing human faces; the getting into a genial humane assembly of my own kind" (TT, 159-60). As Ray Browne asserts, relating the narrator to Melville: "true religion to him is here equated with that humanism, the joining of high and low, true democracy, that he [Melville] discussed in numerous works" [emphasis added]. As the narrator himself concludes, he is a pilgrim searching for "an association of man with man 'such as at its best and highest, is found in the unified multitude of a devout congregation.'"[3] The narrator's cure, his redemption, then, is directly associated with democratic communion. And, if, as Jehlen has phrased it, the American Dream is "a dream of

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[2]Rowland, 10-11.

[3]Ray Browne, Melville's Drive to Humanism (Lafayette: Purdue University Studies, 1971), 205.

the Pilgrim's homecoming," "of safe arrivals," then the narrator is now the genuine pilgrim in search of the democratic and Christian homecoming which was denied him in his ostensible home of America.[4]

But significant obstacles remain for the pilgrim. Redemption demands a complete break from ideology. At the beginning of "Temple Second" the narrator is not in the least bit hopeful that he will find the "homecoming" he desires in Europe; in fact, he fears for his "safe arrival" in London. Thus, like Israel Potter, the narrator responds with fright and reticence to a London he is led to view as "Tartarean" (TT, 159): "A stranger in London on Saturday night, and without a copper! What hospitalities may such an one expect?" (TT, 158). This same London, we have noted, is described as "Leviathan" and in an extended metaphor as a hostile sea which metamorphoses into a Miltonian vision of Hell:

> Saturday Night it was; and the markets and the shops, and every stall and counter were crushed with the one unceasing tide. A whole Sunday's victualling for three millions of human bodies, was going on. Few of them equally hungry with my own, as through my spent lassitude, the unscrupulous human whirlpools eddied me aside at corners, as any straw is eddied in the Norway Maelstrom. What dire suckings into oblivion must such swirling

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[4]Myra Jehlen, American Incarnation (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 15.

> billows know. Better perish mid myriad sharks in mid-Atlantic, than die a penniless stranger in Babylonian London. Forlorn, outcast, without a friend, I staggered on through three millions of my own human kind. The fiendish gaslights, shooting their Tartarean rays across the muddy, sticky streets, lit up the pitiless and pitiable scene. (TT, 158)

As an embodiment of the dominant American Ideology which stipulates the superiority of America, the narrator cannot view Europe objectively. It is worth quoting at length Robert Clark's pointed summary of how American ideology, in establishing an identity for the nation, incorporates a specific view of Europe:

> The Declaration of Independence was said to have liberated the United States from the corruptions of the Old World and to have allowed the new nation to become an 'asylum' where the poor and oppressed could regenerate themselves. Europe was frequently described as being 'despotic', feudal' 'aristocratic ' [adjectives which all apply specifically to the America of "Temple First"]; its historical destiny was to struggle to realise in itself the constitutional perfection that the United States had already achieved. Even before the term 'Manifest Destiny' was coined, the idea of the United States as the most perfect form of society yet to appear on earth, indeed as the end point of human history, was providing the nation with a sanctified mission to extend what Jackson called 'the area of freedom' into the lands occupied by supposedly backward peoples.[5]

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[5]Clark, 4. Clark also notes that "Ironically, as the nation was being represented as an asylum for the oppressed it was rapidly constructing asylums in which

America is thus presumed to be morally superior to Europe because of, among other things, the founding fiction of American innocence engendered by a pristine and ostensibly "vacant" wilderness. The narrator thus approaches England with ideological blinders firmly in place, for he still believes in America as morally superior and unique, as the telos of world history; therefore, in relation to this New Eden, Europe can be none other than a thoroughly corrupted, fallen world.

The narrator thus journeys with little hope in his search for a democratic refuge. However, as he proceeds through the maze-like city he finds an unexpected oasis, the theatre district. Even more unexpected is the reception he receives here, for contrary to the American Ideology, he is met "by a sudden cheery summons in a voice unmistakably benevolent." Significant to Melville's tale is the fact that the bringer of cheer is "some sort of a working-man," a direct contrast to the aristocrats encountered by the narrator earlier. The laborer easily perceives the narrator's desire to enter the theater and offers him an admission ticket: "You

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to incarcerate its own misfits," n. 154. Clark's note speaks directly to the ironic situation in "The Two Temples" in which the oppressed narrator, seeking Christian and democratic asylum, finds himself jailed in the Tombs for his efforts. A somewhat similar situation is also evident in "Bartleby."

want to go in; I know you do" (TT, 161). The offer is unexpected but sincere, quite unlike the treatment the narrator had received in America. However, his ideology still intact, the narrator responds to this expression of altruism with shame at having, for the first time in his life, having been offered and taken charity. As Browne indicates, the American Ideology of independence and rugged self-reliance "rebels at the thought."[6]

Rowland has pointed out that the narrator does not know the true definition of charity or caritas: "Positive charity, he declares, is a humiliating kind of gift; negative charity is forbearance."[7] The narrator's skewed definition, however, demonstrates exactly how the American Ideology functions. His definition of and reaction to charity is illustrative of a national defense mechanism which attempts to stem any perceived attack on the ideas of individualism and self-reliance. Thus, a neutral definition is substituted for the more threatening "caritas," and as a result charity becomes transformed into that which is improper or demeaning. Furthermore, by being overly protective of individualism the Dream actually disallows charity (and as we have seen in "Temple First," negates any hope for democratic

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[6]Browne, 206.

[7]Rowland, 10.

communion) by its subsequent overemphasis on competitive laissez-faire relations.

To sum up, John McWilliams indicates how the American Ideology employs decoys to conceal the reality of social relations. In his comment on charity in another Melville story, "Poor Man's Pudding," he states: "The ideals of liberty and equality conveniently allow Americans not to be charitable."[8] Therefore, even though he has been in dire need of it, the narrator admits charity has never been available to him in America.

In a significant step, however, the narrator has swallowed his pride which had largely been responsible for his complicity with the congregation earlier. To the unexpected offer of charity he concludes:

> Why these unvanquishable scruples? . . . You, and all mortals, live but by sufferance of your charitable kind . . . Stush for your self-upbraidings, and pitiful, poor, shabby pride, you friendless man without a purse.--Go in. (TT, 161)

By accepting the charity despite the American Ideology and by seeing one of the myths of Europe exploded, the narrator thus begins to gain autonomy from ideology and

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[8]McWilliams, Jr., 178.

begins to move, if shakily, toward a more objective view of reality. As Fisher states, "A minor miracle has taken place and an even greater one awaits him in the theater."[9]

His entrance into the theater parallels that of the church in "Temple First" in that he gains access by a small side entrance and must climb several flights of winding stairs to find his place. The ironic difference, however, is that here in a foreign, ostensibly corrupt land, the genuine pilgrim finds cheerful welcome. Unlike the "ecclesiastical inns" (TT, 160) he anticipated discovering in London and which he did actually encounter in New York, the narrator has finally found an appropriate shrine to democracy. Upon entering the inner sanctum of the theater, he "divined" "a fixed human countenance facing [him] from a mysterious window of a sort of sentry-box or closet. Like some saint in a shrine, the countenance was illuminated by two smoky candles" [emphasis added] (TT, 162).

Having presented his ticket the narrator moves toward his seat only to discover further parallels to the first temple. A sudden burst of orchestral music, for example, revives "the memory of the organ anthems

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[9]Fisher, 57.

[he] had heard while on the ladder of the tower at home" (TT, 162). However, from this particular vantage point the narrator no longer feels an outcast as he had in the first temple. Significantly, he begins to feel a sincere sympathy for the levelled, democratic mass which surrounds him now:

> From the same dizzy altitude, through the same fine-spun, vapory crapey air; far, far down upon just such a packed mass of silent human beings; listening to just such grand harmonies; I stood within the topmost gallery of the temple. But hardly alone and silently as before. This time I had company. Not of the first circles, and certainly not of the dress-circles; but most acceptable, right welcome, cheery company, to otherwise uncompanioned me. Quiet well-pleased working-men, and their glad wives and sisters, with here and there an aproned urchin, with all-absorbed, bright face, vermilioned by the excitement and the heated air, hovering like a painted cherub over the vast human firmament below. (TT, 162)

As suggested by the celestial cherub hovering above the human firmament, the narrator here invokes a parallel to the artificial heaven of the tower of "Temple First." But this time he is in the company of the "right welcome, cheery" workingmen and their families. The pyrotechinc heaven of "Temple First" and its feigned democratic spirit have now been replaced with a truly democratic communion. The narrator is now possessed of a fundamentally different conception of

what constitues his high heaven. Rowland had earlier noted that from his vantage point in the tower the narrator had presumptuously allied himself with the spirits of heaven, while viewing the congregation with pride and envy. Now the narrator allies himself in true democratic fashion with the common people. His acceptance of them is full and sincere, no longer marred by an envy for the aristocratic "dress-circle" (TT, 162). Having sincerely accepted these blessed workers, the narrator has revealed himself to be contrite and ready to participate in a symbolic act of communion.

The nature of the communion which follows is in keeping with Melville's treatment of the entirety of "Temple Second," for in Spenserian fashion Melville's allegory functions on both the religious and political levels. Indeed, as noted, both these aspects are inextricably bound up in the American Dream.[10] Religious significations are first suggested by the cup of ale which is "offered . . . in all directions," very much like the communal chalice which is offered at the Sacrament of Communion. In this version of the church, however, it is offered to the narrator not by a robed priest but by a "ragged boy," who states: "Dad's gone to

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[10]Fisher notes that Emerson's "American Scholar" incorporated the Kingdom of God into the American Dream, 60.

Yankee-land, a-seekin' of his fortin; so take a penny mug of ale, do, Yankee, for poor dad's sake" (TT, 163). Frederick Asals succinctly summarizes the Christian allusions of this episode. He sees "in this 'glorious boy,' this 'prince-like benefactor' who freely offers his reviving drink for 'dad's sake' the outlines of the original Cup-Bearer who also gave His refreshment at the cost of personal sacrifice and in His Father's name."[11]

The political symbolism of this episode stems, of course, from the reference to Yankeeland, and specifically from the father's hope in Yankeeland. In discussing various aspects of equality prevalent in America, Toqueville observed that "no element of equality in the American scene had more profound effects than the equality of hope for the increase of the citizen's material wealth."[12] The father thus represents the spirit of the original pioneering Americans who were similarly attempting to escape a Tartarus like the London described by the narrator, in order to seek their fortunes and reestablish their human dignity.

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[11]Frederick Aslas, "Satire and Skepticism in 'The Two Temples,'" Books at Brown, 24 (1971), 15.

[12]Quoted from Don M. Wolfe, The Image of Man in America, 2nd ed. (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1970), 58.

When the narrator responds to the boy's offer, implying that he cannot pay for the refreshment, the boy states, "Never do you mind, Yankee; drink to honest dad." Thus follows the narrator's climactic "strange burst" of praise as he is overcome by this act of charity freely and sincerely given: "With all my heart, you generous boy; here's immortal life to him!" (TT, 163).

Having thus partaken of the sacrament of love, the narrator now becomes a new man: "That unpurchased penny-worth of ale revived my drooping spirits strangely. Stuff was in that barley malt; a most sweet bitterness in those blessed hops. God bless the glorious boy!" The narrator then very significantly announces his new perspective on the world around him:

> The more I looked about me in this lofty gallery, the more was I delighted with its occupants. . . . With an unhurt eye of perfect love, I sat serenely in the gallery, gazing upon the pleasing scene, around me and below. (TT, 163)

The narrator has thus been loosed from the ideological constrictions that had earlier denied his identity by causing him to play inauthentic roles. In this act of sincere communion, the narrator finds new hope for America. For if the son reflects the father,

then the communal hope of both Christianity and democracy still obtains. In the father and son the dream is again presented in its pristine state and made newly tenable, for they are the true "salt of the earth" whom Christ promised would inherit the earth. Because he no longer plays the role acted by the congregation of "Temple First," the narrator too has now become, in a genuine way, one of the "salt of the earth."

Significantly, however, Melville is not equating Christ's Promised Land with America exclusively; to do so would be to revert to the chauvinistic dominant American Ideology which had originally caused the narrator to be deceived about America and Europe in the first place. Along these lines, Fisher summarizes one of the vital meanings of the tale:

> What Melville has implicitly questioned . . . is not the meaning of the dream or even its connection with the promised kingdom of Christian thought. In his own way he seems to have affirmed these. Rather, he challenges, though somewhat obliquely, the self-styled role of America as the redeemer nation (wherein there are seemingly insurmountable obstacles to redemption) and the idea of America as the necessary locus for realization of the American Dream. The symbolic strength of the dream survives, despite what has happened to its substance.[13]

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[13]Fisher, 61.

