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MARLOWE AND MELVILLE

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ABSTRACT

Despite the often striking similarities in the major works of Marlowe and Melville, the relationship between these two poets has been completely overlooked by scholars and critics. The introduction of this study, therefore, seeks to examine the possible reasons for this oversight and point out that Dr. Faustus and Moby Dick are not essentially comparable to Goethe's Faust nor to the tragedies of Shakespeare. They are, in fact, consistently comparable to each other, and a comparison of them enhances the reader's understanding of the respective work.

Since both Marlowe and Melville wrote largely autobiographically, Chapters II and III are devoted to respective biographical accounts of the conditions, experiences and predispositions which seem to have produced the formulation of such similar, unorthodox attitudes and convictions as those held by the two men. Special emphasis has been placed on the step-by-step development of their anti-Christian sentiments which pervade their writing. Following these biographical summaries is a chapter which attempts to draw comparisons between their early environment, their formative educational experiences, their views of society, and their preoccupation with religious problems which culminated in their so-called "atheism."

Chapter V presents evidence that Melville was not only familiar with but in possession of a copy of Marlowe's plays. It seeks to establish the fact that, especially in his conception of Moby Dick,

Melville was particularly influenced by Dr. Faustus and Tamburlaine. This chapter also suggests that Marlowe's influence on Melville can be traced through his subsequent works as well.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Few themes in the literary history of Western civilization have captured the human imagination as thoroughly as that of the "overreacher," the man who attempts to exceed human limitations. Originating almost inevitably with the dawn of man's self-definition and his consequent definition of a divine order or authority which, benevolently or malevolently, rules over his destiny, the subject of human rebellion against such authority has inspired some of the greatest writers from the beginning of Greek and Roman culture to modern times. Perhaps this preoccupation with the spectacle of Man's drive to "exceed his grasp" best exemplifies civilized Man's fundamental need to test the absolute boundaries of his physical, intellectual and spiritual being and to expand, by any means whatsoever, the horizons of his existence and the boundaries of the human condition.

Yet, Man's relentless striving to transcend the invisible barriers raised for him, to overcome, as it were, the confines of his mortality, is inevitably a doomed quest. In demanding what to him appears to be his rightful legacy--to exercise his most godlike qualities and to assert, even as his God does, his power of will, of intellect, of choice--in such endeavor lies his heresy and his ultimate defeat. The heroes of classical Greek tragedy

are probably the most archetypical of such characters who, following the dictates of their own moral and intellectual nature, clash with and defy not only the rules and laws of society but those of the Gods as well.

Such rebels, then, in conflict with the norms of the human community as well as with the laws of heaven, are inevitably of superhuman stature. Their struggles are not those of the average individual, their cause not that of the common man. They seem to belong to Antiquity, for neither Christianity nor modern Atheism seems to allow or make possible the creation of tragic heroes in the classical sense, however generally applied. Personifications of an enormous tension between preoccupation with divinity and assertion of humanity, they seem to fit easily into classical thought and setting but can hardly be transplanted into Christian literature.

Among Christian literature's few notable examples of tragic heroes in the classical mode are those of Herman Melville, who seem to be spiritual descendants of the larger-than-life, heaven-challenging heroes of Antiquity. Among them, Captain Ahab, in particular, has become American literature's foremost representative of overbearing pride, misguided ambition, and scornful defiance of God. In character and dramatic impact he is most often compared to Shakespeare's tragic heroes, while in thematic context he is usually compared to Milton's Satan.¹ Yet another reference of

¹See Henry F. Pommer, Milton and Melville (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press, 1950). This study will not include the literary treatment of non-human characters such as Satan or Prometheus.

comparison is to the Faustian legend, notably to Goethe's Faust.

But important as these sources may have been to Melville, the most obvious similarity of his central characters and works, and ironically the most neglected by critics, is to an Elizabethan dramatist, Christopher Marlowe, whose plays constitute a synthesis of the above-mentioned aspects of Shakespeare, Milton and Goethe.

In attempting to analyze Melville's artistic kinship with Marlowe, one needs to deal briefly with some of the facts and possible reasons for the oversights which may have led to the rather puzzling lack of critical interest in the relationship between the two writers. The influence of Elizabethan writers--notably of Shakespeare--on Melville is, after all, generally acknowledged by scholars.² Melville, in fact, repeatedly brought attention to his interest in that particular period of literature, and his use of Elizabethan literary devices, such as stage settings, dramatic scenes, blank verse and soliloquies, is easily discernible. But while he was lavish in the praise of Shakespeare as a source of personal inspiration, he nevertheless cautioned against the general tendency to see Elizabethan literary achievement solely in terms of one man's accomplishment:

Shakespeare cannot be regarded as in himself the concretion of all the genius of his time, nor as so immeasurably beyond Marlowe, Webster, Ford, Beaumont, Jonson, that those great men can be said to share none of his power? For one, I conceive that

²See Charles Olson, Call Me Ishmael (New York: Reynall and Hitchcock, 1947).

there were dramatists in Elizabeth's day, between whom and Shakespeare the distance was by no means great.³

Yet despite the clear indication, here, that Melville had read and was impressed by the works of other Elizabethans (and his mention of Marlowe is especially important to this study) his "Elizabethan aspects" are almost exclusively attributed to Shakespeare, and comparisons of these two writers tend to begin and end with discussions of more or less obvious rhetorical, stylistic, and dramatic effects. A comprehensive comparison of Melville and Shakespeare, however, has not and perhaps cannot be made because of the essential difference in the two writers' artistic and dramatic points of view and the lack of information about Shakespeare's personal life and views.

Another possible generalization about the "Shakespearean" aspects of Melville's writing may well stem from the fact that, given the immense prominence of Shakespeare over all other Elizabethan writers, Melville scholars have tended to overlook the Marlovian aspects in Shakespeare, which are substantial. We know that Melville owned, read and had marked an edition of the complete dramatic works of Marlowe; for we not only know that Melville was familiar with Marlowe, but that indeed he may well have been more familiar with him than with the other Elizabethan dramatists (Shakespeare excepted) whose works were apparently not in his possession. It is hardly necessary, then, to point out that Melville's use of

³"Hawthorne and His Mosses," The Portable Melville, ed. Jay Leyda (New York: The Viking Press, 1952), p. 420.

blank verse, to name just one literary device, is not necessarily attributable to Shakespearean influence, per se, especially in view of the fact that it was Marlowe who wrote the first truly popular plays in blank verse and that Melville's language, like Marlowe's, tends to make use of imagery and symbols of cosmic range. Shakespeare's imagery, on the other hand, as Caroline Spurgeon has so well documented, tends to reflect his own background and environment.⁴

Another prominent interpretation of Melville's work (especially of Moby Dick) is based on the Faustian legend as utilized by Goethe. As early as 1851, Evert Duyckinck, in his review of Moby-Dick, speaks of the work as "a bit of German melodrama, with Captain Ahab for the Faust of the quarter-deck, and Queequeg with the crew, for Walpurgis night revellers in the forecastle."⁵ Such a cursory assessment of Moby Dick is perhaps understandable in view of the impact of Goethe's work on the literary world of the nineteenth century, but even recent criticism too often sees the Faustian elements in Melville's work solely as inspired by Goethe. Gustaaf Van Cromphout, for instance, in a fairly recent article entitled: "Moby-Dick: the Transformation of the Faustian Ethos" (1979), tends to do just that. Yet his definition of Faustian

⁴Shakespeare's Imagery and What It Tells Us (New York: The Macmillan Company, and Cambridge, England: The University Press, 1935.

⁵Moby-Dick, ed. Harrison Hayford and Hershel Parker (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, c1967), p. 614.

describes not only Goethe's and Melville's heroes but Marlowe's Faustus as well:

I regard Faustian as almost synonymous with "Western" in that Faust represents what is most characteristic of the Western psyche: its boundless aspirations, its expansionism, its identification of knowledge with power, its attempts to subdue nature, its yearning for control over its own destiny.⁶

Such indeed is the nature of Marlowe's Faustus (and to some extent of his Tamburlaine). Yet Cromphout's concern, except for one brief reference to Marlowe's Faustus, is centered on the Faust figure of German Romanticism.

While there is, of course, some merit in a comparison of Melville and Goethe (as there is merit in a comparison of Melville and Shakespeare) there is, first, a disturbing lack of recognition of the influence of Marlowe on Goethe and, second, of the fact that, whereas very general aspects of plot and characterization are alike, the underlying attitude of Melville and consequently the dramatic vision of Moby Dick (as well as of his other works) are essentially different. Goethe, unencumbered by orthodox religious considerations and dogmatic Christian morality, employs the framework of the Christian universe merely as a convenient vehicle for the exposition of his own detached and lofty philosophy. His values and considerations are thus not moral but solely aesthetical (which is not, of course, to say that Marlowe and Melville exclude aesthetic considerations in their writing). For

⁶"Moby-Dick: The Transformation of the Faustian Ethos,"
American Literature, 51 (March 1979), 18.

this reason alone Goethe is able to save his hero and to do it, in effect, in the very Prologue--a device which somewhat undramatically ascertains the essentially comic rather than tragic structure of the play, for the possibility of God's losing a bet with the devil is remote, to say the least. In this respect Goethe is diametrically different from both Marlowe and Melville. His universal laws are ultimately benign and affirmative; theirs are not. A consistent, comprehensive correlation between these writers, therefore, cannot be made.