Fisher's study ends here; however, there is much more to Melville's tale. While it is clear in the contrasting panels of the diptych that Melville was critical of what had become of the dream's "substance," his criticism did not end there. Melville is just as concerned to explore what has allowed the dream to be corrupted; he is interested in examining the actual mechanism that is responsible for its demise. This explains why Melville's tale does not end with the significant realizations that the narrator has made as a result of his communion experience. For it is not enough that the narrator acknowledge that the dream has been corrupted by having succumbed to the isolating individualism which Madison feared and by having repeated the sins of Europe as evinced by its increasingly stratified society. The culmination of the pilgrimage is not to be found only in the narrator's realization about the substance of the Dream, rather it finds its culmination in the narrator's perception of the act which suppresses acknowedgement of the Dream's corruption.

Appropriately enough, the narrator becomes wary of the gap between appearance and reality, between performance and ideal, and explicitly connects the anti-

democratic church of "Temple First" with the theater and with acting:

> But now the curtain rises, and the robed cardinal advances. How marvelous this personal resemblance! He looks every inch to be the self-same, stately priest I saw irradiated by the glow-worm dyes of the pictured windows from my high tower-pew. . . . Hark! The same measured, courtly, noble tone. See! the same imposing attitude. Excellent actor is this Richelieu! . . . Do I dream, or is it genuine memory that recalls some similar thing seen through the woven wires? (TT, 164)

By equating the priest with the actor Macready and with the pretender/performer Richelieu, the narrator acknowledges the power of rhetoric, of ideology, to manipulate a receptive audience. The culmination of all that the narrator has learned on both sides of the Atlantic is thus encapsulated in his final questions: "Hath mere mimicry done this? What is it then to act a part?" (TT, 164). Ultimately, as one critic has suggested, these questions reduce the institution of Christianity to the level of mere form.[14] But in keeping with the tale's dual focus, they also very significantly expose the American rendition of democracy, that is, its ideology, as empty form, as nothing more than an act. Melville's irony thus

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[14]Asals, 7-18.

functions to the end: now when the narrator is no longer an actor, he finally discovers precisely what it is to act a part.

In keeping with the religious motif of "Temple Second," Melville's final image summarizes the narrator's career as a democratic pilgrim. The narrator describes the response of the audience to the play: "Starting to their feet, the enraptured thousands sound their responses, deafeningly; unmistakenly sincere" (TT, 164). Having joined in the genuine Christian charity and democratic communion of the audience, the narrator is thus himself now a participant in their unmistakable sincerity. However, Melville also very purposefully echoes in this image the congregation of "Temple First": "Like the general rising at the Resurrection, the whole host came to their feet, amid a simultaneous roll, like a great drumbeat, from the enrapturing, overpowering organ." Accordingly, if the narrator in his role as pilgrim, physician, and Jonah is a figura of Christ, then the conclusion of "Temple Second" suggests that he himself has significantly been resurrected. The narrator, who had been literally entombed in the tower of "Temple First" is in "Temple Second" symbolically resurrected and delivered from the constricting walls of ideology.

CHAPTER 5

"THE 'GEES"

"The 'Gees" is a little-known sketch which Melville published in Harper's Monthly in 1856 toward the very end of his experimentation with short fiction. Perhaps because of its brevity and the slightness of its production, few critics have discussed the work at any length. It is in fact usually entirely ignored by Melville scholars. The most significant analysis of the sketch to date has been presented by Carolyn Karcher, who states that "the almost total obscurity which Melville's "The 'Gees" has known since its publication . . . altogether belies the considerable insight it furnishes into Melville's much debated racial views." Karcher rightly argues that "the sketch epitomizes Melville's manner of applying what he called 'the great Art of Telling the Truth' to the explosive issues of race and slavery that were currently polarizing his countrymen."[1] Briefly, Karcher argues that Melville presents the 'Gee as one of his "fictional analogues for

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[1]Carolyn L. Karcher, "Melville's 'The 'Gees': A Forgotten Satire on Scientific Racism," American Quarterly, 27 (1975), 421. Karcher later revised this essay for inclusion in her book Shadow Over the Promised Land. I have found it useful to cite from both versions where appropriate.

the Negro."[2] The sketch itself is a satire on the pseudoscientific racism of ethnology, which in turn constituted a masquerade for racial bigotry and proslavery propaganda.

While I concur with Karcher's reading, I contend that "The 'Gees" is not a discourse about racism alone. As in his other tales, Melville embodies in the narrator the mindset which he is attacking, which in this case is largely, although not exclusively, the racist mindset.[3] What is significant in Melville's sketch is the narrator's blindness to his own prejudice and viciousness. The narrator, with whom we are led to sympathize, states: "Of all men seamen have strong prejudices, particularly in the matter of race. They are bigots here." However, his ostensibly objective comment is immediately undercut by an outright but totally unperceived racist statement: "But when a creature of inferior race lives among them, an inferior tar, there seems to be no bound to their disdain."

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[2]Carloyn Karcher, Shadow Over the Promised Land (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), 160.

[3]One critic, Sidney Kaplan, "Melville and the American National Sin," in Seymour L. Gross and John Edward Hardy (eds.), Images of the Negro in American Literature, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 158, takes the narrator literally and thus pronounces Melville himself a racist and the sketch "the ugliest, most tasteless thing Melville ever wrote."

Melville's strategy of displaying such a self-deceiving mind at work serves to recenter the focus of the sketch from racism to what we have called ideology. The sketch fixes upon the narrator's peculiar perception of reality which allows him to live his vicious racism as disinterested innocence.

From the very outset of the sketch, for example, the narrator shamelessly and guiltlessly refers to the natives of Fogo as "'Gees," a term he himself has admitted is a racial slur. The narrator states, "In short, by seaman the abbreviation 'Gee was hit upon in pure contumely" (G, 356). Such allusions (which betoken his racism) have been, he states, "quite natural and easy." "For instance," he continues, "I have said 'the two 'Gees,' just as another would say 'The two Dutchmen,' or 'The two Indians.' In fact, being myself so familiar with 'Gees, it seemed as if all the rest of the world must be" (G, 355). The narrator's "natural assumptions" are the work of ideology, for rather than constituting a set of conscious, professed beliefs, ideology is expressed through the self-evident <u>natural</u> way one perceives reality. The narrator's natural assumption is that the "'Gee" appellation is rightfully given and that the 'Gees are indeed an inferior people. Furthermore, he similarly assumes that his audience

naturally shares in his delusion. Such an assumption is possible because ideology is, as James H. Kavanagh states, not simply a matter of different opinions but rather of different realities altogether.

As Kavanagh further notes, "An ideology structures 'seeing' and 'feeling' before it structures 'thinking.'"[4] Appropriately enough, Melville incorporates throughout his text references to eyes and sight as ironic allusions to the misperception of reality which characterizes the sketch. At the outset, for instance, the narrator's explanation for his account is couched in terms of sight: "My auditors have opened their eyes as if to say, 'What under the sun is a 'Gee?'" For their "enlightenment" he has published his sketch.

After several other references to sight, the narrator then presents a curious but revealing bit of advice for descrying a healthy 'Gee. First, "the eye, like a shot" must, "at one glance," "rake" in the entire body of the 'Gee. He continues, saying:

> Thus far for bone and bottom. For the rest, draw close to, and put the centre of the pupil of your eye--put it, as it were, right into the 'Gee's eye; even as an eye-stone, gently, but firmly slip it in

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[4]Kavanagh, 353.

> there, and then note what speck or beam of viciousness, if any, will be floated out. (G, 359)

The Biblical reference to Matthew 7:3 could not be more appropriate to the focus of Melville's discourse in pointing up the ideological blindness from which the narrator suffers. While attending to the mote in his neighbor's eye the narrator is purblind to the existence and enormity of his own sin. As the Biblical passage itself would connote, any viciousness to emerge from such an offensive procedure would derive from the narrator himself.[5]

As I have already intimated, the narrator's viciousness is not limited exclusively to racism as Karcher argues. Rather, his viciousness is a function of his embodying an ideology which serves as a smoke-screen for exploitative capitalism. Overall, then, the sketch focuses on ideology, but it takes as its central subject matter the economics of the 'Gee. The first half of the sketch concerns his suitability for employment as a sailor in one of the greatest American capitalistic enterprises, the shipping industry. The

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[5]Karcher, Shadow, 179, on the other hand, states that "the experiment leaves ambiguous whether the symptom of 'viciousness' to emerge from such sadistic inspection will derive from the 'Gee's eye or from his scrutinizer's."

second half deals with the outlandish strategies for hiring 'Gees. For as the narrator facetiously announces "there is a choice even in 'Gees" (G, 358).

A sea captain must be able to distinguish the green from the ripe 'Gee, the green being more tractable and hence more easily exploited. Warner Berthoff, the only critic to suggest that "The 'Gees" might be read primarily in terms of economic considerations, states that

> the ironic stress on this race's aboriginal "incivility" and on its submissiveness when "green" and subtle recalcitrance when "ripe" and "knowing" may carry an allusion to the character of the working classes in general within the exploitative order of modern economic life.[6]

The 'Gee thus becomes representative of the cankerous underside of the American Dream and the sketch itself ultimately concerns the deficiencies of the capitalist enterprise as it was being enacted in Melville's America.

The narrator, like so many of the bachelor characters he resembles, is unaware of this darker side of reality because he is immersed in the optimistic American Ideology of capitalism. A fundamental element

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[6]Berthoff, 358.

of this ideology is that "if a business enterprise produces a profit it is socially beneficial, even though there might be undesirable side-effects."[7] Under this rubric chattel slavery as well as wage slavery are justifiable. The 'Gee thus becomes an analogue not only for the black slave but for all exploited laborers. Accordingly, the narrator's viciousness then extends to all oppressed workers and particularly to any "alien" work force, be it from Africa, China, or in this case the island of Fogo.

Because his ideology is so pervasive, the narrator believes himself to be truly innocent. As a result he presents a deceivingly genial front. He appears to be a friendly, world-wise and authoritative storyteller. His purpose for writing his account seems quite ingenuous. He would simply like to tell his tales unimpeded. In order to enlighten his auditors about the identity of the 'Gee, he states, "I have repeatedly had to interrupt myself and not without detriment to my stories." He is careful to note that the idea for publishing his description was not even his own. So that the narrator's stories might go uninterrupted in the future, the narrator's friend had "hinted at the advisability of

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[7]Morse Peckham, Romanticism and Ideology (Greenville, Fla.: Penkevill Publishing, 1985), 205.

writing out some account of the 'Gees, and having it published," to which "happy suggestion" the narrator had responded with alacrity (G, 355). However, as shall be shown, underlying his pleasant disposition and innocuous purpose lurks a menacing design.

The narrator himself is not an overt threat to the 'Gee and to the class of people the 'Gee represents. The narrator cannot be directly equated to the more ruthless representatives of exploitative capitalism such as John Jacob Astor, who is implicated in "Bartleby," Melville's tale of Wall Street. Instead, the narrator resembles such Melvillean capitalistic bachelors as the unnamed lawyer in "Bartleby," Captain Amasa Delano in "Benito Cereno," and the Knights Templar in "Paradise of Bachelors." While the narrator is not himself a profiteer, like these characters he replicates the utilitarian perspective which marked the Astorian magnates and which Melville observed to be an increasingly characteristic trait of American capitalism. It is this complicity in the utilitarian capitalist ideology which condemns him along with Melville's other blameworthy bachelors and which constitutes his viciousness.

The narrator's viciousness is particularly evinced by his strictly utilitarian perspective. To the

narrator the 'Gee's identity is strictly a matter of his function as a worker. He can only be perceived in terms of his use. His very physicality is described in terms of utility. For example, the narrator describes the 'Gee's body as analogous to "native dress," thus equating it with practical and functional wearing apparel. This dress is, in fact, described as "compendious" (G, 357), because at the same time that it is comprehensive, it is economical and efficient.

Furthermore, like the serviceable roof of a hut, the 'Gee's head is "well thatched," obviating the need for a hat; while his "serviceably hard heel" [emphasis added] conveniently substitutes for shoes (G, 357). The 'Gee is also described as "capable of enduring extreme hard work, hard fare, or hard usage, as the case may be" (G, 356). Significantly, the narrator very callously correlates work, fare, and usage, assuming that all three may be rightfully expropriated by the captains of the sailing industry. The 'Gee's identity and value is thus exclusively measured by his exploitability.

As the narrator continues to describe the economic aspects of the 'Gee, he discloses the ruthless rationale provided by the ideology of capitalism. With great satisfaction the narrator notes that 'Gees "are always ready to be shipped" (G, 358). With apparent

ingenuousness the narrator adds that the 'Gee "never asks for wages. He comes for biscuit" (G, 357). He continues: "Any day one may go to their isle, and on the showing of a coin of biscuit over the rail, may load to water's edge with them" (G, 358). The narrator's spritely tone would suggest that the 'Gee has been offered economic opportunity, when in reality as a newly created wage laborer working for a "coin of biscuit" (G, 358) the 'Gee is being exploited for what is literally a subsistence wage, if indeed not less.[8] The 'Gee, in fact, "relishes" (G, 356) this mean compensation according to the narrator, even though all other sailors "demand dollars" (G, 360).

The narrator, of course, has forgotten to take into account his earlier description of the 'Gee's dire situation. As a native of an infertile, "Macadamized" wasteland (G, 356) which produces only fish, the 'Gee is destitute and desperately near starvation. The narrator is also all too conveniently silent on the score of the green 'Gee's naivete about wages and more significantly on the captains' eagerness to exploit the 'Gee's impoverished and ignorant state. Instead, the captains' gouging is avidly promoted under the guise of the 'Gee's

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[8]This coin of biscuit is also reminiscent of the ginger nuts on which Bartleby subsists.

"undersell[ing]" (G, 360) his fellow shipmates; thus what is tantamount to "wage slavery" is justified under the auspices of sound capitalism.[9]

As a representative wage slave the 'Gee is analogous to another notoriously exploited labor force, the Chinese "coolies." The 'Gee is, in fact, associated with the "chinaman" later in the sketch. Here the viciousness of the narrator's utilitarian perspective is particularly betrayed. Exhibiting an attitude similar to that conferred upon both the Chinese and black labor forces, the narrator states that

> owing to the clumsiness of their feet ere improved by practice in the rigging, green 'Gees are wont, in no inconsiderable numbers, to fall overboard the first dark, squally night; insomuch that when unreasonable owners insist with a captain against his will upon a green 'Gee crew fore and aft, he will ship twice as many 'Gees as he would have shipped

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[9]Karcher, Shadow, 183, makes several references to economic aspects of the sketch which further corroborate my analysis. She notes that the calculated exploitation on the part of the sea captains pits "these exploited classes against each other instead of uniting them against their common oppressor." Karcher, 163, also makes a similar correlation to "wage slavery," noting that "both the economic exploitation to which Cape Verdeans [the Fogoans] lent themselves and its effects on their white competitors in America dramatized the plight of northern blacks under capitalist "wage slavery." As my own analysis suggests, the 'Gee as wage slave can also refer to the notoriously exploited Chinese labor force and to the Caucasian workers in the northern factories, as well as to northern blacks.

> of Americans, so as to provide for all contingencies. (G, 358)

Revealingly, the narrator's disapproval is limited to the unreasonableness of the owners and the impracticality of insisting on stocking a ship with only green 'Gees. The captains' unscrupulousness in shipping twice as many 'Gees and the reality of the appalling "contingencies"--which translates into an anticipated loss of at least half of the crew--are shamelessly ignored. Karcher likens such inhumane shipping of the 'Gees to the "Middle Passage" from Africa, as the slave transport was called, in which a similarly devastating death toll was routinely anticipated.[10] The conclusion to be drawn is that, like the blacks and Chinese of which the 'Gee is representative, these islanders are useful but also expendable.[11]

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[10]Karcher, Shadow, 176.

[11]Wage slaves were arguably worse off than southern slaves, at least according to southern apologists and to some northern pamphleteers. Hannah Josephson, in The Golden Threads : New England's Mill Girls and Magnates, (New York, 1949), 279, cites an anonymous pamphlet entitled The Condition of Labor which addresses the plight of northern wage slaves who were as dependent on capital as the slaves were on their masters. The pamphleteer states, "I do not say that the two systems are identical; nor am I concerned now to point out their differences. I say their difference is not so great as is commonly supposed, nor so great as to justify the northern slaveholder in crying out very loudly against his Southern brother."

Like the Chinese, the 'Gee is a newly discovered work force "which until a comparatively recent period, remained almost undreamed of by seafaring Americans" (G, 357), but one which is quickly taken advantage of with terrible efficiency by the captains of industry. The narrator notes that

> It is now some forty years since he [the 'Gee] first became known to certain masters of our Nantucket ships, who commenced the practice of touching at Fogo, on the outward passage, there to fill up vacancies among their crews arising from the short supply of men at home. By degrees the custom became pretty general, till now the 'Gee is found aboard of almost one whaler out of three. (G, 357)

The narrator states the reason they are in request is that the "unsophisticated" 'Gee asks only for biscuit:

> He does not know what other wages mean, unless cuffs and buffets be wages, of which sort he receives a liberal allowance, paid with great punctuality, besides perquisites of punches thrown in now and then. But for all this, some persons there are, and not unduly biassed by partiality to him either, who still insist that the 'Gee never gets his due. (G, 357)

The narrator's "clever" turn of phrase is revealing. Despite his attempt to attribute malice to an anonymous source--"other persons"--his inappropriately

lighthearted tone actually flaunts the disdain he harbors for the 'Gee.

The narrator's ruthless scorn for the 'Gee is further illustrated in his very next comment. He states:

> His [the 'Gee's] docile services being thus cheaply to be had, some captains will go the length of maintaining that the 'Gee sailors are preferable, indeed every way, physically and intellectually, superior to American sailors--such captains complaining, and justly, that American sailors, if not decently treated, are apt to give serious trouble. (G, 357)

Again the narrator expresses no concern for the welfare of the 'Gee, noting only that American sailors will not tolerate indecent treatment. The 'Gee is thus "preferable" for the strictly utilitarian reason that he is more easily and necessarily made tractable by corporal punishment than his American counterpart.

Significantly, the narrator is never aware of the extent of his contempt. He astutely suggests at one point that the "innate disdain of regularly bred seamen toward 'Gees receives an added edge" by the fact that "the 'Gees undersell them" (G, 360). The implication is that, all in all, the racism of the seamen should be taken with a grain of salt since it is economically motivated. Here the narrator reveals the extent of his

blindness: he is unaware that, as a sailor himself, he too is manipulated by underlying interests, that he too has capitulated to the same economically-motivated racism.

Because of his ideology, the narrator feels himself completely blameless. Thus he can again be equated to all of Melville's capitalist bachelors. These characters, from their smug outlooks and in their snug retreats, made comfortable at the expense of exploited workers, stand aloof from the oppressive worlds of Babo, Bartleby, and of the young factory workers of "Tartarus of Maids." As the lawyer states, "Misery hides aloof, so we deem that misery there is none" (B, 55).[12] From the vantage point of the easy chair from whence he presumably tells his stories, the narrator, like these bachelors, wraps himself in innocence believing that he has retreated from the scene of racist exploitation, all the while remaining in actual complicity with its facilitating ideology.

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[12]Similar sentiments are expressed in "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids": "The thing called pain, the bugbear styled trouble--those two legends seemed preposterous to their bachelor imaginations. How could men of liberal sense, ripe scholarship in the world, and capacious philosophical and convivial understandings--how could they suffer themselves to be imposed upon by such monkish fables? Pain! Trouble! As well talk of Catholic miracles. No such thing--Pass the sherry, sir" (PBTM, 209).

As Kavanagh suggests, ideology functions so effectively and absolutely because its hold on the subject is totally unconscious. It refuses to be made explicit even though its strategies may seem transparent to a reader outside the ideological framework. Such is the case with one of the central strategies of the narrator's ideology for affirming and justifying itself--the appeal to a debased form of romanticism. The narrator takes as a given, as a fundamental part of his weltanschauung, what can only be described as a perverted romantic view of what he considers to be the "natural" order of the world.[13] In this view, Nature is enlisted in the capitalist's cause as an arbiter of the status quo.

To understand how the capitalists have appropriated nature to their own use one need only look to Melville's "Tartarus of Maids," in which Lowell-like industrialists attempt to hide their satanic mills within an ostensibly idyllic forest, which Melville notes ironically, lies near "the bottom of [Devil's] Dungeon" (PBTM, 211).[14]

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[13] Melville is often critical in the short fiction of debased appeals to romanticism and nature as a means of circumventing reality. In "Cock-A-Doodle-Doo," for example, he parodies both Wordsworth's "Resolution and Independence" as well as Emersonian transcendentalism.

[14] "The Bell-Tower" and "The Lightening-Rod Man" can also be interpreted to show capitalistic appropriation of nature. Bannadonna would outdo nature to create a

In two other tales, "Benito Cereno" and "Bartleby," Melville's bachelors similarly appeal to nature as a way of avoiding their own responsibilities and the reality of injustice and exploitation. The lawyer prescribes the sky and the grass as remedies against Bartleby's imprisoning walls. Delano yields to the healing power of Nature as a means of reaffirming the corrupt status quo, stating, "the past is passed . . . yon bright sun has forgotten it all, and the blue sea, and the blue sky; these have turned over new leaves" (BC, 314). Both view nature as a panacea for oppression. But as the fates of Bartleby and Benito Cereno indicate, the nature invoked by the lawyer and Delano proves to be an ineffective placebo.

Like these unconscious representatives of capitalistic enterprise, the narrator too finds vindication in nature for what would otherwise be viewed, were it dealt to an American, as maltreatment. Having noted that the 'Gee is capable of enduring hard work and hard usage, the narrator appeals to natural authority, declaring that "In fact, upon a scientific view, there would seem a natural adaptability in the 'Gee to hard times generally" (G, 356). In his

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new serf, the iron slave Talus, while the Lightening-Rod Man attempts to control nature with his rods for the sake of selfish economic gain.

ideological view "the kindly care of Nature" has providentially, and quite conveniently it would seem, conspired with the capitalist in "fitting" the 'Gee for his lot (G, 356).

Furthermore, kindly Nature in its wisdom has apparently chosen not to outfit the 'Gee with an "exquisitely delicate sensibility":

> His physicals and spirituals are in singular contrast. The 'Gee has a great appetite, but little imagination; a large eyeball, but small insight. Biscuit he crunches, but sentiment he eschews.(G, 356)

The viewpoint expressed here is reminiscent of Delano's belief that blacks possess "the unaspiring contentment of a limited mind" (BC, 279). Thus if one can assume that the 'Gee is distinct from Americans, if they are by nature satisfied with less, then there is no obligation to treat them as one would their American counterparts.[15]

Ideological justification of exploitation, however, need not rely exclusively on appeals to nature. Another way in which ideology passes off exploitative racism is

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[15]The same viewpoint is espoused by the lawyer in "Bartleby," when he asserts that Turkey was the type whom prosperity hurt. Such logic virtually necessitates exploitation by the "paternalistic" capitalist; it is justified as deliverance from the perils of plenty.

by besmirching the character of the 'Gee. Under the pretense of well-deserved disdain the 'Gee may be exploited guiltlessly. This is made evident during the course of the narrator's discussion about the difficulty of hiring 'Gee's, particularly by way of Fogoan middlemen. "Many a young man," he begins, "has been thrown and badly hurt by a 'Gee of his own choosing." Therefore, instructs the narrator,

> On no account should the shipper negotiate for his 'Gee with any middle-man, himself a 'Gee. Because such an one must be a knowing 'Gee who will be sure to advise the green 'Gee what things to hide and what to display to hit the skipper's fancy [emphasis added]. (G, 358)

Melville implies, of course, that the "knowing" middleman or the "ripe," "sophisticated" 'Gees are, because of their knowledge, detrimental to profitable exploitation. But the narrator's true disdain is revealed through the twisted logic he exhibits in his example of "the rashness of trusting to one of these middle-men" (G, 358).

He recalls the case of a 'Gee who was recommended to a New Bedford captain "as one of the most agile 'Gees in Fogo":

> There he stood straight and stout, in a flowing pair of man-of-war's-man's trowsers, uncommonly well filled out. True, he did not step around much at the time. But that was diffidence. Good. They shipped him. But at the first taking in of sail the 'Gee hung fire. Come to look, both trowser-legs were full of elephantiasis. It was a long sperm-whaling voyage. Useless as so much lumber, at every port prohibited from being dumped ashore, that elephantine 'Gee, ever crunching biscuit, for three weary years was trundled round the globe. (G, 359)

What the narrator has achieved in this anecdotal description is a complete inversion of the roles of the exploited and exploiter. Clearly offended by the duplicity and ingratitude of the 'Gee, the narrator vigorously accuses the ailing man of taking advantage of the captain at the same time that he completely ignores the history of 'Gee exploitation which he has already shared with his readers. Because he is blinded by his ideology, he cannot perceive the overwhelming evidence that attests to the inhumanity and oppression routinely perpetrated on the 'Gees. Adding insult to injury, the narrator even begrudges the 'Gee his paltry sum of biscuit.

What is subtly evidenced by the narrator's reaction to the 'Gee's supposed ingratitude is the paternalistic attitude which characterized American imperialism under the auspices of Manifest Destiny. The narrator's entire

sketch, in fact, might be taken as a self-serving imperialistic allegory. The 'Gees' homeland is first described in terms of an economic Tartarus. The narrator states that

> The Isle of Fogo, that is "Fire Isle," was so called from its volcano, which, after throwing up an infinite deal of stones and ashes, finally threw up business altogether, from its broadcast bounteousness having become bankrupt" [emphasis added] (G, 356).