But, as Melville tends to be misunderstood in comparison with Goethe, so does Marlowe. While libraries are well supplied with secondary literature on Faust and Dr. Faustus, respectively, amazingly little has been said about the relationship of one work to the other. In surveying the existing literature, one must agree with Otto Heller, author of the most exhaustive of the few comparative works on the two plays:

I am at a loss to explain why Goethe's relation to Marlowe should have so utterly failed to attract scholarly investigation: nay why in the mountainous literature on Faust that relation seems to have been almost speciously neglected. So unanimous has been this wholesale disposal of the matter that even to broach a question against it is regarded by many scholars as a breach of propriety.⁷

As Heller points out, it is almost impossible to overlook the striking similarities of Faust and Faustus; they cannot be explained away with the fact that both Marlowe and Goethe were

⁷Faust and Faustus: A Study of Goethe's Relation to Marlowe (1931: rpt. New York: Cooper Square Publishers, 1972), p. 12.

doubtless familiar with the German Faustbuch, the Historia von D. Johann Fausten, published in Frankfurt, in 1587, and then reissued with additional chapters in the same year. But since Marlowe probably had no knowledge of German, he most likely had based his play on an English translation of it by an unidentified "P.F."⁸ But whereas Heller does much to establish the influence of Marlowe on Goethe, especially in the dramatic setting of the opening scene and in the overall similarity of the character of both heroes, he seems to explain almost inadvertently the probable cause for the literary critics' "wholesale disposal" of this fact. For, in judging the overall artistic effectiveness of Faustus compared to Faust, Heller generally suggests that Marlowe attempted but failed to do what Goethe did some two hundred years later. He sees in both poets "a personal bias . . . in favor of the hero, a willingness to save him from the clutches of the devil because of a personal fondness more or less apart from their sense of justice"; but he finds that, whereas Goethe succeeds in saving his Faust, such salvation is "in Marlowe only timidly and transiently essayed."⁹

Professor Heller does, ever so briefly, allow that "of course, the difference between the modern and the mediaeval mentality bears importantly on this variance."¹⁰ But this all-important

⁸Frederick Boas, Christopher Marlowe, A Biographical and Critical Study (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1940), p. 203.

⁹Heller, p. 71.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 73.

point is neither accurately perceived--for to attribute to Marlowe, who was in effect a spokesman for the English Renaissance, a "mediaeval mentality" is to misjudge and underestimate the author as well as his work--nor is it in any way pursued as a possible clue to the essential differences in the Weltanschauung of Marlowe and Goethe. Also, this is precisely the point which necessitates a closer critical modification of the term "Faustian hero," for its two chief prototypes, Faust and Faustus, all similarities notwithstanding, are products of two entirely different frameworks of thought and as dramatic figures not comparable for the simple reason that one of necessity is comic, the other of equal necessity tragic. Thus, to interpret Marlowe's work in terms of Goethe's has traditionally meant to detract from the artistic accomplishment of Marlowe by ignoring the essential difference of his aims and the complexity of his purpose. His Faustus, far from being artistically flawed due mainly to the alleged deterioration of its hero, has only within the last four decades received some of its rightful recognition as a literary masterwork. And because of the efforts of such scholars as Frederick S. Boas, Una Ellis-Fermor, Paul H. Kocher and Harry Levin (to name but a few) the complexity of Marlowe's intellect, the multilayered levels of meaning in Dr. Faustus, and the consummate artistry of his achievement are now beginning to be recognized and appreciated. As Norman Sanders has observed:

There is no evidence of deterioration in Faustus, except at a superficial text level. Instead I suggest that Faustus is perfectly consistent and that the play is in no way flawed--that indeed it is

equal in importance and artistic achievement to Hamlet as a monument to Renaissance Man.¹¹

Such recognition of Marlowe's achievement, however, by no means suggests a critical consensus on the matter. Marlowe remains, even in contemporary criticism, much misunderstood and misinterpreted. The essentially controversial nature of his work (its inherent heresy and "atheism") has led too many critics either to deride Marlowe, to ignore him, or to "save" him by attempting to bring him within the realm of conventionality and Christian respectability. Roy Battenhouse, for instance, who finds Marlowe's personal attitude "totally irrelevant" to the interpretation of his work, sees his tragic heroes as archetypical of human corruption and propensity for evil and his work, therefore, as representing "the most grandly moral spectacles in the whole realm of English Drama."¹² Battenhouse's insistence here that Marlowe deliberately created weak, inconsistent, and "evil" central characters in order to present "moral spectacles," does injustice to the poet--as does Heller's conclusion that Marlowe did not know how to save Faustus and therefore ruined the artistic development of his play. In this respect, Marlowe, again, has much in common with Melville, whose heroes (Ahab, Pierre and Billy Budd, in particular) are frequently seen by critics from diametrically opposed points of

¹¹From class notes taken at the University of Tennessee, December 6, 1973.

¹²Marlowe's Tamburlaine: A Study in Renaissance Moral Philosophy (1941; rpt. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1964).

view and whose creations have been viewed as manifesting a lack of sustained artistic conception and unity.

In analyzing Melville's kinship to Marlowe, then, it must be recognized that this particular Elizabethan writer not only stands as a key figure behind many of Melville's alleged Shakespearean and Goethean aspects but that his relationship to Melville is direct, detailed, and striking. Melville's tragic heroes, in fact, are more than Shakespearean and Faustian: they are Marlovian. Combining within themselves the Faustian traits, both in the traditional sense and in Goethe's, they possess yet another quality which (Marlowe excepted) no other Western writer managed to bestow upon his protagonists: Melville's heroes, like Marlowe's, are almost superhuman in conception and, ultimately, representatives of civilized Man, who for the sake of their heart and their intellect must probe and experience, indict and therefore defy their God. Their fate is certain from the start, and they are, in the words of Nathalia Wright, possessed of "an unswerving allegiance to destiny." It is precisely this allegiance which defines their tragic stature, and "this passion, of course, moves all Melville's major characters, constituting their kinship with the Marlovian rather than the Shakespearean hero."¹³

Another interesting similarity in the works of Marlowe and Melville is that they tend to be strongly autobiographical.

¹³Nathalia Wright, Melville's Use of the Bible (1949; rpt. New York: Octagon Books, 1969), p. 73.

Marlowe's so-called "atheism," for instance, caused an open scandal among his contemporaries, and Melville's controversial and often irreverent attitudes regarding Christianity found their way into his own and other people's correspondence. Both men's unorthodox views, preoccupations and unconventional personalities are often openly or covertly expressed or reflected in their works, and both seemed to be aware and enjoying the use of various traditional literary devices to obscure and yet at the same time to reveal the inherent heresy in their writing. Thus, to a far greater extent than in the case of Shakespeare, by contrast, it is helpful to the reader to be aware of their personal disposition in order to appreciate fully the irony and ambivalence in their writing. In a sense, it can be argued that both writers were engagé (to use a modern term) in that their works increasingly tend to represent their personal campaigns against what they saw to be an essentially hypocritical, hostile society reflecting the rule of an unjust and malevolent God. Yet the fact that Marlowe and Melville rebelled against the tyranny imposed upon the individual by divine authority--a tyranny irrevocably decreed and perpetuated--is in itself evidence that they by no means denied the existence of this authority. The modern concept and definition of atheism was, after all, non-existent in Marlowe's time and equally absent in Melville's upbringing and environment. Thus, against the stifling religious dogma which for Marlowe was constituted by mediaeval Christian orthodoxy, for Melville by nineteenth century Calvinism, Marlowe

set the self-assertion of the new middle-class Renaissance man, Melville his American individualism and ideals of cosmic democracy.

But God defied is still God almighty, and the tension thus inherent in the poets' personal views of Man's relationship to Man and to God was fertile ground for the creation of dramatic conflict of universal significance. It lent itself, furthermore, to the creation of works of multifaceted ambivalence, for this kind of subject matter was safe to present neither to the public of Marlowe's time, nor of Melville's. Both Marlowe and Melville, therefore, tended to choose overtly Christian settings and stories which strongly suggested morality plays and then invert the meaning of the surface plot and its apparent purpose. But whereas one reason for this practice was, of course, to hide the actual meaning of the works (because it would, if readily discernible by the public, surely have cost Marlowe his life and Melville whatever degree of popularity and "respectability" he had still cared to maintain), it also lent itself to the creation of satire, to complex allegory and ultimately to high tragedy. Regardless of which of these elements are predominant in a particular one of Marlowe's and Melville's works, however, they are separately and collectively absolutely consistent in that they represent, on one level of interpretation, a rejection and indictment of the nature of God. All of their major characters are victims of His merciless malice; some, however, maintain even in the face of their inevitable doom a magnificent defiant grandeur which attests to and glorifies Man's indomitable spirit.

CHAPTER II

THE LIFE OF MARLOWE

Christopher Marlowe was born to John and Catherine Marlowe, of Canterbury, and baptized in their parish church of St. George on February 26, 1564.¹ Although the exact date of his birth is unknown, it may be assumed to have preceded his baptism by only a few days because the high infant mortality rate in those days made it customary to have children christened as soon as their mother was able to leave the childbed. Marlowe's father was a shoemaker who, in 1561, while still an apprentice, had married Catherine Arthur, the daughter of a Dover yeoman; Christopher was the second child and first son born to this union. By 1576, Catherine had borne nine children, of whom the oldest girl, Mary, died at age four and the two younger sons in infancy. The youngest child, the second Thomas, who was Christopher's junior by twelve years, is generally thought to have died young.

¹The facts about Marlowe's life come primarily from the following sources: Frederick Boas, Christopher Marlowe, A Biographical and Critical Study (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1940); A. L. Rowse, Christopher Marlowe. A Biography (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1964); Samuel A. Tannenbaum, The Assassination of Christopher Marlowe (A New View), (Hamden, Conn.: The Shoe String Press, Inc., 1928; reissued 1962); A. D. Wraight, In Search of Christopher Marlowe. A Pictorial Biography (New York: The Vanguard Press, Inc., c1965). Only quotations have been footnoted.

Although Marlowe has often been referred to as "a poor cobbler's son," there is no evidence that he actually spent his childhood in poverty. His father became a freeman in 1564 (the year of Christopher's birth) and seems to have been able to prosper fairly well in his business. Between 1567 and 1594, he successfully employed four apprentices, at least two of whom apparently completed their full seven-year term with him. Furthermore, starting in 1579 he is recorded as having acted as a professional bondsman for couples seeking marriage licenses; and when his wife died, one year after his own death in 1605, she left in her will many personal and household goods which not only attest to her pride in material possessions (especially jewelry and silverware) but also to the fact that the family was by no means impoverished.

But even though John Marlowe seems to have provided fairly well for his wife and his six surviving children, he was probably a less than admirable man. In an interesting article on the Marlowe family, William Urry, archivist to the city of Canterbury, describes John Marlowe as "a busy, active, pugnacious fellow, clearly very fond of the limelight, prone to go to the law at the slightest excuse, ready to perform public office, and probably rather neglectful of his business."² He was "endlessly engaged in lawsuits, usually as defendant for debt." Thus, while on one hand John Marlowe was acting as a bondsman, on the other he was apparently

²This and the next three quotations are from William Urry, "Marlowe and Canterbury," The Times Literary Supplement, Feb. 13, 1964, p. 136.

unable or unwilling to pay his own debts--a fact which, even given the average Elizabethan's tendency to make regular court appearances, seems to testify to a lack of prudence. And in this respect his daughters do not fare any better with William Urry. One, in fact is described as a "common swearer and blasphemmer of God," a charge which was later to be levelled against his son Christopher as well. But with a "noisy, self-assertive, improvident fellow" for a father, perhaps their behavior is not too surprising. In any case, the Marlowe household must have been a rather turbulent one. And, considering that Christopher Marlowe spent the first sixteen years of his life in the midst of his family, there can hardly be a doubt but that he was profoundly affected by his home environment.

If it is true that childhood experiences and impressions are crucial determinants in the ultimate emotional and intellectual development of the individual, then Canterbury must have exerted a powerful influence upon the mind of its native son. Indeed, if in retrospect one were to choose a particularly appropriate place of birth for Marlowe, one would almost inevitably have to choose Canterbury; for perhaps nowhere else in England could one find the combination of historical perspective, geographical coincidence, and social milieu which seems so inevitably right for the emerging personality of the poet.

Canterbury is a town with an impressive history which dates back not only to the earliest beginnings of Christianity but, farther, to the days of the Roman Empire. Located about fifteen

miles inland from Dover, it lay on the main road between this all-important gateway to Europe and London. The road had, in fact, been built by the Romans and led from the coast right through the middle of Canterbury and across England, to Wales. The foundation for the walls girdling the city had also been laid by Romans, and there was abundant evidence of their presence in other architectural parts of the city. But with its massive, fortified walls, towers, and gates, Canterbury was (and in some respects still is) a typically mediaeval town, utterly dominated by its immense Cathedral which towers over all other buildings and defines the identity of the town from every perspective.

The cathedral, administered by the Priory of Christ Church, had long been England's foremost monument to orthodox Christianity; for Canterbury was more than an important commercial and political center: it was the bastion of the Roman Catholic Church in England. And as such it held an important place not only in the minds of Christians everywhere but, more powerfully, in their hearts; the cathedral contained the shrine of St. Thomas of Becket, martyr to the Faith, yet reminder of its ultimate dominance over all worldly power.

Since 1174, when the penitent King Henry II himself, barefoot and weeping, had come through the streets of Canterbury and proceeded to the cathedral crypt where he suffered a scourging, the city had seen an almost endless procession of pilgrims to St. Thomas' shrine. They came from every walk of life and flooded the streets of

Canterbury, themselves testimony to the multifaceted spectacle of mediaeval society, as Chaucer's Canterbury Tales so vividly describe it. But most memorable were the primates, princes and kings who came and whose arrival in the city constituted colorful pageants of pomp, wealth and worldly authority.

But if beggars and princes had anything in common, it was that they came to pay tribute to St. Thomas and that such tribute was almost inevitably signified by their offerings. However modest or lavish, they combined to comprise approximately £ 20000 annually-- a sum which apparently does not include the money brought into Christ Church by other enterprises or that invested in the permanent displays of wealth in various parts of the Cathedral. Erasmus, for instance, wrote about the high altar: "we should think the richest monarchs mere beggars in comparison of the abundance of silver and gold which belonged to the furniture of it." And, describing the crown of Becket, he was moved to remark that "the least valuable portion was gold; every part glistened, shone and sparkled with rare and very large jewels, some of them exceeding the size of a goose's egg."³

By the time Marlowe was born, the shrine of St. Thomas had been stripped of its treasure and existed only as a legend. But surely it must have been a popular legend in Canterbury! And twelve beautiful stained glass windows in the Trinity Chapel of

³A. D. Wraight, In Search of Christopher Marlowe. A Pictorial Biography (New York: The Vanguard Press, c1965), p. 36.

the Cathedral, for instance, still show a replica of Becket's shrine. It is easy to believe, therefore, that Marlowe's preoccupation with precious metals and jewels was formed in his childhood and (aside from whatever partiality he might have inherited from his mother) was substantially fed by the stories he had heard about the fabulous riches of St. Thomas' shrine. As A. D. Wraight points out, "infinite riches in a little room"⁴ (such as delight Barabas in The Jew of Malta) was an apt description for the shrine itself, and Marlowe's writing repeatedly mentions such riches as were to be found there.

As Canterbury had been a showplace for the authority, the power and the wealth of the orthodox Church, it was also to become one for the rebellion against it. For Canterbury perhaps more than any other English city manifested the changes brought by the Reformation when, unlike his repentant, submissive namesake in 1174, Henry VIII asserted his own authority over that of Rome by making himself the ecclesiastical as well as the secular ruler of England. Until 1538, the monastic house of Christ Church had been in constant rivalry with that of St. Augustine, the great abbey just east of the city wall. Jealous of each other, neither institution deferred to the other nor was willing to subject itself

⁴Christopher Marlowe, The Jew of Malta. The Revels Plays (Manchester: University Press, 1978), I.i.37. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations are from this series, with act, scene, and line numbers given in the text. The following abbreviations have been used: F for Doctor Faustus; J for the Jew of Malta; T, II T for Tamburlaine the Great Parts 1 and 2.

to anyone except the Pope. But in July of 1538, Abbot John Essex surrendered St. Augustine Abbey, and there followed a systematic destruction of most of its buildings, including its Norman church (SS. Peter and Paul) which was nearly as large as the Cathedral.

These two great monastic houses for centuries dominated the life of Canterbury, as their towers and spires dominated the city itself. It was Elizabeth's father, Henry VIII, who changed all that. The Abbey of St. Augustine without the city walls possessed the tomb of the founder of English Christendom, while the Cathedral Church of Christ within the walls boasted the Shrine of St. Thomas the Martyr, and Henry stripped them both.⁵

Because of strong public sentiment, Henry had to proceed with considerable caution in the desecration of the institution of Christ Church. Between 1536 and 1538, he decreed systematic abrogation of festivals and holidays in honor of St. Thomas, and on July 7, 1538, the day of the traditional high festival of the Translation of St. Thomas, Archbishop Cranmer himself set a public precedent by dining on meat instead of fasting. Shortly thereafter, Thomas of Becket was declared to have been an intransigent rebel rather than a saint.

In September of this eventful year all pictures and images of Becket were removed; his shrine was stripped; his remains were burnt. The incredible wealth of the shrine, which had accumulated over centuries, was appropriated and brought to the jewel-house in the Tower of London. It took two enormous chests, barely transportable by eight strong men, to cart off the jewels alone and

⁵Wraight, p. 21.

twenty-six carts were required to take all this treasure to London. Along with the treasures went countless relics, including heads, arms, and teeth of various saints, pieces of the True Cross, a spine of the Crown of Thorns, a portion of the Lord's Table, and a piece of Golgotha rock. The Cathedral, observes A. L. Rowse, had been "a veritable holy factory manufacturing grace," and Henry, in the name of the Reformation, "made a clearance of all this junk."⁶

Thus, although the Cathedral still stood, it no longer stood as a monument to orthodox faith and to the power of Rome but rather as a witness to the usurpation of them. Traditionally the symbol of synthesis of ecclesiastical supremacy and worldly power, it was now in effect a reminder of the chasm between Church and State. And, more important, it was a constant reminder of its own inherent vulnerability. The Church had, after all, proved to be assailable; secular power and individual will could prevail against its most sacred tenets. In that sense Henry VIII seemed to prove that "To be a King is half to be a god" (T.II.v.56). And in that he was indeed like Tamburlaine, who boldly assails the Heavens and yet appears to see no heresy in his actions.

The reaction to Henry's more overt iconoclasm is readily discernible in Marlowe's Edward II:

Why should a king be subject to a priest?
Proud Rome, that hatchest such imperial grooms,
With these thy superstitious taper-lights,

⁶Rowse, pp. 1-5.

Wherewith thy antichristian churches blaze,
 I'll fire thy crazed buildings, and enforce
 The paper towers to kiss the lowly ground.⁷

But there is a deeper lesson in the history of Canterbury Cathedral; and although it is often held that Marlowe was singularly unaffected by its overpowering presence in his early life, it must surely be conceded that in a larger sense it may have provided some initial premises for his later thinking.

The inherent inconsistencies between religious principle and practice on one level crystallized by the Reformation were also present in the everyday life of Elizabethan society. It did not take a mind as brilliant as Marlowe's to detect them, for Canterbury, narrowly defined by its ancient walls and even in Marlowe's time barely contained by them, was a veritable microcosm of the seemingly irreconcilable paradoxes of a society between Mediaevalism and Renaissance. Although the city had broken with the religious traditions of many centuries, it was still a consciously pious city. It was still defined and dominated by its cathedral, around which the buildings huddled as if for protection and reassurance. And as if its enormous presence were not enough, there were over a dozen other churches within the walls, outside of which, until 1538, there had also been the towering, enormous Abbey of St. Augustine.

In Marlowe's childhood, Canterbury was still a town of lavish religious ceremonies and of constant testimonies to faith. But

⁷Edward II, ed. H. B. Charlton and R. D. Waller (New York: Gordian Press, Inc., 1966), I.iv.96-102.

St. Augustine now lay in ruin, razed by the father of Queen Elizabeth in what constituted open rebellion against the heretofore unquestioned authority of the representative of God on Earth; monks and priests of the Roman Church were slandered and ridiculed, even by the priests of the new order, whose unquestioned superior was their monarch. When Elizabeth visited Canterbury in 1573, Marlowe then a child of nine, doubtless caught a glimpse of her. In her procession through Canterbury she was borne by four of her Temporal Knights, under a canopy, an honor which had formerly been preserved for the Holy Host. And at night she rested at the palace of St. Austins, built from the former abbot's lodging and used as a private palace for English royalty.

Civic life in Canterbury was far from colorless. Many trades and guilds flourished within the city, and its narrow streets and markets must have been filled with bustling, often noisy crowds. Its proximity to the coast brought many sailors into town who mingled with the townspeople and with other travellers on the way to the coast or, conversely, to the inland areas. And whereas much of public life revolved around religious ritual and order, equally as much was given to secular pleasures. It is generally held that more plays were performed in Canterbury than in Stratford and that it was a regular stop for every major company touring the provinces. Marlowe's exposure to the theatre thus may have come at a very early age.

But the inherent cruelty and brutality of Elizabethan life was very much in evidence. Bull-baiting, for instance, seems to have been one of the most popular public amusements. Canterbury's city ordinance, in fact, stipulated that bull meat be sold only after the animals had been subjected to baiting or chasing, since it was thought that such practices improved the quality of the meat. The spectacle of these animals being tormented by packs of vicious dogs was as common a public scene as were weddings, funerals and church processions. One must, in fact, conclude that the most typical and familiar sounds of the city were composed of the chants of the market criers, the howling of dogs, the screaming of tortured animals and, of course, the ringing of church bells.