The end result, notes the narrator, is that the isle became desolate and its inhabitants destitute. But, with the arrival of the American shippers, the 'Gees are offered deliverance, so the allegory goes, in the form of ship's biscuit. This deliverance might very well have more profound connotations for the narrator. With its suggestion of a communion wafer, this biscuit, which is not only "relished" but "held [as] a sort of lozenge" (G, 356) by the 'Gee, symbolizes the ostensible economic salvation offered the wretched islanders by what Melville himself described as "the Messiah of Nations."

Ultimately, the effect of the narrator's anecdote with all of its enveloping religious connotations, is to foster contempt not only for the sick 'Gee, but for all 'Gees for abusing the messianic deliverance offered them. As a result, all mistreatment of 'Gees is

conveniently converted into a rational act of justice, of punishment well deserved by an ungrateful people.[16]

Furthermore, on a more pragmatic level, it also justifies the drastic tactics for culling 'Gees for hire and for ascertaining their true constitution. The narrator recalls a particular Captain Hosea Kean who, in the middle of the night surprises the 'Gee to be shipped, puts pistols to the heads of family and friends, and

> bursts upon his 'Gee, so to speak, in the very bosom of his family. By this means, more than once, unexpected revelations have been made. A 'Gee, noised abroad for a Hercules in strength and an Apollo Belvidere for beauty, of a sudden is discovered all in a wretched heap . . . Solitude is the house of candor, according to Captain Kean. In the stall, not the street, he says, resides the real nag. (G, 359)

In Kean's hiring methods Melville consciously insinuates the racist economic enterprise of kidnapping African natives from their homelands and families so that they could be "transported" and sold into slavery.

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[16]In his commentary on "Benito Cereno," Kavanagh notes a similar need for rationalizing the mistreatment of the oppressed: "the use of armed force must never be understood for what it is (the social equivalent of the class interested violence of aristocrats and slave-owners), but as a mistake resulting from excessive goodness" (374).

These appeals to nature and to the 'Gee's character outlined above are both ultimately integrated into the most insidious aspect of the legitimating ideology, its dehumanization of the exploited. In order to alleviate guilt, the exploiters had to search out appropriate self-serving evidence. Here Karcher's analysis of scientific racism in "The 'Gees" comes into play. Ethnology, as the pseudoscience was called, purported to have discovered racial differences which affirmed the "rightful status of the Negro on scientific grounds."[17] In reality, the goal was to "transmute racial prejudice into accredited fact."[18] Its pernicious theories were nothing less than a scientific attempt to degrade certain races to a subhuman level in the interest of economic exploitation. As Karcher argues, the narrator's own account mimics and participates in this form of degradation.

Within the narrator's account this degradation takes both subtle and blatant forms. In a clever but revealing turn of phrase the narrator states of the 'Gee, "Biscuit he crunches, but sentiment he eschews" (G,356). While the phrase itself is meant to be humorous with its play on the near-homonym of "chew,"

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[17]Karcher, "Forgotten Satire, 422.

[18]Karcher, "Forgotten Satire," 425.

the force of it is to denigrate the 'Gee as a human being. If the 'Gee is assumed to abstain from all sentiment, then he is denied basic human emotions and feelings; the end result is his expedient removal from the realm of common humanity.

Much more devastating and denigrating, however, is the narrator's "natural and easy" (G, 355) ability to foist animal characteristics upon the 'Gee. The narrator illustrates precisely how his mind works by remarking that while in the "horse-latitudes," [emphasis added] bored captains will debate whether the 'Gee's "teeth are intended for carnivorous or herbivorous purposes, or both conjoined" (G, 357). Later, the narrator's equine association is made blatant when he states:

> To know 'Gees--to be a sound judge of 'Gees--one must study them, just as to know and be a judge of horses one must study horses. Simple as for the most part are both horse and 'Gee, in neither case can knowledge of the creature come by intuition. How unwise, then, in those ignorant young captains who, on their first voyage, will go and ship their 'Gees at Fogo without any preparatory information, or even so much as taking convenient advice from a 'Gee jockey. By a "Gee jockey is meant a man well versed in 'Gees. Many a young captain has been thrown and badly hurt by a 'Gee of his own choosing. (G, 358)

As Karcher notes, the procedure for hiring a 'Gee requires inspecting the prospective employee in a manner that "smacks of putting a horse through its points."[19] The narrator presents the following instructions "for the benefit of inexperienced captains":

> Get square before him, at, say three paces, so that the eye, like a shot, may rake the 'Gee fore and aft, at one glance taking in his whole make and build--how he looks about the head, whether he carry it well; his ears, are they over-lengthy? How fares it in the withers? His legs, does the 'Gee stand strongly on them? His knees, any Belshazzar symptoms there? How stands it in the region of the brisket? etc., etc. (G, 358)

It is of course appropriate to Melville's purposes and to the narrator's as well that the horse be the primary animal reference employed. The horse parallel confirms for the narrator the 'Gee's status as a beast of burden, whereas for Melville it alludes to the disturbing reality that, like chattel and wage slaves, the horse constituted the backbone of the American economy.

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[19]Karcher, Shadow, 178. Karcher also states that Melville "conjure[s] up the slave market scenes described by so many visitors to the South. Observers often remarked on the resemblance of slave markets to horse markets and likened the 'transactions in buying and selling slaves' to the 'spirit of jockeying."

Another of the narrator's mental associations reveals the bestial status which the 'Gee is accorded by the ruling class. In his informative manner, the narrator recounts that a monkey-jacket, "a rude sort of shaggy garment . . . first known in Fogo," is often called a 'Gee jacket by sailors. Significantly, this recollection promptly brings to mind that "there is no call to which the 'Gee will with more alacrity respond than the word 'Man'" (G, 360). The reference to the monkey has thus reminded the narrator of the humanity which the 'Gee ostensibly lacks. With great relish the narrator goes on to say,

> Is there any hard work to be done, and the 'Gees stand round in sulks? "Here, my men!" cries the mate. How they jump. But ten to one when the work is done, it is plain 'Gee again. "Here, 'Gee! you 'Ge-e-e-e!" In fact, it is not unsurmised, that only when extraordinary stimulus is needed, only when an extra strain is to be got out of them, are these hapless 'Gees ennobled with the human name. (G, 360)

The narrator's flippant observation illustrates that the 'Gee's bestial status has become so entrenched that it can actually be manipulated to the advantage of the exploiter. It attests that only when it is expedient <u>not</u> to associate the 'Gee with a species of monkey is he

plied with the ennobling name of "man." Otherwise his brutish identity remains intact.[20]

While the animal imagery indicts its users, Melville also employs it to his advantage to implicate the economic system which breeds it. In startling fashion Melville transmutes the bestial imagery into culinary references in order to expose and characterize the dark, appalling nature of the relationship between exploiter and exploited.

Food and eating, in fact, constitute a motif of sorts within the sketch. The 'Gee, for example, is said to have a "great appetite" (G, 356). The narrator mentions the 'Gee's limited diet of fish as well as the general debate over whether the 'Gee is herbivorous or carnivorous. Also, as we have seen, much is made of the biscuit which the 'Gee is ever crunching. (It is mentioned six times within the short sketch.)

This food motif takes a macabre turn, however, when the images are converted into metaphors and similes for the 'Gee himself. According to the narrator, the 'Gees,

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[20]Karcher, Shadow, 181, however, observantly notes that even though such appeals to the 'Gees's sense of manhood are mere ploys, "to be resorted to in extreme emergencies and then only for the duration of the crisis, nevertheless, Melville implies, the 'Gee's inalienable humanity, like that of all slaves, triumphs over the dehumanizing prejudice of the master class by compelling this minimal acknowledgment."

(whose name in the plural form suggests the edible game "geese") have been "stocked" on their island of Fogo, from whence they have been "drafted off as food for powder" (G, 355-56). The narrator then makes more specific culinary suggestions, first by referring to the "brisket" of the 'Gee and then in stating his own opinion that "Like the negro, the 'Gee has a peculiar savor but a different one--a wild, gamey savor, as in the sea bird called haglet" (G, 357). This is immediately followed by what can only be taken as a blatantly cannibalistic insinuation: "Like venison, his flesh is firm but lean" (G, 357). Such cannibalistic intimations give new connotations to the 'Gee epithets "ripe" and "green" and to the ship captains' peculiar appetite for 'Gees. Like boardinghouse diners, they cry, "Away with that ripe 'Gee! . . . Green 'Gee's for me!"(G, 358).

References to cannibalism and its use metaphorically are not at all unusual in Melville's work. In Typee Melville treated literal cannibalism as a means of questioning our fundamental definitions of civilization and barbarism.[21] He employs it

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[21]WIthin the context of her study of ethnolgy, Karcher, Shadow, 175, also makes passing reference to cannibalism in "The 'Gees." She states, "Ironically, cannibalism was one of the barbarities associated with the Negro's savage state in Africa, from which

figuratively to similar effect in several of the short works. In "Poor Man's Pudding and Rich Man's Crumbs," for example, the narrator refers to the impoverished mass as a "mob of cannibals" (PMPRMC, 175) who, in a figurative cannibalistic feast are allowed to consume their exploiters symbolically. Invoking the type of the arch-oppressor, the narrator asks, "But where is Napoleon's head in a charger? I should fancy that ought to have been the principal dish" (PMPRMC, 176).[22] In "Bartleby" each of the characters is defined in terms of food metaphors, "and each finally is just so much fodder consumed by [the lawyer] to keep his 'snug business' moving along."[23] In each case the barbaric practice of cannibalism refers specifically to the economic exploitation committed in an ostensibly civilized world.

Thus we are presented with the proper context for

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proslavery apologists claimed the slave trade had 'rescued' him. Yet Melville, who had ten years earlier defended the Typees as more 'humane and virtuous,' despite their cannibalism, than the 'polished communities of Europe,' now reverses the traditional notions of barbarism and civilization altogether, hinting that the latest refinement of European civilization--the science of probing racial differences--involves connoisseurship in human flesh."

[22]William B. Dillingham, 119-142 makes similar references to cannibalism in "Poor Man's Pudding and Rich Man's Crumbs," but arrives at different conclusions.

[23]Allen F. Stein, "The Motif of Voracity in 'Bartleby,'" Emerson Society Quarterly, 21 (1975), 29.

interpreting Melville's use of cannibalism in "The 'Gees." Within this "civilized" world of American shipping, economic exploitation of the "barbarous and semi-barbarous" 'Gee is tantamount to cannibalism. Not only is the 'Gee viewed as a beast of burden in this economic enterprise, but in utilitarianism taken to its utmost extreme, he is actually deemed food for human consumption. In an uncanny resemblance to the cow, the 'Gee, with his "butter teeth," "hybrid" complexion and "tough leather suit from tip to toe" (G, 356-57), has become nothing more than human livestock to be fattened on biscuit and then devoured by what Melville regarded as a cannibalistic capitalist system.

Ultimately, the narrator's very ideology is itself cannibalistic. In discussing the educability of the 'Gee, the narrator makes passing reference to "<u>finishing off</u> wild Indians in the classics and higher mathematics" [emphasis added] (G, 360.) Here the punning reference to eating ironically suggests devouring the exploited peoples, not through assimilation, but rather by swallowing up their very identity. This is in fact the work of ideology; for the sake of economic interest it devours the identities of its victims by foisting upon them degrading, self-serving stereotypes.

What appears at the outset, then, as an innocent sketch told by a genial storyteller proves on the basis of its embodied ideology to be a macabre tale of cannibalistic menace and economic viciousness. The narrator's avowed purpose had been to present an accurate account of the 'Gee in order to forestall further interruption and "detriment" to his maritime stories. But his real purpose is to establish the 'Gee's identity as an inferior. Thus he preserves within his sketch the sub-human status foisted upon the 'Gee by the hegemony, reinforcing the hierarchy which asserts the narrator's supremacy at the expense of exploited laborers such as the 'Gee. And if his sketch is any indication, the narrator's stories will continue to perpetuate the status quo, subsequently unimpeded by any future questions about the 'Gee's true identity.

At the sketch's conclusion, the narrator unwittingly announces the threat that he has been attempting to stave off. He states that the 'Gees that one encounters in the various seaports, such as New Bedford and Nantucket,

> are not the 'Gees of Fogo. That is, they are no longer green 'Gees. They are sophisticated 'Gees, and hence liable to be taken for naturalized citizens badly sunburnt. (G, 360)

In other words, notwithstanding ideological machinations, the 'Gee is too obviously akin to other Americans and fellow human beings. His case is too similar to that of the "Chinaman," who "in new coat and pantaloons, his long queue coiled out of sight in one of Genin's hats, has promenaded Broadway, and been taken merely for an eccentric Georgia planter" (G, 360).