Nor was public insensitivity to suffering confined to animals. Witch trials still existed, and in the name of God innocent people were still burnt alive. Canterbury had its gallows just outside St. George's gate (next to a nunnery), and in 1573, for example, the year of Elizabeth's visit, several people were publicly executed in the city.

All of these elements in Marlowe's early environment surely influenced his emotional and intellectual development. But since he was indeed highly intellectual, it is easy to ascribe his later personality almost exclusively to his years at Cambridge. Canterbury as a shaping force in the poet's development is therefore often overlooked or treated too lightly. Yet we know that childhood experiences are crucial in the total development of the individual--

and especially in that of the artist. However intellectualized the artist's ultimate views, he must draw from the deep well of his earliest perceptions. And in this sense Canterbury transposes itself onto all of Marlowe's subsequent experiences and attitudes.

In January of 1579, one month before his fifteenth birthday, Christopher Marlowe became a Queen's scholar at Christ Church. Funded by the Church, the school (which had been refounded under the name of King's school after the dissolution of the cathedral monastery) contained fifty "poor boys" between the ages of nine and fifteen, with special aptitude for learning. Since reading and writing were prerequisites for admission, it is assumed that Marlowe had spent his elementary school years in one of the public schools of Canterbury or possibly at King's School as a non-scholarship student. The latter theory would explain the fact that he was given a scholarship only weeks before he became by age ineligible to receive one.

Although officially the student body was to consist of boys whose families were financially destitute, most of the students were, in fact, sons of the local gentry. One may assume that at King's School the young Marlowe was for the first time brought into close and constant contact with contemporaries who came from wealthy and socially prominent families and that it was not easy for a shoemaker's son to hold his own in such company.

Lessons at King's School started at six in the morning and ended between five and seven at night. Emphasis was mainly on

reading and writing Latin, and it was a typical Renaissance practice to train students to act in classical or neo-classical plays in order to further their proficiency in that language. Another important part of the curriculum was the musical education of the students. It is fairly certain, in fact, that Marlowe was a choir boy since, according to the statutes of the school, its scholars were to assist the choristers at the cathedral and since Marlowe's subsequent scholarship to Cambridge stipulated musical ability. In any case, every day started with High Mass at the Cathedral, and lessons began and ended with prayers and Psalms.

At the end of the Michaelmas term of 1580, Marlowe, then sixteen, graduated from King's School and went to Corpus Christi College at Cambridge, on a scholarship founded by Mathew Parker, Archbishop of Canterbury and Master of Corpus Christi, for "the best and aptest scholars well instructed in their grammar and if it may be such as can make a verse."⁸

Corpus Christi was one of the oldest colleges in Cambridge, flanked and dominated by the churches of St. Benet's and St. Botolph's. The atmosphere at Cambridge was even more ecclesiastical than that of Oxford, and its reputation was at its highest point during Elizabeth's reign. The impetus for Cambridge's surge had, of course, come from the Reformation and more specifically perhaps from the fact that the Queen herself was a product of Cambridge

⁸This and the next four quotations are from Philip Henderson, Christopher Marlowe (New York: Harper and Rowe, 1974), 2d ed., pp. 9-10.

in that her tutors and most of her close advisors had been trained there.

In the two decades prior to Marlowe's residence at Corpus Christi, Cambridge had experienced the rapid spread of Puritanism and Calvinism, although there was equally widespread resistance to and dislike of Puritans. Archbishop Parker, for example, who like all Anglican Archbishops of Canterbury was a Cambridge man, called the Puritans "those irritable precisions of Cambridge." A number of students, in turn, seem to have given expression to generally irreligious views by irreverent behavior in chapel, where their "debauched and atheistical opinions" led them to "make up nonsensical prayers" and to turn "in the wrong direction during the Creed." By the time Marlowe arrived at Cambridge, the Puritans had suffered a substantial defeat in their effort to gain control of the university, but the campus atmosphere was still charged with the currents of strongly felt and passionately debated religious controversy.

Not all students at Cambridge voiced their protests in relatively innocuous ways. Francis Kett, for instance, a Fellow from 1573-1580, who was still at Corpus Christi when Marlowe arrived, was a wellknown heretic convicted and burnt at the stake eight years later. It is not certain, of course, that Marlowe had any direct contact with him, since Kett stayed only a short while after Marlowe arrived. He was, furthermore, much older, and therefore Boas, for instance, thinks it unlikely that they met. Yet, one

can imagine that, at seventeen, Marlowe already had strong opinions and boundless curiosity. Doubtless he would have heard about Kett from other students, for religious controversy was one of the most popular topics at Corpus Christi; and his curiosity might have led him to seek out the older man. There should be no question, after all, that he was determined, self-assured and charming enough to assert himself under almost any circumstances; and it really cannot be assumed that he was too timid to attempt contact with anyone with whom he wanted to become acquainted. But even if Marlowe had not met or even heard of Kett, he was to become very familiar with the ideas of Giordano Bruno, the well-known heretical thinker whose life also ended at the stake.

Although Marlowe was exposed to many intellectual issues at Cambridge, it is not surprising that his heterodox religious thought eventually preoccupied him to the point of becoming an obsession. For while on one hand he was, like all Elizabethans, witness to the ruthless iconoclasm of an age which had in the very name of God attacked and abolished some of the most sacred tenets of the Faith, he was, on the other, forced into the dogmatism of a new order which was on the whole no less limiting and stifling. Religion, after all, was far from a private matter: it permeated every aspect of public life and imposed its dictates, either in the name of orthodoxy or of reform, onto the lives of individuals, the affairs of communities, the policies of states. And in this respect Cambridge may well have been a re-enforcement, in intellectual

and practical terms, of what Marlowe had already perceived through the experiences of his childhood and early youth.

For while Marlowe's new environment was on one hand lively and stimulating, it was on the other restrictive and stifling. Cambridge was still dominantly clerical, and strict rules existed to regulate (or at least attempt to regulate) the students' daily lives. Chapel attendance was mandatory twice a day: once at five in the morning and again at the end of the day. Henderson sums up the general rules of conduct as follows:

In theory undergraduates were closely confined. They were not supposed to go outside of the college gates unless accompanied by a member of the college; and inside they were required to talk to one another in Latin or Hebrew, and they were not allowed to read irreligious books or to keep "fierce birds." All taverns, fairs, dances and public sports, and "all such things that allure and entice them to lewdness, folly, riotous manners, whereunto the nature of man is more inclined," as the Privy Council wrote to the college authorities, were out of bounds. These rules were enforced by severe penalties, such as flogging and the stocks. "Poor scholars," such as Marlowe, were required to be "honest, lowly, studious and such as might become their station." All students were supposed to wear priestly gowns reaching down to their heels made of "woolen cloth, or black puke, London brown, or other such color."⁹

It is easy to imagine how such rules would be viewed by a young man of Marlowe's temperament and character, especially in view of the fact that the wealthier students seem to have virtually ignored them:

⁹This and the next quotation are from Henderson, pp. 14-15.

In practice, the richer students, according to William Harrison, in his Description of England, used to "ruffle and roist it out, exceeding in apparel and riotous company, which draweth them from their books unto another trade. And for excuse, when they are charged with breach of all good order, think it sufficient to say they are gentlemen, which grieveth many not a little." These gentlemen, adds Father Parsons, wore excessive ruffs, clothes of velvet and silk, swords and rapiers, contrary to academic rules; playing at cards and dice in the parlours of inns and engaged in fencing, cock-fighting and bear-baiting. To this disgraceful laxity he attributes "the filling up and pestering of colleges with harlots to be baits for the young men."

It is possible, of course, that Father Parsons, not generally known for his objectivity, exaggerates the social vices at Cambridge. But much of what he wrote seems to have been true, and especially so during Marlowe's stay, when the Master at Corpus Christi, Dr. Norgate, appears to have been a very easy-going, generally inefficient and neglectful head. Wraight states that "at the year of his death in 1587, the year that Marlowe completed his studies, the college was found to be so much in debt, and the finances generally in such ruinous state, that it was shaken to its foundations."¹⁰

Thus Cambridge, besides being a formative aspect in Marlowe's intellectual growth, was equally important to his character development. As Rowse puts it: "the youths intimately thrown together, the vivacity, the brittle disputations . . . the entire masculine tone of it all, the spartanism, the boredom, not without its

¹⁰Wraight, p. 63.

occasional consolations"--all these were crucial elements in Marlowe's life.¹¹ However superior his mind to his father's, for instance, he had doubtless inherited some of John Marlowe's consuming need to assert himself, to raise himself above his station; and he was daily confronted with the wealth and privilege of his peers who were "gentlemen." Echoes of his discontent with the life of a poor scholar were never to leave him and were to find expression in various passages of his future works, such as in Faustus' resolution:

I'll have them fill the public schools with silk
Wherewith the students shall be bravely clad.
(I.i.89-90)

The good life beckoned, and Marlowe without wealth or name but with intelligence, personal magnetism and ambition needed to find ways not only to hold his own in an environment where most of his peers were his social superiors, but also to win his own share of fame and fortune. This quest for recognition and power is an important aspect in all of his major works, from Tamburlaine through Faustus. Though promising in his academic and artistic pursuits, Marlowe was doubtless practical and realistic enough to know that these achievements alone were not likely to bring him the kind of life he longed for (the material riches and pleasures, for example, which are so important to all his heroes). It is possible, therefore, that he used his friendship with some

¹¹Rowse, p. 17.

of the young noblemen at Corpus Christi to gain access to circles which could get him employment in the Queen's secret service. And it can be concluded, then, that while still at Cambridge he was already becoming involved in religious and political intrigues which were eventually to seal his fate.

In 1584 Marlowe took his B.A. and became Dominus Marlowe. Since he was subsequently given another three-year scholarship it is evident that he intended, or at least pretended to prepare for Holy Orders; for the Parker scholarships were given only to young men preparing for the priesthood. Marlowe probably meant to make full use of available scholarships while actually having little desire to become a clergyman. One is reminded of the lines given to Faustus:

Having commenced, be a divine in show,
Yet level at the end of every art.
(I.i.3-4)

He was by now well educated in Latin literature, especially in poetry, in rhetoric, philosophy, logic, history and cosmology, a combination of geography and astronomy. He also acquired some knowledge of mathematics and medicine. He probably had a thorough knowledge of French and an adequate proficiency in Greek. It has been repeatedly pointed out, however, that he was far better acquainted with the classical Latin writers than with the Greek. Above everything, he had a sound knowledge of divinity, a fact which was in a rather unusual way to determine the course of his life.

It is somewhat ironical, if not to say symbolic, that the assortment of Greek and Latin Bibles which Archbishop Parker had provided for the use of his scholars, was chained in one of the chambers of the students' residence. Marlowe was doubtless intimately familiar with this little chained library, but his consuming interest by that time probably lay in extracurricular reading. His mind seems to have thrived on controversy, and he may well have joined the "odd crew" about which Gabriel Harvey wrote in a letter to Spenser, in 1579, the year before Marlowe went to Cambridge:

You cannot step into a scholar's study but . . .
 you shall likely find open either Bodin de Republica
 or Leroy's Exposition upon Aristoteles' Politics
 or some other like French or Italian political dis-
 course. And I warrant you some good fellows amongst
 us begin now to be pretty well acquainted with a
 certain parlous book called, as I remember me, Il
 Principo di Nicolo Machiavelli, and I can peradventure
 name you an odd crew or two that are as cunning in
 his Discorsi, in his Historia Fiorentini, and in
 his Dialogues della Guerra too, and in certain Turkish
 discourses. . . .¹²

This account tends to lead one to the assumption that Marlowe had the opportunity to become familiar with Machiavelli's own writing rather than merely, as is often held, through Gentillet's distorted and inaccurate interpretation of it in his Contre-Machiavel. In any case, the seeming embodiment of what Robert Greene called

¹²Wraight, p. 55.

Marlowe's "pestilent Machiavilian pollicie,"¹³ in the character of the Guise (The Massacre of Paris) and more notably in Barabas and Machiavel (the speaker of the Prologue in The Jew of Malta), virtually established the tradition of the Machiavellian stage villain of Elizabethan England. But whether or not Marlowe was familiar with Machiavelli's work, he was soon to witness the veracity of its tenets and participate in the practical application of its philosophy.

In June of 1587, Marlowe was to take his M.A. degree from Cambridge and was expected to take Holy Orders shortly thereafter. But a few weeks before his graduation there were rumors at the university to the effect that he had become Catholic and gone to Rheims to prepare for the priesthood at the Jesuit seminary there. These rumors were, of course, damaging to Marlowe. Not only did they imply that, after being the recipient of a scholarship funded by the Anglican Church he was now turning his back on his benefactors and joining the hostile Catholic camp, but also that he was betraying his country and his Queen. It must be remembered that in February of the same year Mary, Queen of Scots, had been executed after years of political plots and manoeuvres for and against her ascension to the throne of England. English Catholics in France had been instrumental in every scheme to advance the

¹³Paul H. Kocher, Christopher Marlowe. A Study of His Thought, Learning, and Character (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1946), p. 180.

cause of Mary and after her death were feverishly plotting the invasion of England by Catholic forces and the dethronement of its "pretended" Queen. Rheims, thus, was a veritable hotbed of ferment against the established government of England, and Marlowe's alleged association with the Jesuit seminary would have constituted political as well as religious treason.

It is likely that Marlowe had indeed gone to Rheims, but as a government agent charged with collecting information about the political activities and intentions of Elizabeth's enemies. It was a situation not unlike the one in The Jew of Malta (I.ii.), in which Barabas decides to use his daughter as a spy; but unlike Abigail, who is sent to the nunnery in order to help him destroy its inhabitants, Marlowe was in little danger of being converted--by either side. Although he was later again to be accused of leaning toward Catholicism (a curious charge against an "Atheist"), there is no real evidence that he was impressed by it any more than he was by Anglicanism or Puritanism. Instead it seems likely that, even while he was still studying at Cambridge, his own attitude toward organized religion is summed up in the Guise's Prologue to The Jew of Malta:

I count religion but a childish toy,
And hold there is no sin but ignorance.
(Prologue, 14-15)

But however unconventional his attitudes and indeed his life, by now, it behooved Marlowe to part from Cambridge if not in good grace then at least in good academic standing. Doubtless

he now had connections in high places (probably with Sir Francis Walsingham himself, with whose younger cousin, Thomas, he was apparently even then well acquainted),¹⁴ and it is therefore not surprising, if unusual, that the Privy Council itself intervened on Marlowe's behalf. Leslie Hotson, in 1925, discovered the following entry in the Privy Council Register, dated June 19, 1587:

Whereas it was reported that Christopher Morley was determined to haue gone beyond the seas to Reames and there to remaine Their Lordships thought good to certefie that he had no such intent, but that in all his accions he had behaued him selfe orderlie and discreettlie wherebie he had done her Majestie good service, & deserued to be rewarded for his faithfull dealings: Their Lordships request that the rumor thereof should be allaiied by all possible meanes, and that he should be furthered in the degree he was to take this next Commencement: Because it was not her Majesties pleasure that anie one emploied as he had been in matters touching the benefitt of his Countrie should be defamed by those that are ignorant in th' affaires he went about.¹⁵

Obviously Marlowe experienced no further problems with the Cambridge authorities. He graduated in July and, instead of taking Anglican Orders, proceeded directly to London in order to launch his career as a playwright. As a poet he had already distinguished himself with his probably secret translations of Ovid's *Elegies* (which were to be publicly burnt after his death); and at least Part One of Tamburlaine was already finished. What we know of him, up to this time, we know only from public documents, from

¹⁴Boas, p. 122.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 22.

deductions based on environmental influences and factors, and from his tendency to reveal himself in his writing; yet such knowledge seems sufficient to ascribe to him, by inference, certain personality traits. Thus perhaps the words of Spencer to Baldock, in Edward II, best characterize Marlowe's attitude at the end of his Cambridge days:

Then Baldock, you must case the scholar off,
 And learn to court it like a gentleman.
 Tis not a black coat and a little band,
 A velvet cap'd cloak, fac'd before with serge.
 And smelling to a nosegay all the day,
 Or holding of a napkin in your hand,
 Or saying a long grace at a table's end,
 Or making low legs to a nobleman,
 Or looking downward, with your eyelids close,
 Or saying, "Truly an't may please your honour!"
 Can get you any favor with great men.
 You must be proud, bold, pleasant, resolute,
 And now and then, stab as occasion serves.
 (II.i.31-44)

Baldock replies that, although he appears "curate-like," he is "inwardly licentious enough to be apt for any kind of villany," and we are left to suspect that we have, here, at least a partial self-portrait of the artist.

Of Marlowe's first two years in London virtually nothing is known, except of course that both parts of his Tamburlaine (performed by the Lord Admiral's men, with Edward Alleyn in the title role) were immensely successful and followed each other in rapid succession. The first part of Tamburlaine must have gone into performance almost as soon as Marlowe arrived in London, a fact which points to the likelihood that it had been written while

Marlowe was still at Cambridge or else away on government business. This theory is enforced by Sir Edmund Chambers' discovery, in 1930, of a letter dated November 16, 1587, in which Phillip Gawdy tells his father about the accidental death of one of the Lord Admiral's men, who had been tied to a post and shot by his fellow actors. There is now general agreement that the incident referred to an enactment of the death of the Governor of Babylon, in Tamburlaine, Part II, and as evident in the prologue to this play, it was written consequent to the popular success of Part One.

Although during his lifetime none of Marlowe's published works bore his name, textual evidence points so strongly to his work that there is no longer any dissent (as there had been at the beginning of the nineteenth century) about his authorship. Already the "Marlovian line" was strongly and uniquely in evidence; so was his knowledge of the classical myths, of Latin drama, of astronomy and especially of geography; and, most important, so was the preoccupation with the abiding theme of Man's relentless drive to challenge and attempt to defy the limits of his existence.

So far Marlowe's life seems to have been an extraordinary story of success. He had raised himself out of the social milieu of his father's shop, gotten three successive scholarships which afforded him an education equal to that of any nobleman, and had met and become friends with young men of wealth and influence. He had also attracted the attention of high government officials who had trusted him with travelling on secret missions on behalf

of the Queen. Furthermore he was exceptionally gifted as a poet and had already won fame in London for his plays. But, Marlowe, like his heroes, was destined for tragedy, and his doom, like theirs, was determined by his gravitation toward problems from which he could not extricate himself.

On September 16, 1589, Marlowe became involved in a duel in Hog Lane, Finsbury, with William Bradley, son of the host of the nearby Bishop Inn. A friend of Marlowe, the poet Thomas Watson, intervened, apparently to end the fight, whereupon Bradley furiously turned on Watson, wounding and cornering him. Watson, seemingly desperate, struck a deadly blow to Bradley. Bystanders called a constable who arrested Watson and Marlowe, and they were sent to Newgate prison to await trial. Marlowe spent thirteen days in the grim, dark prison, where, according to Lake Hutton, who had been imprisoned there during the same year, starving men in irons begged for bread and where, earlier, a scholar committed for "charms and devilish witchcraft" had been "by famished prisoners eaten up."¹⁶

Conditions at Newgate were so terrible that few prisoners survived extended confinement there. But once again Marlowe was lucky: on October 3, he was released on bail, and one month later he was acquitted of criminal charges. Watson, less fortunate, had to spend nearly five months at Newgate and survived his release by only two and a half years.

¹⁶Henderson, p. 31.

But although Marlowe had been cleared of the charges of committing a violent crime (as he had earlier been cleared of the charges of Catholicism), he was now becoming the target for even deadlier allegations. In the sixteenth century the charge of "Atheism" (a term which was used in the denunciation of anyone who dared question or challenge, in theory or action, the prevailing ecclesiastical or secular authority) was probably the most sinister of all aspersions because it could be applied, almost at random, to any intellectual or practical endeavor which was divergent from prevailing religious, philosophical, scientific or even political thought. One should therefore not be surprised that the young poet became entangled in a web of such charges; what surprises, in fact, is that the prevailing oppressiveness did not utterly obliterate most intellectual and creative achievements of the age.