In sum, the 'Gee's humanity is not to be denied--unless, as the narrator concludes, one "apply to any sharp-witted American whaling captain, but more especially to the before-mentioned old Captain Hosea Kean" (G, 361). For these captains of the sailing industry are the victimizers of the 'Gee, and like the narrator whose ideology they enact, they are purblind to its exploitative nature. Ironically recalling the eye motif established at the beginning of the sketch, the narrator states in his conclusion that "a stranger need have a sharp eye to know a 'Gee, even if he see him" (G, 361). But as his narrative has revealed, if he is to "know" the 'Gee as the narrator does, he had rather have a "Kean" eye, that is, the ideologically blinded eye of Captain Hosea Kean.

CHAPTER 6

STUDIES OF "BENITO CERENO" AND IDEOLOGY

With the exception of "Bartleby," "Benito Cereno" is Melville's only tale to be systematically analyzed in terms of ideology. Sandra Zagarell's "Reenvisioning America: Melville's 'Benito Cereno'" and James H. Kavanagh's "'Benito Cereno' and the Liberal Hero" present varied but worthwhile examinations of the role of ideology in "Benito Cereno." These studies offer a helpful grounding for my own analysis in the following chapter. Zagarell and particularly Kavanagh extend their studies into the historical and theoretical realms, respectively, which go beyond the scope of this study. Thus, rather than discuss each essay in depth, I will elaborate the points which relate most directly to my own work.

James Kavanagh argues that ideology itself is the subject of "Benito Cereno." He explains that

> "Benito Cereno," like much of Melville's late fiction, has been a charged and controversial text for dominant critical ideologies because it effects what Althusser calls an "internal distantiation" of an ideology, requiring us, through its principal character, "to "perceive" . . . <u>from the inside</u>, by an

internal distance, the ideology in which it is held."[1]

Kavanagh goes into significant detail to explain how this "distantiation" functions within the tale and thus I quote him at some length:

> Like other Melville texts, "Benito Cereno" presents [a] double image of itself through an ironic narration, which establishes at once the "lived experience" of, and the "internal distance" from, a specific ideological "lived relation to the real." "Benito Cereno's" peculiar third-person, determinate point-of-view, quasi-stream-of-consciousness narration ironizes the "real" Amasa Delano's discourse from the Narrative of Voyages and Travels with subtle, often minute, syntactical changes and framing devices; this narration is Melville's textualizing of the ideology, allowing the reader either to identify with the experience of the fictionalized American Captain, or to take a critical distance from it. The reader can, and indeed must (up to a point), "live" the textual experience from within Delano's peculiar subject position; but the text, in maintaining the difference between Delano's "eye" and its own "I," also allows the reader to see, this time as an object, "the way Delano sees."[2]

Because the reader is usually "deceived" along with Delano on the first reading, the reader is thus obliged to read "Benito Cereno" twice. But rather than rereading the text itself a second time, the reader must

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[1]Kavanagh, 357.

[2]Kavanagh, 358.

read his or her own spontaneous "relation to" the text and to the ideology it puts into production. Kavanagh contiinues:

> By making us "follow the leader" through the ironic unfolding of Delano's ideology, the text becomes that ideology's immanent critique, bringing us up against the complex of violence and death that subvene the ideology, and allowing us to break from it."[3]

Irony allows us to break from the seductive grip of identification between reader and Delano. This is suggested at the outset of the tale with Delano's initial reaction to the sighting of the San Dominick:

> Captain Delano's surprise might have deepened into some uneasiness had he not been a person of singularly undistrustful good nature, not liable. . . to indulge in personal alarms, any way involving the imputation of malign evil in man. Whether, in view of what humanity is capable, such a trait implies, along with a benevolent heart, more than ordinary quickness and accuracy of intellectual perception, may be left to the wise to determine. (BC, 239)

The text thus preserves and conceals radically negative judgments about Delano. Even though readers may feel that in the phrase "benevolent heart" something positive has been said about Delano's character, what

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[3]Kavanagh, 358.

has actually been communicated is that Delano is witless.

Later Delano launches into his notorious reflection on the "nature" of blacks, one sampling of which is his belief that a black individual such as Babo is by nature docile because of his "unaspiring contentment of a limited mind, and that susceptibility of blind attachment inhering in indisputable inferiors." The text continues, concluding that "Delano took to negroes, not philanthropically, but genially, just as other men to Newfoundland dogs" (BC, 279).

As Kavanagh notes, "The text certainly 'knows' what is going on here." The realization that Delano is actually being manipulated by a rebellious black man who threatens to kill him makes it impossible to read the text in terms of Delano's ideological assumptions about blacks. One can read the text only as "fixing for a scathing ironic gaze the preconscious mind-set of a character whose ignorance of his own mortal danger derives precisely from his <u>seeing</u> blacks as equivalent to 'Newfoundland dogs.'"[4]

Delano's ideological "seeing" causes him to misrecognize everything aboard the <u>San Dominick</u>--hence the success of Babo's masquerade. "Delano's

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[4]Kavanagh, 367.

misrecognition here exemplifies the 'overdetermination of the real by the imaginary' in ideology."[5] This "overdetermination of reality" is expressed symptomatically in Delano as megalomania, paranoia, and racism. Like a megalomaniac, Delano feels that he is the center of attention because he is a benevolent American. For example, he thinks that a lowly sailor risks his own life to save him out of "gratitude for a kind word." Like a paranoid patient, Delano assumes that everyone under control of Cereno is plotting against him. This then culminates in Delano's racism in which he interprets the evidence before him in every way but the most obvious because of his assumption that blacks are "too stupid" (BC, 270).

In actuality, Delano is the center of attention and is in mortal danger, but this sense is not congruent with the "reality" he sees. Delano perceives

> as real only the situation that conforms to his imaginary struggle with his sole "equal," in rank, race, class, power, and therefore (for Delano) intelligence, Cereno.[6]

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[5]Kavanagh, 364.

[6]Kavanagh, 364.

Similarly, the whole scene on the San Dominick seems unreal to Delano "because it presents an image of social power relations that lacks the appropriate reference points for any reality he can construct."[7] As a result, Delano's anxieties center around loss of control--either the loss of his own authority or the perception of Cereno's loss. But what most confuses him is the lack of repressive actions aboard ship which would reconfirm his heavily imaginary sense of himself (as a "natural" authority over racial inferiors). The oppressive apparatuses are absent that would reproduce the ideology or "lived relation to the real," which would make his reality look as it should. What calms him is the restoration of authority, the megalomanic project of relieving the "weak" Cereno of his command and paranoid project of heading off the "evil" Cereno's plot against Delano's own command.

Throughout the tale, Delano's ideology represents him as good-natured and naive. He actually goes as far as associating himself with a recollected childhood image of himself as the innocent "Jack of the Beach." It is an association which causes Delano to state, "you are a child indeed; a child of the second childhood, old

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[7]Kavanagh, 365.

boy' you are beginning to dote and drule I'm afraid" (BC, 272). To this Kavanagh adds the observation:

> When a text has a character warning himself that he is "beginning to dote and drule," the critical reader might legitimately read the ironic distance signified as insufficiently measured by notions of "naivete,"' or "undistrustful good nature." And when the text a few sentences later, puts in Delano's head the words: "Ha! glancing toward the boat; there's Rover; good dog; a white bone in her mouth. A pretty big bone though, seems to me," one can easily read an association between Delano's vision of the surf as a "bone" in the mouth of his boat and the text's image of the skeleton affixed to the prow of the San Dominick--a bone on which this ideology will have to choke.[8]

The text reveals ultimately that Delano's misrecognition of himself is not naivete. It is not a mistake deriving from Delano's supposed innocence, his belief in his moral goodness; but, rather, it is a condition of his deliberate and violent defense of privilege, power and self-image.

Evidence of this stems from the textual moment when Delano, after realizing that he has been deceived, that his ideology has been manipulated, orders his men to retake the San Dominick. The text reveals that Delano knows that blacks are in effect unarmed and unaware of

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[8]Kavanagh, 369.

their vulnerability since their guns have been "secretly put out of order." Despite Cereno's pleading "with all his remaining strength" against the scheme to attack the slaves--even though he is the only one with a semblance of "real" interest in recapturing the slaves--Delano persists. He is unconcerned about the mass slaughter of blacks and whites in his desire to forcibly restore "the proper image and order of the 'real.'" Delano, of course, "because of his class-political position as the representative of the interests of the officers and owners as a whole, piously refrains from going, sending out his chief mate, an ex-pirate" to do the dirty work of leading the charge.[9] Finally, the text reveals that Delano has "subtly but definitely" lied to his crew about the presence of gold upon the San Dominick. "They were told," "the more to encourage them" (BC, 297), that the ship carried a cargo of gold and silver, even though the two ship's inventories given in the text make no mention at all of any precious metals aboard ship.

Kavanagh states that

> Delano's violent repression of the blacks against Cereno's own entreaties, seeks to reconstruct that comforting order of things in which other men assume their proper relation

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[9]Kavanagh, 371.

> to him, a relation like that of "Newfoundland dogs."

Delano's desire is to avoid recognizing that this order is constructed out of his own egotistical and violent practices. Instead, he wants to believe and to actually "see" this order as justified by his own essential innocence. Kavanagh continues, stating,

> In the ideological discourse of a man like Delano, of the "civilization" that produces such men, the use of armed force must never be understood for what it is (the social equivalent of the class-interested violence of aristocrats and slaveowners), but as a mistake resulting from an excess of goodness, a mistake to be abolished from memory and history as quickly as possible.[10]

It would thus be a mistake, Kavanagh concludes, to view Delano as simply naive and innocent, for through ideology the text reveals Delano as culpable and in complicity with Benito Cereno and Aranda in perpetuating racial oppression.

Sandra Zagarell's approach to "Benito Cereno" also involves ideology, although she employs it in the strict dictionary sense as "a set of ideas." She explores how various cultural ideas and constructs influence Delano's

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[10]Kavanagh, 374.

vision of the action aboard the San Dominick, of himself and ultimately of America itself. "Benito Cereno" thus lays bare an elaborate ideology by means of which America denied the historical implications of its institutions such as slavery. It presents slavery as one of several "powerful synedoches for economic activities and cultural disjunctions that threatened the country's stability at every level."[11]

In examining Delano's representative mode of thinking, Melville critiques northern antebellum thought by letting it speak for itself. "Benito Cereno" elaborates a complex ideology which "dramatizes the epistemological fancy footwork Delano must perform in order not to understand what is amiss on the San Dominick."[12] Delano's sentimental racism and expansionist mentality and chauvinism are only two of his ideology's many components. The tale also incorporates such components as the code of gentility, debased romanticism, and sensational melodrama.

Delano's racism dispels his suspicions about a conspiracy by reaffirming his comfortable ideology about the blacks' docile inferiority. A black mother, for example, is seen as a "dam" and her child a "wide-awake

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[11]Zagarell, 245.

[12]Zagarell, 246.

faun" (BC, 267). Delano's chauvinism also alleviates his fears about a plot against him when he recalls that "as a nation . . . these Spaniards are all an odd set; the very word Spaniard has a curious conspirator, Guy-Fawkish twang to it" (BC, 273).

Furthermore, Delano subscribes to a code of gentility central to Victorian America by which he views and judges acts and gestures. His persistent faith in this conspicuously irrelevant code obscures reality and prevents Delano from recognizing clues as clues.

> Because he values gentility, he is fooled by the crude parody enacted by the steward Francesco, whose excessive shuffling and bowing cause Babo to look 'askance,' and declares himself pleased with the man's 'nods, and bows, and smiles; a king indeed--the king of kind hearts and polite fellows.'"[13]

Delano also partakes of a debased romanticism which he combines with his racism to enable him to view blacks as noble savages. This form of romanticism allows him to avoid the responsibility of understanding human experience and perceiving reality for what it is.

Despite all of these components, Delano's ideology fails him and finally forces him to reinterpret the San Dominick as a pirate ship with Cereno posing as a

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[13]Zagarell, 247.

legitimate captain. Zagarell notes that the theme of piracy had become popularized and sentimentalized by the 1840s. Thus Delano recollects tales of Malay pirates who lured unsuspecting seamen aboard empty-looking ships, while below deck "prowled a hundred spears with yellow arms ready to upthrust them through the mats" (BC, 262). Zagarell states:

> These fantasies relieve him of the need to think inductively, for personally threatening though they are, they do not admit of any significant threat to the social order. Moreover, Delano's sensationalist explanation of the San Dominick as a pirate ship complements his sentimental racism: not only are both informed by cliche, but the two are interchangeable. When Delano finally discovers the true nature of the blacks' position, he shifts effortlessly from sentimentalizing them to brutalizing them as monsters, "flourishing hatchets and knives, in ferocious piratical revolt."[14]

All of these components reinforce Delano's faith in the social order, despite the fact that the social hierarchy is actually arbitrary and unstable. Delano can only assume that the social order is stable and determinate, whereas the disempowered, such as the slaves, who can clearly perceive inequity, will be alert

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[14]Zagarell, 248.

to and intent on exploiting every ambiguity within the cultural "order."