It has been held, notably by Boas, that Marlowe's Cambridge years do not warrant any suspicion of "Atheism" on his part. Yet (as noted above) the atmosphere at Cambridge was essentially conducive to such heresy, and so apparently was Marlowe's character. And he may, after all, have been acquainted with Kett, or at least with Kett's theories (which were essentially Arian in nature, as were Marlowe's). In addition, there is Oxinden's statement that Marlowe had converted his friend, Thomas Fineaux, to Atheism, which he was later forced to recant; and another admirer of Marlowe, Simon Aldrich, who entered Trinity College in 1593, allegedly told

Oxinden "that Marlowe was an Atheist and wrote a book against the Scriptures, how that it was all one man's making; and would have printed it, but it could not be suffered to be printed."¹⁷ Finally, we do know that Marlowe summarily turned his back on the prospect of joining the Anglican priesthood and, judging by the manner in which he proceeded, may assume that however well he dissembled he had not the least inclination to become a spokesman for Christian philosophy and dogma.

The first indication that Marlowe was beginning to acquire a reputation as an Atheist came in Robert Greene's preface to Perimedes the Blacksmith (1588). In it Greene describes Marlowe as a "mad and scoffing" poet, whose work reflects his own blasphemy in "daring God out of heaven with that Atheist Tamburlan."¹⁸ It is generally conceded that Greene's reference to Marlowe, here, was prompted to a considerable degree by professional envy, for Greene's moralistic tone in this passage is in no way consistent with his personal life.

But in September of 1592, following his bizarre death, Greene's unfinished autobiographical novel Greene's Groatsworth of Wit Bought with a million of Repentance was published and created a sensation in London's literary circles. Although he used no names, Greene, in one of his exhortations, was obviously addressing himself to Marlowe:

¹⁷Boas, p. 110.

¹⁸Kocher, p. 23.

Wonder not (for with thee will I first begin) thou famous gracer of tragedians, that Greene, who hath said with thee (like the fool in his heart) there is no God, should now give glory unto his greatness; for his Hand lies heavily upon me; He hath spoken unto me with a voice of thunder, and I have felt He is a God that can punish enemies. Why should thy excellent wit, His gift, be so blinded, that thou shouldst give no glory to the Giver: Is it pestilent Machiavellian policy that thou hast studied? O peevish folly! What are his rules but mere confused machines, able to extirpate in small time the generation of mankind. For if Sic volo, sic jubeo hold in those that are able to command: and if it be lawful Fas et nefas to do anything that is beneficial [apparently to oneself], only Tyrants should possess the earth, and they striving to exceed in tyranny, should each to the other be a slaughter man; till the mightiest outliving all, one stroke were left for death that in one age man's life should end. The broacher of this diabolical atheism is dead, and in his life had never the felicity he aimed at; but he began in craft, lived in fear, and ended in despair. . . . This apostate perished as ill as Julian: and wilt thou, my friend, be his disciple? Look but to me, by him persuaded to that liberty, and thou shalt find it in an infernal bondage. I know the least of my demerits merit this miserable death, but wilful striving against known-truth exceedeth all the terrors of my soul. Defer not (with me) till this last point of extremity: for little knowest thou how in the end thou shalt be visited.¹⁹

On first glance this admonition may appear to be no more than conventional deathbed moralizing. But it is also a remarkable assessment of the human condition by a man who, not unlike Marlowe, was torn by the dichotomy of his age. Greene acknowledges his essential kinship with the rebel against traditional order and divine authority, but he finally submits to them; he echoes the ruthless defiance as well as the agony of Marlowe's heroes, but

¹⁹Henderson, pp. 36-37.

he opts for ultimate salvation because the forces of orthodoxy are still far too powerful to be resisted. (And however simply expressed, here, Greene's assessment of the consequences of total self-assertion is well perceived and strangely prophetic, especially in the twentieth century.) Thus, in essence, Greene is in the position of a more orthodox Faustus, who must ask himself: "Whither should I fly?" And in agony and fear he is compelled to submit to a vengeful God.

There is no evidence that Marlowe followed Greene's advice--nor indeed that he appreciated it. Like Shakespeare, who was also mentioned in Greene's work, Marlowe was offended by Greene's exhortation. But Henry Chettle, editor and publisher of the Groatsworth, while apologizing to Shakespeare adamantly refused to apologize to Marlowe, nor even to make his acquaintance. Chettle had, as it were, deleted the most damaging part of Greene's address to Marlowe and apparently believed that he owed nothing further to a man with whom he felt no kinship and whose reputation was questionable.

But soon more serious and specific allegations were to be made against Marlowe. On May 12, 1593, Thomas Kyd was arrested on suspicion of being involved in seditious activities. A search of his living quarters produced three sheets of paper which were described by the arresting officer as "Vile heretical conceiptes denyinge the deity of Jhesus Christe or Savior."²⁰ The pages

²⁰The quotations and general account of Kyd's and subsequently Marlowe's arrest are from Tannenbaum, pp. 19-28.

contained excerpts of a Socinian treatise quoted by John Proctor, a parish priest who had, in 1549, published a book titled The Fall of the Late Arrian, in which he refuted the particular points made in the treatise.

It has been pointed out that, since the confiscated papers were transcripts and not atheistical but rather Theistic or Unitarian in thought, Kyd might have utilized these obvious points for his defense instead of insisting that the papers were "fragments of a disputation" which he "had" from Marlowe. But however logical and sensible such a line of reasoning may appear to the modern reader, it assumes a religious moderation and tolerance which simply did not exist in Elizabethan England. Furthermore, scholars seem to agree that Kyd was probably envious of Marlowe's success as a playwright and may even have held him responsible for his arrest.

While the close scrutiny of Kyd's "waste and idle papers" revealed no evidence to substantiate the original charges against him, the new and even more dangerous suspicion of heresy which arose from the seizure of the Socinian fragments prompted his being interrogated under torture. Kyd now insisted that the dangerous papers actually belonged to Marlowe and that they had become accidentally shuffled in with his own papers when he and Marlowe had been "writing in the same room two years since." Considering that the notes sought to prove the existence of "contraries" in the Scriptures and to refute the divinity of Jesus, it is understandable that Kyd tried feverishly to clear himself of the charges

of heresy; these were, after all, the same kind of Arian arguments which had brought Francis Kett (among others) to the stake four years previous.

The exact nature of Kyd's testimony during the time of his imprisonment is not known, but it was obviously damaging enough for the Privy Council to issue an order for Marlowe's arrest. Thus, on May 20, Marlowe was taken from Scadbury, the home of his friend and patron Thomas Walsingham, and brought to London. But unlike the hapless Kyd, he was immediately released on bail with the provision that he stay within the precincts of London and be in "daily attendance" on the members of the Council "until he shall be licensed to the contrary."

The leniency of the Council once more seems evidence of its favorable predisposition in regard to Marlowe. Perhaps it was prompted by the fact that the poet was an agent of the Queen--and perhaps the Council was aware that Marlowe himself had been responsible for Kyd's arrest. But in actuality the very fact that Marlowe was allowed to remain free constituted his death sentence, for it provided his enemies--or possibly his friends--the opportunity to silence the poet before he could implicate anyone else.

One way or another, Marlowe's doom was now dealt. The evidence which began to accumulate against him was such that, if interrogated and tried by the dreaded Star Chamber, he had hardly a chance to escape alive. The kind of charges brought against him are evident in one of Kyd's letters to the Lord Keeper, John

Puckering (written after Marlowe's death but most likely containing some of the testimony Kyd had given to the court), in which he describes some of Marlowe's opinions and character traits:

First, it was his custom when I knew him first, and as I heard say he continued it in table talk or otherwise, to jest at the divine scriptures, gibe at prayers, and strive in argument to frustrate and confute what hath been spoke or writ by prophets and such holy men.

1. He would report St. John to be Our Saviour Christ's Alexis (I cover it with reverence and trembling) that is, that Christ did love him with an extraordinary love.

2. That for me to write a poem of St. Paul's conversion, as I was determined, he said would be as if I should go write a book of fast and loose, esteeming Paul a juggler.

3. That the prodigal child's portion was but four nobles, he held his purse so near the bottom in all pictures, and that it either was a jest or else four nobles then was thought a great patrimony, not thinking it a proverb.

4. That things esteemed to be done by divine power might have as well been done by observation of men, all which he would so suddenly take slight occasions to slip out as I and many others, in regard of his other rashness in attempting sudden privy injuries to men did overslip though often reprehend him for it, and for which God is my witness as well by my Lord's commandment, as in hatred of his life and thoughts I left and did refrain his company.

"He would persuade with men of quality to go unto the King of Scots, whither I hear Roydon is gone and where, if he had lived, he told me, when I saw him last, he meant to be."²¹

It is not difficult to believe that these utterances were Marlowe's; considering other biographical evidence, in fact, they seem rather typical of him. And even though Kyd probably had reason to hate Marlowe, it is unlikely that he could risk to lie to the

²¹Henderson, pp. 59-60.

Privy Council, which was a formidable institution indeed. Kyd's letter does give the impression that Marlowe was rather careless, even in public, in voicing his opinions, and it appeals to Lord Puckering to "enquire of such as he conversed withal, that is (as I am given to understand) with Harriot, Warner, Roydon, and some stationers in Paul's Churchyard,"²² to bear him out. Kyd's reference to these men is probably the most interesting part of his letters, because it sheds some light on the kind of people Marlowe kept company with. They were, from what we have learned about them, brilliant, unorthodox, and freethinking--and accomplished either in literary or scientific pursuits. Marlowe's acquaintance with Harriot, a renowned mathematician and astronomer, is also one of the factors which link him with Sir Walter Raleigh and with his distinguished, if notorious, School of Night.

Kyd's testimony against Marlowe is substantiated by yet another important document, sent to the Privy Council by Richard Baines, an informer. The Note containing the opinions of one Christopher Marly concerning his damnable judgement of religion and scorn of God's Word, was probably received by the Council three days before Marlowe's death and contained a list of charges so horrifying that a copy of it was sent to the Queen. The Baines Note attributes to Marlowe the following habitual utterances:

"That the Indians and many authors of antiquity have assuredly written above sixteen thousand years agoe,

²²Ibid., p. 59.

whereas Adam is proved to have lived within six thousand years.

"He affirmeth that Moses was but a juggler, and that one Heriots (Harriot), being Sir Walter Raleigh's man, can do more than he.

"That Moses made the Jews to travel 40 years in the wilderness, which journey might have been done in less than one year, ere they came to the promised land, to the intent that those who were privy to most of his subtleties might perish, and so an everlasting superstition remain in the hearts of the people.

"That the first beginning of religion was only to keep men in awe.

"That it was an easy matter for Moses, being brought up in all the arts of the Egyptians, to abuse the Jews, being a rude and gross people.

"That Christ was a bastard and His mother dishonest.

"That He was the son of a carpenter, and that if the Jews among whom He was born did crucify Him they best knew Him and whence He came.

"That Christ deserved better to die than Barabbas, and that the Jews made a good choice, though Barabbas were both a thief and a murderer.

"That if there be any God or any good religion, then it is in the papists, because the service of God is performed with more ceremonies, as elevation of the Mass, organs, singing men, shaven crowns &c.

That all Protestants are hypocritical asses.

"That if he were put to write a new religion, he would undertake both a more excellent and admirable method, and that the New Testament is filthily written.

"That the woman of Samaria and her sister were whores and that Christ knew them dishonestly.

"That St. John the Evangelist was bedfellow to Christ and leaned always in his bosom; that he used him as the sinners of Sodoma.

"That all they that love not tobacco and boys were fools.

"That all the apostles were fishermen and base fellows neither of wit nor worth; that Paul only had wit but he was a timorous fellow in bidding men to be subject to magistrates against his conscience.

"That he had as good right to coin as the Queen of England, and that he was acquainted with one Poole, a prisoner in Newgate, who hath great skill in mixture of metals; and having learned such things of him, he meant, through the help of a cunning stamp-maker, to coin French crowns, pistolets and English shillings.

"That if Christ would have instituted the sacrament with more ceremonial reverence it would have been had in more admiration; that it would have been much better being administered in a tobacco pipe.

"That the Angel Gabriel was bawd to the Holy Ghost, because he brought the salutation to Mary.

"That one Richard Cholmley had confessed that he was persuaded by Marlowe's reasons to become an atheist.²³

The striking similarities of some of these accusations to those in Kyd's letters are evident. Yet there is no indication that the two men were allied or even acquainted. And, again, the charges ring true, even though Baines is more brutally direct in expressing what Kyd apparently relates with some reluctance. (It has been proven that Marlowe did, in fact, become acquainted with "one Poole," a coiner, while both men were imprisoned at Newgate.) Furthermore, Baines, too, gives the impression that he can verify all his charges, "with many other," and apparently expects no trouble in finding witnesses to support them:

"These things, with many other, shall by good and honest witness be approved to be his opinions and common speeches; and that this Marlowe doth not only hold them himself, but almost into every company he cometh he persuadeth men to atheism, willing them not to be afeard of bugbears and hobgoblins, and utterly scorning both God and His ministers, as I, Richard Baines, will justify and approve, both by mine oath and the testimony of many honest men; and almost all men with whom he hath conversed at any time will testify the same.

Baines then expresses the opinion that "all men in Christianity ought to endeavor that the mouth of so dangerous a member may

²³This and the next four quotations are from Henderson, pp. 62-65.

be stopped." And he adds what may well have been the most immediately lethal statement--if indeed Marlowe was still alive: "He saith likewise that he hath quoted a number of contrarities out of the Scripture, which he hath given to some great men who in convenient time shall be named. When these things shall be called in question the witness shall be produced."

There has, of course, been considerable debate about the credibility of the Baines Note.²⁴ But, whereas J. H. Ingram has argued that the note is a forgery, and other critics have maintained that, considering Baines' unsavory reputation as a double agent and an informer, little credence should be given to his testimony, most agree that (as in the case of Kyd) the awesome power of the Star Chamber would effectively deter any presentation of unsupported charges. Furthermore, had the matter come to a trial, he would certainly have been forced to produce the witnesses he had guaranteed to supply. Paul Kocher, in fact, argues persuasively that the note actually constitutes a rather coherent, if incomplete, outline of Marlowe's often-mentioned treatise against Christianity which he had read in private circles and which had been written down from memory by Baines. Kocher also speculates that the "great men" referred to in the Note were those in the Raleigh circle, a supposition which leads Samuel Tannenbaum, for instance, to conclude that Marlowe was killed at Raleigh's behest--a theory which

²⁴For more detailed accounts of the various theories concerning the Baines Note, see the treatment of that topic by Boas, Ingram, Kocher, and Tannenbaum.

is made more plausible by the fact that Raleigh's name was removed from the copy of the Note which was sent to the Queen.

But it was nevertheless one of Thomas Walsingham's men who killed Marlowe, and scholars have therefore also tended to hold Walsingham responsible for his friend's death. Furthermore, the political implications of Kyd's charge that Marlowe was planning to go "unto the King of Scots," suggest that Lady Audrey Walsingham may have had a hand in his murder. As Poirier summarizes that matter, Lady Walsingham was continuously plotting to secure the English throne for James VI. Since Marlowe apparently was interested in and informed about the Scottish King's affairs, he may well have had secret information which could have implicated Lady Walsingham. Fearing for her life, she may have persuaded Frizer, who often acted in matters of her interest, to eliminate the man who knew too much about her.²⁵

The truth about the exact circumstances which led to Marlowe's death will probably never be known. He died in the evening of May 30, 1593, in Deptford Strand, at the house (or possibly the inn) of a certain Eleanor Bull, and in the company of three men: Robert Poley, Nicholas Skeres, and Ingram Frizer. All of them were men of questionable character and had worked, or were still working, as secret agents or messengers. According to these three rather unreliable witnesses, Marlowe had spent the

²⁵Michael Poirier, Christopher Marlowe (London: Chatto and Windus, 1951), pp. 33-34.

day with them, talking, dining and walking in the garden. After supper Marlowe allegedly lay down on a bed, while his companions were sitting at a table nearby, playing backgammon.

The fatal incident supposedly was the result of Marlowe's getting into an argument with Frizer over the payment of the food bill--an argument which, according to the three eyewitnesses, got so violent that Marlowe sprung up, drew a dagger which Frizer was wearing on his belt, and assaulted him with it, causing his companion to suffer three long, shallow head wounds. Frizer (in what appears to have been a rather incredible display, first of physical awkwardness, then of gymnastic prowess), allegedly managed to retrieve his dagger and to drive it into Marlowe's skull, just above the right eye. The thrust was reported by the coroner as having inflicted a wound two inches deep from which Marlowe was said to have died instantly.

Thus ended the life of one of England's most brilliant and promising poets--at age twenty-nine and as a victim, perhaps, of his own rash temper and tendency to inflict "sudden privy injuries" upon others but, more likely, as a victim of what Tannenbaum has quite persuasively argued to have been a contrived murder.

It is difficult to imagine that, however shocking Marlowe's religious opinions may have been, they could have been the cause for his death. A. L. Rowse, in discussing Kyd's charges, sees Marlowe in this respect as nothing more than "a recognisable, a familiar enough, type among intellectuals." On the whole, Rowse

feels, they actually present "an advance in rationality," and he maintains that "the edge on his temper springs not only from his temperament and its defects, the split within him whence came his genius, but from being savaged by the mountainous mass of non-sensical beliefs and prejudices which he had the courage to challenge, but not the wisdom to ignore."²⁶

But whereas one might agree with this evaluation in general, it is difficult to imagine indifference as an effective intellectual means of resisting the oppressiveness of sixteenth century Christianity. Rowse's lofty attitude about all this "nonsense" is a twentieth century attitude, after all. The "bugbears and hobgoblins" which Marlowe sought to defeat were part of an unending nightmare. "In the sixteenth century Christianity was more than a religion. It was a state within a state, with a vast officialdom, a censorship, an obligatory church attendance, everpresent moral and doctrinal compulsion, the rack and the stake before death, and eternal hell afterwards."²⁷

Against such conditions every courageous individual, in whatever intellectual endeavor, must surely have felt compelled to fight. Would it have been wisdom, then, to acquiesce, to perpetuate the nightmare? It would take centuries for anyone to say publicly what men like Marlowe were saying without having to

²⁶Rowse, p. 122.

²⁷Kocher, p. 332.

suffer the most severe of recriminations (and it may well be argued that even today it is not advisable to do so). Marlowe was, in this sense, a revolutionary. And his courage was even greater when one considers the fact that he knew in his heart that he could never really destroy the bugbears and hobgoblins--nor effectively challenge their creator.

CHAPTER III

THE LIFE OF MELVILLE

In November of 1890, a few months before Herman Melville's death, Edward Bok, a syndicated columnist in New York, wrote that there were "more people today who believe Herman Melville dead than there are who know he is living."¹ The once famous writer, he declared, was now so obscure that "Busy New York has no idea he is even alive." And when Melville did die, in September of the next year, the New York Tribune was first to print an obituary which contained the following statement: "He won considerable fame as an author by the publication of a book in 1847 entitled 'Typee'. . . . This was his best work, although he has since written a number of other stories, which were published more for private than public circulation." But the Tribune represented no isolated case of obliviousness; the New York Times, no less, published an incredibly inaccurate obituary entitled "A Tribute to the Late Hiram Melville."

At that time the general critical estimation of Melville's work could perhaps be summed up in the words of Fitz-James O'Brien, well known literary critic, who in 1853 had written: "Typee . . . was healthy; Omoo nearly so; after them came Mardi with its excusable

¹This and the next three quotations are from Hugh W. Hetherington, Melville's Reviewers, British and American, 1846-1891 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1961), pp. 287, 290, 288, 219.

insanity." O'Brien does not even mention Redburn and White-Jacket and apparently finds it unnecessary to comment on the degree of sanity in Moby Dick.

Today, Melville is considered one of the most important American writers. Indeed, during the past thirty years no American author has received more intense scholarly attention--not only in his native country but in Europe, South America, Japan and Australia--than this man, who at the end of his life had been neglected, ignored, or forgotten by the general public as well as the critics. Thus it can be said that Melville, like Marlowe, has truly been discovered through the literary scholarship of the twentieth century.

Herman Melville, born on August 1, 1819, in New York, was the third child and second son of Allan and Maria Gansevoort Melville.² His father was an importer of French goods and apparently a genteel if essentially weak man who, though devoutly religious, valued all the outward amenities of life and took great pride in his name and social position. Allan came from a good English family, had travelled extensively as a young man and had, in fact, visited his titled relatives in Scotland the year before Herman was born. But the American branch of the Melville family was neither as wealthy

²The facts about Melville's life are from the following sources: Lewis Mumford, Herman Melville (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1929; rev. ed. 1962); Leon Howard, Herman Melville (Berkeley: University of California Press, c1951); and Eleanor Melville Metcalf, Herman Melville: Cycle and Epicycle (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953. Only the quotations are footnoted. The quotations from Mumford are from the revised edition.

nor as eminent as the family of his wife, the Gansevoorts, rich landowners of Dutch descent who were among the most successful of the old Dutch families in upperstate New York.