Zagarell states that "Benito Cereno" incorporates the stance of the blacks into a

> stunning depiction of the instability of any culture emanating from a fluctuating social order. The novella demonstrates that the hierarchy and the characteristics of both race and gender thought to be natural by antebellum Americans, are merely conventions; it also implies that all culture is a human creation, subject to change and frequently unstable.[15]

The inversion of the usual master-slave conditions, presenting whites as slaves and blacks as enslavers, shows racial relations to be cultural constructs. It reveals that racial dominance is a matter of circumstance:

> Babo and Cereno encircle each other in a perpetual embrace in which the ruler plays ruled and ruled plays ruler, and from which racial authority emerges as a question of context only."[16]

Gender too is revealed to be a cultural construct. Because the status of women in western culture was

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[15]Zagarell, 250.

[16]Zagarell, 250.

traditionally low, blacks were feminized in order to perpetuate and justify their "inferiority." Accordingly, they are viewed by Delano as "natural valets and hairdressers" (BC, 278). Similarly, the slaves emasculate Cereno by forcing him to wear an empty scabbard "artificially stiffened." In both cases it is clear that no absolute such as sex actually undergirds gender.

Zagarell culminates her examination of the instability of the social order by stating that

> Melville goes beyond portraying race and gender as cultural constructs, moreover to suggest that all meaning in his readers' world derives from convention and that meaning itself is therefore unfixed. In the blacks' revolt, Melville may represent his increasing sense of the fluidity of meaning. . . . He may also have seen this fluidity to result from the essential instability of a social order based on a highly unequal distribution of power. "Benito Cereno" suggests that even under normal circumstances, at least in a slave society, conventional ideologies like Delano's remain coherent only at the price of vast oversimplification. In reality mutability prevails."[17]

Zagarell continues, noting that "even artifacts are cultural markers lacking inherent properties." Delano, in fact, indicates this contingency musing that the San

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[17]Zagarell, 251.

Dominick's rusty main-chains are "more fit for the ship's present business" of transporting slaves than for their original purposes on war vessels. Once the slave revolt has exposed the instability of the social order, other artifacts such as hatchets, normally used in clearing land, acquire new functions as weapons in the hands of the slaves.[18]

"More dramatically," states Zagarell, "unexceptional parts of the cultural fabric emerge as unspoken languages which encode mutually exclusive meanings, some of them seditious." Babo's properly slave-like ministrations to Cereno seem appropriately solicitous to Delano but signify covert threats to Cereno. Similarly, Cereno's fainting spells manifest ill-health to Delano, but signify passive resistance to Babo.[19]

Clothing too is revealed as a mutable type of visual language. Babo's near-nakedness suggests the image of the subservient, powerless slave, but it also "signifies his power and intelligence in appropriating the connotations of the rags which inscribe his former subjugation."[20] Furthermore, Babo's gestures and body

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[18]Zagarell, 251.

[19]Zagarell, 251.

[20]Zagarell, 251.

language totally disrupt meanings through their multivalence. Babo's smile, while a threat to Cereno, is a reassuring sign to Delano as well as to the other blacks, although for very different reasons. After cutting Cereno during shaving, Babo turns his face "half round, so as to be alike visible to the Spaniard and the American. His expression seemed "to hint, that he was desirous, by getting his master to go on with the conversation, considerately to withdraw his attention from the recent annoying accident." Zagarell further observes that

> Babo's single gesture conveys consideration to Delano, menace and malice to Cereno; on another level, it communicates to the reader Babo's extraordinary skill at appropriating and subverting all the nuances of the traditional role of the black body servant.[21]

Thus according to Zagarell, "Benito Cereno" reveals that "the conventions whose fixity men like Delano take for granted are exceedingly fluid."[22] The multivalent indeterminacy of these ideological conventions, particularly in a society founded on inequity, is exposed by the disempowered groups such as the slaves of

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[21]Zagarell, 252.

[22]Zagarell, 246.

the San Dominick, who convert such conventions into unspoken languages of dissent and insurrection.

This summary of some of the central aspects of Sandra Zagarell's and James Kavanagh's articles provides the premises upon which my discussion of "Benito Cereno" builds. We agree to the centrality of ideology to "Benito Cereno" and to the notion that ideology hides the culpability of Delano as well as the fundamental instability of the social order. From this point on, however, my own analysis expands into different directions to present a new reading which examines ideology as an inclusive confidence game, with both historical and linguistic ramifications.

CHAPTER 7

"BENITO CERENO"

"In landlessness alone resides the highest truth." Moby Dick

In Moby Dick and Pierre, Herman Melville began to explore a fundamental loss of belief in God or a grounding absolute. Nina Baym states:

> Given Melville's Emersonian-derived notion of language as proceeding from a divine Author or Namer, his loss of belief in an Absolute entailed the loss not only of truth in the universe but also of coherence and meaning in language. In Moby Dick we are poised on the brink of an awareness of these losses; in Pierre we have tumbled into the abyss."[1]

In this chapter I suggest that "Benito Cereno," Melville's most significant work following Pierre, is an exploration of the very depths of that abyss.

The descent into the abyss is guided by Melville's discovery of an American confidence game. On the level of history, America espoused freedom and equality for all and yet it acquiesced to slavery. The disparity of these two positions could only be legitimized through a

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[1]Nina Baym, "Melville's Quarrel with Fiction," PMLA, 94 (1979), 910.

game of confidence. This game of self-deceit we would now label as ideology, that preconscious mindset which prestructures all experience and reality to accord with one's self-appraisal. James Kavanagh notes that ideology functions by allowing

> one to imagine one's relation to the world in such a way as to 'feel' comfortable (i.e. fully justified) about oneself, even while one is actively working to reproduce repressive social relations.[2]

Thus Delano can say that "slavery breeds ugly passions in man"; but he can believe that blacks possess the "unaspiring contentment of a limited mind. . . inhering in indisputable inferiors" (BC, 279). The confidence game of ideology thus enslaves blacks at the same time that it frees Delano from guilt. "Benito Cereno" is thus, as Carolyn Karcher notes, "an exploration of the white racist mind and how it reacts in the face of a slave insurrection."[3]

Several critics along with Karcher have shown how Melville challenges cultural assumptions about blacks in "Benito Cereno." Michael Rogin, for one, notes that by portraying the master-slave relationship as a charade it

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[2]Kavanagh, 357.

[3]Karcher, Shadow, 128.

is revealed to be a cultural construct rather than a "natural" relationship as Delano regards it.[4] Sandra Zagarell also notes at length how racial characteristics as well as racial dominance thought to be natural by antebellum Americans were in fact merely matters of custom and circumstance.[5] The ideology of which Delano partakes is thus revealed to be nothing other than an arbitrary system. It is based on convention which is designed solely to keep the hegemony, the ruling social body, empowered. It thus has no absolute authority or grounding sanction other than hegemonic modes of awareness and the actions that proceed from them. Delano's innocent self-image and world order are thus radically ungrounded or unfixed and guaranteed only by his confidence in what is in essence an imperiled human construct.

But the confidence game does not stop at this historical level. In "Benito Cereno" the problem of slavery ultimately becomes linked with the problem of coherence and meaning in language itself; it embodies Melville's confrontation with the epistemological abyss described by Baym. Zagarell argues that, by revealing ideology as unfixed because culturally based, Melville

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[4]Rogin, 208-220.

[5]Zagarell, 250.

concludes ultimately that "all meaning in his readers' world derives from convention and that meaning itself is therefore unfixed." Zagarell goes on to hint, and rightly so, that "In the blacks' revolt, Melville may represent his increasing sense of the fluidity of meaning."[6] It is my purpose to demonstrate that this is indeed the case, to show that Babo's rebellion can be placed into a linguistic context which reveals Mel-ville's profound despair about the indeterminacy of language and meaning. The American confidence game to which I have been referring thus functions at both the historical and the linguistic levels.

These two elements are combined in the central conflict of "Benito Cereno," a conflict which in this sea tale is couched in terms of fixity and flux. Fixity anchors the historical social order as well as the linguistic meaning of language, while fluidity or flux subverts both. Within the tale, Delano comes to embody this conflict. In his attempt to maintain the fixity of the hegemonic status quo, he must deny flux, flux which is represented historically in the narrative by the

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[6]Zagarell, 251. Along these same lines Edgar A. Dryden, Melville's Thematics of Form: The Great Art of Telling the Truth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1968) 206, states that in "Benito Cereno" "the Spanish vessel is the stage for a masquerade which is ontologically subversive."

subversive slave revolt and linguistically by what the poststructuralists have shown to be the straying indeterminacy of language.

Before moving into an examination of how Delano "fixes" reality through an ideological confidence game, we should note that Delano cannot tolerate flux of any sort. At the beginning of the tale "a strange sail coming into the bay" is sighted by someone on his ship. The narrative voice reports that "the longer the stranger was watched the more singular appeared her maneuvers" (BC, 240). The ship appears to be on an erratic course, reeling and wavering uncertainly on the ocean. Delano is compelled--in what will become a paranoid reaction to ambiguous motion--to contain this movement by boarding the ship and ultimately instituting his own notion of order by "withdrawing the command" of its captain and imperialistically placing the unruly ship "in charge of his second mate" and thus bringing it to "anchorage" (BC, 262-63).

Here, at the very outset, the fluidity or what the poststructuralists have labeled the "play" of meaning is suggested by the way Delano interprets the ship as a sign. To him the "uncertainty of her movements" (BC,240) is interpreted as a sign of distress, but the informed reader, on the second and subsequent readings,

recognizes the ambiguous movement of the ship as a sign of the freedom attained by the slaves on board who have revolted against their oppressors. Ironically, Delano's attempt to foist his interpreted meaning upon the ship by fixing its wavering motion will ultimately be equivalent to fixing the free movement of the blacks by returning them violently to slavery.

Significantly, Delano's desire for fixity will govern his judgments and actions throughout the tale. During his stay aboard the unanchored ship he will attempt to fix the flux of ambiguous meanings. This fixity is imposed through an ideology which constructs and perceives a "lived relation to the real" which is designed to guarantee Delano's status while it corroborates his innocent self-image. Quite ominously, however, as soon as Delano boards the San Dominick and his own boat returns to the mother ship, "the wind entirely died away, and the tide turning, began drifting back the ship helplessly seaward" (BC, 244).

On first gaining the deck of the San Dominick, Delano notes the sharp contrast with his ship. Compared to the fixed orderliness of his own crew, the subversive movement and noisy confusion of the numerous blacks "repeatedly challenged his eye" (BC, 247) and his "regulated mind" (BC, 280). But both the eye and the

mind find confidence reaffirmed in images of fixity which deny the reality of flux and corroborate the ideological "fixation" of the blacks as inferior and content. This denial of flux is echoed early in the tale by the first of a series of anomalous wave images: "The sea, though undulated into roods of swells, seemed fixed, and was sleeked at the surface like waved lead that has cooled and set in the smelter's mold" (BC, 239).

Thus when "currents" of suspicion cross Delano's mind, he "fixes" them by resorting to his anchoring ideology.[7] For example, climbing on deck, Delano is "at once surrounded by a clamorous throng of whites and blacks . . . the latter outnumbering the former more than could have been expected" (BC, 242). To this flux of unanticipated slave movement, Delano's "staid scrutiny" latches on to the comforting sight of the oakum pickers, who, "in venerable contrast to the tumult below them, were couched, sphynx-like " [emphasis added] in a square (BC, 243). Ironically, Delano's ideology views the sphinx as a reassuring sign of the blacks' stabilizing docility rather than as a sign of the riddle

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[7]The entire quotation from "Benito Cereno" reads: "Ah, these currents spin one's head round almost as much as they do the ship" (BC, 267). Here Delano's desire to fix the "currents" in his mind and the waves themselves is joined with his desire to fix the movement of the ship.

they pose; he is unwilling to acknowledge the mystery of their behavior, to solve their riddle. Thus Delano avoids the truth of the indeterminacy of signs. Through images of fixity he is able to disavow the furtive police action of the oakum pickers while the subsequent irony makes the reader aware of the subversive, straying nature of language.

The gigantic figure of Atufal, the enchained slave king, also presents a series of challenges to Delano's eye and mind, but ones which he always manages to subdue through his ideological fixation. As part of Babo's scheme, Atufal is required upon every hour to stand before Cereno and ask for pardon. When the imposing figure of Atufal is first introduced, his foreboding appearance and very real threat cause Cereno to start. Quite to the contrary, however, Delano calmly views Atufal, "not without a mixture of admiration," as a "royal spirit" (BC, 255, 256). But this self-stroking comment is possible only because Delano assumes he can safely make it. For in the shackled Atufal Delano sees a comforting sign of utter fixity:

> An iron collar was about his neck, from which depended a chain, thrice wound round his body; the terminating links pad-locked together at a broad band of iron, his girdle. (BC, 255)

However, because circumstances aboard ship are in reality contrary to Delano's expectations, he remains plagued by the subversive movement within his own psyche. "Vagar[ies]" (BC, 280) and peculiar "images flitted through his mind" (BC, 268). Thus Atufal is later able to induce a subtle form of subversive movement by causing Delano, like Cereno before him, to start suddenly from the slave's unexpected appearance.[8] But, repressing his doubts in total compliance with Babo's silent bidding, Delano immediately concludes that this start "was perhaps, purely physical." The image of Atufal "monumentally fixed at the threshold, like one of those sculptured porters of black marble guarding the porches of Egyptian tombs" thus becomes for Delano a comforting sign. Through his ideology, he is able to interpret Atufal's fixed presence as "singularly attesting docility even in sullenness" (BC, 287).

Nonetheless, when Delano next hears the echo of the ship's flawed bell striking the hour, announcing Atufal's reappearance, his mind "responsive to the portent, swarmed with superstitious suspicions." As the

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[8]Stewart Justman, "Repression and Self in 'Benito Cereno,'" Studies in Short Fiction, 15 (1978) 302, notes that such movements as Delano's twitches are actually manifestations of the reality which he is straining to repress.

narrator states, "In images far swifter than these sentences, the minutest details of all his former distrusts swept through him." Unable to free himself entirely from his questions about Atufal, Delano asks, "Was the negro now lying in wait?"(BC, 292).

However, suspicion is quickly banished when in a comprehensive view Delano takes in, among other things, the comforting sights of "his trim ship lying peacefully at anchor" and "the oakum-pickers still gravely plying their fingers." These images of fixity conjoined by his "charmed eye" with "the chained figure of the black" allow his "clenched jaw and hand" to relax, assuring him of the contentment and passivity of the slaves (BC, 292).

Delano's ideological fixing is not limited to the blacks alone, however. Delano similarly appeals to fixed images when the subversive movement of Cereno and the Spanish sailors challenge his eyes. When Cereno is first introduced, he is described in terms of perplexing movement:

> . . . like some hypochondriac abbot he moved slowly about, at times suddenly pausing, starting or staring, biting his lip, biting his finger-nail, flushing, paling, twitching his beard, with other symptoms of an absent or moody mind. (BC, 245)

The Spanish sailors themselves befuddle Delano in their strange movements. At one particular point, Delano, "wrapped in thought, was passing near a dark hatchway, leading down into the steerage, when, perceiving motion there, he looked to see what moved" (BC, 261). It turns out to be a man hiding a jewel, the same man Delano had noticed making odd movements earlier in the day. Soon thereafter, he notices that

> something moved nigh the chains. . . . a Spanish sailor, a marling spike in his hand, was seen, who made what seemed an imperfect gesture towards the balcony . . . Had some random, unintentional motion of the man. . . been mistaken for a significant beckoning?" (BC, 269).

Delano cannot account for these mysterious gestures, and, overcome with the flux of meanings, he feels a "squeamish sort of emotion . . . as one feeling incipient seasickness" (BC, 271).

To relieve this motion sickness Delano turns to the stabilizing sight of his boat, which "to his delight" was again in view:

> The less distant sight of that well-known boat--showing it, not as before, half-blended with the haze, but with outline defined, as that its individuality, like a man's was manifest; that boat, Rover by name, which,

> though now in strange seas, had often pressed the beach of Captain Delano's home, and, brought to its threshold for repairs, had familiarly lain there, as a Newfoundland dog; the sight of that household boat evoked a thousand trustful associations, which, contrasted with previous suspicions, filled him not only with lightsome confidence, but somehow with half humorous self-reproaches at his former lack of it. (BC, 271-72)

For Delano, the familiar ship presents comforting reassurance of order and stability. Significantly, the comfort which Delano draws from the image of his ship distinctly outlined and defined is associated with a man's individuality made "manifest." Here again then is evidence of how Delano takes comfort in identities which are certain, fixed, and unambiguous--as previously evinced by his perception of the blacks and the Spaniards. However, Delano conveniently ignores contrary signs. For example, he resists the play of the name "Rover," associating it with his favorite dog rather than with the idea of straying which the word itself denotes. These familiar associations, which Kavanagh specifically equates with ideology, once again provide a stable ground from which Delano can deny subversive movement.[9]

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[9]Kavanagh, 368, states that "Ideology is precisely that network of 'a thousand trust associations' upon which Delano seizes with glee at the sight of his boat."

Thus far then it is apparent that Delano's visions of fixity function to disguise the real fluidity of meaning aboard the San Dominick. They disguise the ultimately free, and for Delano, menacing aspects of straying signs such as Babo. Instead, they corroborate Delano's ideological assumptions about world order and particularly about blacks. As Babo had anticipated in preparing his masquerade for Delano, the various fixed "tableaux"--particularly that of Atufal--play up to Delano's ideology and thus prevent him from recognizing, despite his suspicions, the fundamental instability rampant aboard the ship.

But Delano's denial of subversive movement does not end here. Just as Delano refuses to see the autonomous movement of the slaves as inherently free human beings, he also refuses to recognize the play in the very signs he employs to fix the slaves ideologically and to bolster his own innocent identity.

An excellent example of Delano's "willed ignorance" to his own manipulation of language occurs when he states: "Don Benito, I envy you such a friend; slave I cannot call him" (BC, 250).[10] Here Delano, a citizen of

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[10]Justman, 302, argues that Delano does unconsciously perceive the reality aboard ship. "He has entered into virtual agreement to be deceived. . . . He shows not innocence but willed ignorance."

the strongly abolitionist town of Duxbury, clearly seems to distance himself from slavery and its moral implications. However, he quickly reveals that he is merely coddling his own self-image and that in actuality the two terms "friend" and "slave" are synonymous in meaning. "Friend," with all of its positive connotations, becomes nothing more than a safeguard to Delano's rectitude and smug innocence.[11] When we recall that Delano "took to negroes . . . just as other men to Newfoundland dogs" (BC, 279), we comprehend the slippage of the term's referent. Then we see that his relationship to blacks in no way resembles that between a friend and a friend, but instead replicates the relationship between a master and dog. This relationship then easily slides into that between master and slave as attested by Delano's subsequent offer to purchase Babo.

Delano has thus appropriated the meaning of "friend" to suit his own purposes. Through his employment of the word, Delano not only escapes the

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[11]Delano, of course, takes great comfort in his own innocent self-image. He recalls his own childhood innocence in order to corroborate what he considers his innocence as an adult and thus alleviate his fears: "'What, I, Amasa Delano--Jack of the Beach, as they called me when a lad--I, Amasa; the same that, ducksatchel in hand, used to paddle along the water-side to the school-house . . . I to be murdered here at the ends of the earth . . .? Too nonsensical to think of! Who would murder Amasa Delano? His conscience is clean'" (BC, 272).

guilt of treating Babo like a slave, but he further enhances his own innocent self-image.[12] This same kind of self-stroking justification is revealed when it is said of Delano that "At home, he had often taken rare satisfaction in sitting in his door watching some free man of color at his work or play" (BC, 279). Of course the man is not free at all, but, like Aranda's slaves who are "free" to wander the shipdeck, he "ranges within the bounds" of Delano's ideology.

Later, upon observing a black mother nursing her child, Delano employs a more complex sign. "Well pleased" with the scene, he states "There's naked nature" (BC, 268). Associating the woman with an Emersonian vision of benign nature--a vision which reflects his own innocence--he assumes a condescending admiration for her. But as with Atufal this is a sympathy easily attained. For Delano's concept of nature is in actuality far removed from the pristine, unfettered associations he invokes. In reality the word "nature" is actually a hegemonic appropriation, a sign whose signifieds have been manipulated to accord with white programs of superiority. From this concept of

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[12]Kavanagh, 374, notes that "For Delano, the American, the sense of his own innocence and good will serves as a precondition for the forcible maintenance of political and social relations that support his privilege."

nature, for example, Delano derives such convenient stereotypes as: "Most negroes are natural valets and hair-dressers," and, whites "by nature, [are] the shrewder race" (BC, 278, 270). The meaning of nature has been drastically altered to accommodate the hegemony's self-serving desires, and thus, as a concept is emptied of meaning and is displaced by an encroaching, domesticating civilization.

Delano's appropriation and domestication of blacks is indicated by his ostensibly "romantic" portrayal of the "idyllic" scene, which of course very conveniently advances his ideological stereotypes. The woman is described as a "doe" but also as a "dam." Her nursing child is similarly described as a "fawn," but its hands are "like two paws clamoring upon her"; its mouth and nose are "ineffectually rooting to get at the mark" (BC, 267). Not surprisingly these "natural sights somehow insensibly deepened [Delano's] confidence and ease" (BC, 268). Because Delano believes himself to be viewing nature in captivity, his final comparison of the woman to a leopardess produces, in his mind at least, the same tranquilizing effect as the tame image of the shepherd dog to which Delano equates Babo. Like Atufal the woman is securely fixed, not by chains but by Delano's unacknowledged manipulation of signs.

As Carolyn Karcher notes, there is also a sexual component in this scene that must be taken into account:

> Underlying Delano's preference for the Negro in chains is an unmistakable sexual attraction toward the "naked nature" he thinks he sees in the Negro, whether embodied in the "colossal form" of Atufal or in a "slumbering negress . . .lying with youthful limbs carelessly disposed; and nursing a "stark naked" baby at her "lapped breasts."

Karcher concludes that for Delano the enslaved women aboard the San Dominick "incarnate the animal in himself--an animal that must at all costs be domesticated, but that, once domesticated, can be indulged with impunity."[13]

Through his unrecognized manipulation and appropriation of the concept of nature, then, Delano is able simultaneously to admire and to exploit this image of naked nature. The irony to which Delano is not privy is that this example of innocent nature has been enslaved and violated, symbolically raped, by his corrupt and encompassing civilization. But the analysis need not stop here, for if Delano is the representative American, then this passage suggests remarkable parallels to American history. Not only does it

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[13]Karcher, 134.

correspond to America's treatment of blacks, but it also symbolizes America's treatment of nature and the continent as well, clearly suggesting the simultaneous worship and rape of the Virgin Wilderness.

What this analysis suggests is that Delano presumes what is tantamount to "ownership" not only of the blacks, but of language itself. He appropriates the meanings of such words and concepts as "friend" and "nature." If, according to Euripides, a slave is one who cannot speak his thoughts, then Delano enslaves both blacks and language by presuming that his ideology speaks for both. In other words, the historical and linguistic confidence game in which Delano partakes is grounded on the belief that language as well as humans can be enslaved, on faith in a fixed and certain identity for the black individual and for the word or sign itself.

The end result of such fixing of identity and meaning is suggested by Melville's final image of the metaphorically fixed ocean: "the leaded ocean seemed laid out and leaded up, its course finished, soul gone, defunct" (BC, 272). Under Delano's command, the destiny of both the black individual and of the language would be a loss not only of intrinsic autonomy and freedom, but of the very soul which infuses both with life.

But as Lacan notes in his examination of the master-slave dialectic, the slave's true identity or soul, far from being fixed by Delano's conceptions, "is [exists] in the anticipated moment of the master's death, from which moment he [the slave] will begin to live."[14] This is precisely the enterprise which has been played out upon the San Dominick. Babo and the slaves have killed their master, Aranda, and affixed his skeleton to the bow as an ironic warning about the ultimate instability of authority. Thus, as inherent freedom and identity are reasserted, Melville reveals the actual unstable relations which underlie all claims to mastery. And because the hegemonic order by which Delano structures his world no longer obtains, language itself has accordingly been freed and is able to reassert its inherent identity, which the post-structuralists identify as the intrinsic and unremitting play of the word.

This play of language is particularly discernible in Babo's use of words. His freedom has fundamentally called into question all identities and all meanings aboard the San Dominick. The word "pardon," for example, receives special emphasis in Melville's

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[14]Jacques Lacan, "The Function of Language in Psychoanalysis," in The Language of the Self, tr. Anthony Wilden (New York: Delta, 1968) 79.

indictment of slavery. Its meaning is uprooted, unfixed by Babo.

Cereno, reciting Babo's script, refers to the word first, and not without difficulty, when Atufal is called before him: "'Answer,' said Don Benito, still averting his glance, 'say but the one word, pardon, and your chains shall be off'" (BC, 255). Here Delano's ideology serves Babo's purposes, for he regards the word with full confidence in its power to free Atufal. But the word has been appropriated by Babo, whose own use of it indicates its new meaning: "Proud Atufal must first ask master's pardon. The slave there carries the padlock, but master here carries the key" (BC, 256). Like the master Cereno's phallic key (and later his stuffed scabbard), the word "pardon" has been converted into a sign of impotence.

The shaving scene has long been recognized as Babo's tour de force of duplicitous meaning. The staged scene of Babo with a razor at Cereno's neck suggests fawning servility to Delano, but utter terror to Cereno. As a sign its dual aim is to corroborate Delano's ideological image of the happy, domesticated primitive at the same time that it decenters Cereno's ordered world by presenting an alien, uncanny savage.

The unsettling effect is particularly caused by Babo's repetition and subsequent deconstruction of the word "master":

> "You must not shake so, master. See, Don Amasa, master always shakes when I shave him. And yet master knows I never yet have drawn blood, though it's true, if master will shake so, I may some of these times. Now, master,' he continued. ' And now, Don Amasa, please go on with your talk about the gale and all that; master can hear, and between times, master can answer." (BC, 280-81)

Because Delano assumes a stable, determinate, familiar world, the word "master" reflects his own hegemonic status. However, the same word is used as a weapon to frighten Cereno. The word in fact petrifies Cereno because it has been loosed from its previous meanings. He cannot help but recognize its arbitrariness. For it now stands unfixed, revealing only its own empty mechanical functioning and thus the fundamental instability of language and meaning. The single sign, as a comfort to one person and a threat to the other, reveals the indeterminacy of meaning by its radical openness to contradictory readings.[15]

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[15]M. H. Abrams, A Glossary of Literary Terms, 5th edition, (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1988) 203.

But the decentering of the word does not end here. Babo's own identity as master is called into question because it is not in itself complete and self-sufficient. His identity as master is always conditional. He is dependent on Delano's cooperating as a "slave," even while Babo is trying to differentiate himself from his enslavers and the system of enslavement.

This relationship is best depicted in the shield-like stern-piece which Melville incorporates into his tale. The stern-piece is

> medallioned about by groups of mythological or symbolical devices; uppermost and central of which was a dark satyr in a mask, holding his foot on the prostrate neck of a writhing figure, likewise masked" (BC, 241).

This image is used by Melville to symbolize the master-slave relationship depicted aboard the San Dominick. The two figures are locked in an unending battle in which each is continually calling upon the other for its foundation, for its identity as master, even as it is constantly differentiating itself from the other. Because both are masked, the true identity of the victor is never apparent; indeed in this vicious struggle for identity neither is ever the ultimate victor. As we see

within the narrative, the oppressed and oppressor merely switch places, but always in anticipation of another in a unending series of reversals. They reveal themselves thus as a "mutually constitutive opposition."

As this last phrase suggests, beyond manifesting the historical situation on the San Dominick, the stern-piece also symbolizes the linguistic predicament, the indeterminacy of meaning, with which the tale is ultimately concerned. The fundamentally unstable relationship between master and slave and the incessant play of the word's meaning as depicted on the stern-piece actually presents a striking parallel to the "radically 'undecidable' play of linguistic meanings" that Jacques Derrida refers to as "differance." Derrida's coinage, a French pun on the words "differ" and "defer," suggests "the mutual dependence and difference that the terms of hierarchical oppositions have for each other."[16] As Abrams notes:

> The point of this double sense is that on the one hand there is indeed an "effect" of meaning in an utterance which is produced by its difference from other meanings, but that on the other hand, since this meaning can never come to rest in an actual presence, or "transcendental signified," its determinate specification is deferred from one

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[16]J. M. Balkin, "Deconstructive Practice and Legal Theory," The Yale Law Journal, 96 (1987), 752.

> substitutive linguistic interpretation to another, in a movement, or "play," without end.[17]

Thus as a depiction of "differance," the stern-piece creates an effect of meaning, of one figure as dominant or one concept as privileged to the exclusion of the other. But this meaning or identity is as illusory as the master status of Babo, Cereno, or Delano. Identity is always conditional on the other within the hierarchy. Since the dialectic struggle is forever ongoing, neither figure can ever rest in an actual presence of transcendent, fixed mastery. Instead each depends upon and defers to the other in an incessant flux or play of meaning. As Abrams concludes,

> There is thus no ground, in the incessant play of differance that constitutes language, for attributing a decidable meaning, or even a finite set of determinately multiple meanings . . . to any utterance that we speak or write."[18]

Thus, for the poststructuralist, Melville's tale reveals that all language and meaning are axiomatically unfixed.

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[17]Abrams, 204.

[18]Abrams, 205.

This recognition of language and meaning as radically unfixed appears to be the frightening conclusion at which Cereno (and perhaps Melville himself) has arrived. For Cereno has been privy in a most terrifying way to the straying indeterminacy of language and meaning. He has been forced to enact the role of master while enslaved, and the result of the performance has been to decenter all the meanings of his world. He cannot help but recognize Delano's confidence game--how Delano unconsciously deceives himself to bolster his own confidence. The drama has thus revealed to Cereno the arbitrariness of Delano's ideological fixing of "the negro," and the irony of Delano's use of such terms as "slave" and "friend." Moreover, the masquerade has exposed as illusion the concept of language as fixed and determinate. And it has subsequently revealed Cereno himself as an actor in a confidence game of language.

Cereno, in whom is lodged a "dictatorship beyond which . . . there was no earthly appeal" while at sea, where it is "with captains as with gods," watches helplessly as his god-like fiat disintegrates (BC, 246). Words such as "pardon" are converted before his eyes to shells as empty as the "artificially stiffened" scabbard

which he wears at his side and which now betokens impotence (BC, 315).

According to the deposition in the tale, Cereno is ultimately left "broken in body and mind" (BC, 312). But Delano cannot understand Cereno's despair. To his question, "what has cast such a shadow upon you," he receives what will remain for him an enigmatic response: "the negro" (BC, 314). Delano cannot comprehend that for Cereno the word "negro" is no longer ideologically fixed as it is for him, that it has instead become a sign of radical instability, not only as embodied by Babo, but by its very nature as a signifier, as a word itself.

Thus, the significance is clear when Melville states in a dramatic single sentence paragraph: "There was no more conversation that day." Cereno, who can no longer "keep faith with the blacks," has also lost faith in the word or the logos. The confidence game of language has been fully revealed to him and has thus transformed his ordered ship and universe into chaos.

Cereno's only recourse is to withdraw from the sea of flux to terra firma and specifically to a mountain-top monastery in a desperate search for stability and fixity. But the monastery to which he retreats is no different from the San Dominick which is itself

described as a "white-washed monastery," populated by "monkish" negroes (BC, 240). Aboard ship Cereno has encountered Babo, whose subversion we have seen has, on the level of history, come to represent the freedom inhering in all human beings. However, on the linguistic level, he has also come to symbolize the subversive play of language and may thus be viewed as the embodied word or logos. Therefore, Cereno's retreat to the monastery is doomed because if Babo, as embodied logos, has revealed himself to be in actuality radically destabilized, then it is unlikely that God or the Logos will be able to provide the absolute grounding or stability in which Cereno hopes to place his faith. For Cereno, and for Melville himself, God or the Logos is no longer the guarantor of the validity of language or the absolute ground of meaning.[19] Cereno is thus left to die in what Derrida calls "the abyss of indeterminacy."

Delano's confidence, however, remains intact. He remains undaunted in his view of the world as fixed, unambiguous, and stable. His confidence game maintains a seamless veil of self-deception. Ironically, however,

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[19]Abrams, 204. Cereno falls into the abyss because he cannot tolerate the notion that "The absence of a transcendental signified extends the domain and the play of signification infinitely" 205.

it is the completeness of this purblind self-deception which saves Delano:

> Yes, all is owing to Providence, I know: but the temper of my mind that morning was more than commonly pleasant, while the sight of so much suffering, more apparent than real, added to my good-nature, compassion, and charity happily interweaving the three. Had it been otherwise, doubtless, as you hint, some of my interferences might have ended unhappily enough. (BC, 314)

But his blindness does not simply save him from Babo, the negro, but rather from the terrifying truth of the flux of meaning, the abyss of indeterminacy.

To the end then, Delano refuses to perceive the subversive movement underlying his ideologically fixed concept of Babo. Even when Babo, dagger in hand, attempts to kill Cereno, Delano fixes the action in strict accordance with his predetermined vision of Babo as an eternally loyal domestic. Thus it is as a "desperate fidelity to befriend his master to the last" that Delano interprets Babo's blatant sign of rebellion. Quite appropriately, then, as if to prevent further slippage of meaning, Delano actually "[grinds] the prostrate negro" underfoot, literally fixing him in an ironic echo of the stern-piece (BC, 295).

Significantly, from Delano's perspective the prostrate figure is depicted as "snakishly writhing up from the boat's bottom" (BC, 295). The image of the arch subversive, Satan is thus invoked and projects the essential terms of the narrative. Against what Delano interprets as satanic movement and flux, the narrative poses Providential order, as symbolized by Delano's own ship "anchored in the bay of Santa Maria," that is, in the secure bosom of the Mother of God (BC, 238).

Thus in Delano's skewed cosmology, the forces of good and evil, fixity and flux, have been pitted against each other, and fixity has apparently won. In fact, to corroborate the return to hegemonic order and stability, Melville concludes the tale with the hauntingly dramatic image of Babo's decapitated head, "that hive of subtlety" "fixed on a pole" [emphasis added], (BC, 315).

The maintenance of order indicated by Babo's fixed head is attributed by Delano to Providence. In his belief in a providential God as Absolute, Delano embodies what Derrida calls "logocentrism," the belief in an ultimate referent, a self-certifying absolute or foundation which centers or anchors all meaning. With this belief in fixity Delano's hegemonic status is guaranteed and he can admonish Cereno with smug

assurance: "the past is passed. Why moralize upon it. Forget it" (BC, 314).

Although the scales have purportedly fallen from Delano's eyes, he remains as blind as ever. He sees the skeleton of the slave master Aranda fixed to the bow of the ship, but fails to discern its import. The figure stands as a mockery of fixity, representing Babo's subversion of all notions of authority and mastery in which Delano places his confidence. The words "Follow your leader," which Babo has chalked below the skeleton, are an ironic message to Delano himself. For Delano does indeed follow his hegemonic leaders in perpetuating the vicious cycle depicted on the stern-piece, blindly presuming mastery of his fellow human beings and of language itself. The ultimate irony, however, is that Providence, the absolute and grounding premise of Delano's identity and very existence, is also finally subverted by Babo. "Who had thought he was in the permanent safekeeping of Providence was in the conditional keeping of an enemy," of Babo, the arch subversive and symbol of radical freedom.[20]

The final image of the tale is of Babo, whose voiceless head,

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[20]Justman, 306.

> fixed on a pole in the Plaza, met, unabashed, the gaze of the whites; and across the Plaza looked toward St. Bartholemew's church . . . and across the Rimac bridge looked toward the monastery. (BC, 315)

Like the word itself, Babo remains subversive and radically free to the end, his presence indicting whites such as Delano and the church itself--that illusory prop of western culture--for its futile logocentric attempts to fix meaning and identity. This final image of defiance suggests that despite the despair which Melville might have shared with Benito Cereno, he was, unlike the Spaniard, not afraid to look deeply into the abyss and to record what he beheld.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

During the decade of the 1850s, Melville turned from writing about the metaphysical questions of the universe to the more concrete problems of day-to-day existence. His tales focused on the socio-economic realm of life and particularly on the way that life was represented ideologically, that is, in the mind's eye of America's citizens.

In his short fiction Melville presents at least three examples of the dominant American Ideology at work. The narrators of "The Two Temples," "The 'Gees," and "Benito Cereno" all partake of an unconscious, self-deluding confidence game which is ideologically induced. Respectively, these narrators deceive themselves to undemocratic elitism, economic exploitation, and complicity in slavery and racial oppression. Ideology allows them to circumvent their culpability. In fact, ideology actually displaces reality by creating a "lived relation to the real" which confirms each narrator's innocent self-image and thus reaffirms his confidence in society and his place in it.

It was this self-deluding relation to reality which Melville blamed for the failure of the American Dream to

manifest itself. But as suggested in "Benito Cereno," this "lived relation to the real" is not limited to the socio-economic realm. Because ideology displaces reality, it calls into question the very nature of reality itself. Thus, Melville returns full circle to the philosophical and epistemological concerns of the earlier works such as Moby Dick and Pierre. For the effect of "Benito Cereno" is to expose all social and linguistic expressions of meaning as nothing less than "pasteboard masks" in which one arbitrarily places one's confidence.

Immediately after composing his short fiction, Melville wrote his masterpiece on confidence games: The Confidence-Man. In this tour de force which grew out of the short fiction, he confronted the confidence games that bolster faith in human constructs ranging from capitalist society to language and God. He concludes the novel with the enigmatic statement: "Something further may follow this Masquerade." But nothing follows; the readers of the novel have themselves been made the victims of a confidence game. In the fiction of the 1850s, the Masquerade which veils reality is ideology and the disturbing metaphysical implication is that nothing underlies ideology, nothing follows the Masquerade, nothing but another confidence game.

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