Maria Melville was the daughter of General Peter Gansevoort, a great soldier and hero of the Revolutionary War. The only girl in a family of boys, she was formal, class-conscious and inordinately proud. Lewis Mumford describes her as "preening herself with a sense of her family's importance," and wearing "her pride in station like a crest."³ Allan, according to Mumford, was "a trivial but not uncultivated man," with little imagination and less capability to deal with adversity. The couple was apparently well matched, since both partners had the same general values and aims. Mumford concedes that Herman's parents valued correctness in all aspects of life but sees this trait as congruent with their generally petty and shallow nature.

But if Allan and Maria Melville were somewhat shallow and pompous people, they were probably no more so than the circles in which they found themselves. The society they were part of was generally pleasant and agreeable but on the whole conventional, pretentious and provincial,

and Mr. and Mrs. Melville were just the sort of people to persuade one to accept its conventions as the very acme of human desire. One visited: one left one's card; one entertained at dinner; occasionally one went to the theatre, or to one of those miscellaneous exhibitions of forgeries and bad copies and minor

³This and the next two quotations are from Mumford, pp. 6, 7.

masterpieces that served to introduce art into America: one might even descend a little to that prodigious educational spectacle the Cosmorama, or Picture of the World, at Scudder's Museum.

The New York of 1819, though in its physical aspects already a large city, was yet devoid of the creative activities which vitalized the European cities. And its founding families of Dutch and English descent (such as the Gansevoorts, for instance) were not patrons of the fine arts. They had built manorial houses along the Hudson and Mohawk and had but to sit back and watch their land holdings become more and more valuable as the population increased. They were powerful proprietors, interested in the crafts, in commerce and in trade, but they had nothing to contribute to the establishment of an artistic community.

It is difficult, today, to think of New York as provincial--probably because it is difficult to envision the New York of 1819. It must be remembered that during Melville's childhood the city was not much more important than other port cities such as Boston, Baltimore, Salem and Charleston, and that it had taken the lead mainly because it had a regularly sailing packet line. Of course, the Erie Canal was then under construction, and this direct water route to inland America was to be a decisive element in shaping the future of New York and of the country at large. But in 1819 change was not yet the key word for the comfortable bourgeoisie of New York.

At the time of Herman's birth his father's business was doing moderately well, and the Melville home, complete with a cook,

a nurse and a governess, was a reflection of the prosperous respectability of its owner. Within the first few years of Herman's life Allan moved his family three times, each time to a larger house in a more fashionable neighborhood. Extremely conscious of the public image they wished to project, the Melvilles missed no occasion to live up to it. When they travelled they did so in a private carriage, even if Allan had to rent one and overload it with his steadily growing family; and when Maria visited her family for the summer, she travelled not only with her children but with her complete entourage of servants. There is little doubt that the Melvilles felt a need to stand out in public life and to be recognized as people of special rank and importance.

But the outward appearance of solidity and affluence was deceiving. Allan's business was impaired by a greatly curtailed foreign exchange, a result of America's first post-war depression. Furthermore--and this may have been the primary problem--commercial enterprise was an endeavor for which Allan Melville seems to have been particularly unsuited. By 1828 he found himself in serious financial trouble, and toward the end of 1830 he had incurred too many debts and exhausted his financial resources to the point where it was necessary for him to close down his business. Unable to maintain his home, he took his family to Albany, leaving behind various unpaid bills, including a quarter's rent for his house. His prospects for a new start in business, however, were jeopardized by the fact that he had not settled his financial obligations,

and he was forced once again to make desperate appeals for assistance to his father and to Peter Gansevoort, his brother-in-law, who had lent him money on previous occasions.

Almost immediately after the family's arrival in Albany, Herman and his older brother Gansevoort were enrolled in the Albany Academy, where Herman did so well that he received the first prize in his class for his excellence in "ciphering books."⁴ This was doubtless a surprise to his parents because usually it was Gansevoort who took the limelight when it came to winning honors. Herman, whose health had not always been the best, had been a quiet, at times even withdrawn child, whom his father four years earlier had described in a letter to the Gansevoorts as "very backward in speech and somewhat slow in comprehension." But, Allan assured his relatives, "you will find him as far as he understands men and things both solid and profound and of a docile and amiable disposition."⁵

There is no evidence that his father's estimation of Herman was unanimous; in fact, Herman became the declared favorite of his relatives on the Melville as well as on the Gansevoort side. But even so, it was his misfortune constantly to be unfavorably compared to his brothers. Though more "sedate," than either of them, he was considered "less buoyant in mind" than the older Gansevoort and less "bewitching" and "intelligent" than the younger

⁴Howard, p. 6.

⁵Mumford, p. 10.

Allan.⁶ Once in a while, however, he had surprised his parents. In February of 1828, for instance, Allan had written to Peter Gansevoort: "You will be as much surprised as myself to know that Herman proved the best speaker in the indoctury department of [his] High School," where, as Allan proudly reported, Gansevoort still ranked among the top students of the senior class. And as late as 1830 Allan wrote a letter which, in the words of Leon Howard, testifies to his "incapacity for enthusiasm about his second son." Allan, after praising Gansevoort's accomplishments and daughter Helen Maria's gifts, writes:

Herman, I think is making more progress than formerly, and without being a bright scholar, he maintains a respectable standing, and would proceed further, if he could be induced to study more--being a most amiable and innocent child, I cannot find it in my heart to coerce him, especially as he seems to have chosen Commerce as a favorite pursuit, whose practical activity can well dispense with much book knowledge.

One might wonder if "solid" and "profound" Herman was concentrating on commerce because of the constant tension in his home over his father's worsening business prospects. His mother, who had long been nervous and overwrought, was given to periods of deep depression and to alarming "fainting fits," which were to make a lasting impression on Herman. Moreover, by 1830 Maria Melville had borne eight children, and the family was experiencing more than its share of childhood diseases and other everyday problems

⁶This and the next three quotations are from Howard, p. 5.

which arise in a large family and tend to drain the physical and emotional energy of the parents. It would appear that in such a household it was difficult for Herman to feel secure and comfortable, especially since his father was a rather severe man who rarely laughed and who quite clearly favored his first-born son.

The move to Albany was merely the prelude to ultimate disaster for Allan Melville. He had hoped to use his connection with the Albany Gansevoorts in order to start a new business, but neither their help nor his father's was enough. In early December 1831, desperate for yet another loan, he undertook a trip to New York, travelling by steamship, open carriage, and even on foot across a frozen river. He arrived at home exhausted but refused to rest and threw himself into the task of rescuing his business. By January ninth, however, the state of extreme excitement and sleeplessness which he had experienced since returning home took on aspects of mania. On January 28, 1832, Allan Melville died, a delirious and deranged man, leaving his wife and children to an uncertain future.

The direct and indirect impact of his father's death on Herman Melville can hardly be overestimated, for it brought about a series of physical and emotional experiences which were essential to the eventual development of his character and his perception as an artist. Many years later he was to insist that he had hardly experienced any "growth" until his twenty-fifth year, but he meant by such growth "a vivid and conscious development . . . of . . .

ideas, emotions, feelings, insights." The "long, unconscious growth"⁷ with which he contrasts this almost abrupt awareness and synthesis of perceptions was, however subliminal, prerequisite to the development of his artistic consciousness. And in order to experience this preliminary growth he had, early in his life, to confront radically different sets of circumstances, struggle with contradictory realities, grope for halfway acceptable options.

We do not know anything about Herman's immediate reaction to the death of his father. But perhaps Redburn can be cited here as giving expression to Melville's own feelings:

Talk not of the bitterness of middle-age and after life . . . a boy can feel all that and much more, when upon his young soul the mildew has fallen; and the fruit, which with others is only blasted after ripeness, with him is nipped in the first blossom and bud. And never again can such blights be made good; they strike in too deep, and leave such a scar that the air of paradise might not erase it.⁸

The bitterness which Herman experienced started, perhaps, with the realization that the life he had dreamed about, the life he could expect as the son of a gentleman, was now denied him. After some hasty conferences in the wake of his father's death, it was decided that Herman and Gansevoort should be withdrawn from

⁷Mumford, p. 87.

⁸Redburn. His First Voyage. The Newberry-Northwestern Edition of The Writings of Herman Melville, ed. Harrison Hayford, Hershel Parker, and G. Thomas Tanselle (Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern University Press and The Newberry Library), IV (1969), 11. All other references to Melville's writings, unless otherwise noted, are to this edition with volume numbers and dates incorporated in the footnotes.

the Albany Academy and begin to work. Gansevoort, at sixteen, was to take over Allan's fur and cap business, while Herman, at not yet thirteen, was to work in an Albany bank as an apprentice clerk. The long, lazy summers spent with the Gansevoorts in Albany and Boston were now a thing of the past. The Melville children had never been as wealthy as their cousins, but now they were poor compared to them--so poor they could not even continue to go to school. The uncles and aunts were kind and sympathetic, of course, but they did not go out of their way to help. The world suddenly looked bleak and cold to young Melville.

For two years, while Gansevoort struggled with the fur and cap business, Herman worked diligently, though probably not enthusiastically, at the bank. The shock of his father's business failure and his death under such horrifying circumstances had made a deep and lasting impression on the boy. He began to idealize the image of his father to the point where he became like a deity for him. Later, in Pierre, Melville gives some insight into the intensity of this feeling. Memories of his father become

a shrine in the fresh-foliaged heart of Pierre up to which he ascended by many tableted steps of remembrance; and around which annually . . . he hung fresh wreaths of a sweet holy affection. In this shrine stood the perfect marble form of his departed father, without blemish, unclouded, snow-white, serene . . . fond personification of perfect human goodness and virtue.⁹

⁹Pierre or The Ambiguities, VII (1971), 68.

This god-like image of his father, however, seems to have been shattered at some time in Melville's future. We do not know how or why, but when it happened it was probably the most devastating blow he could possibly suffer.

In the spring of 1834, Herman left his job at the bank and went to Pittsfield to help his uncle, Thomas Melville, with the seasonal work on his farm. Thomas, like his brother Allan, had suffered much adversity. Once a wealthy banker in Paris, he had been married to the daughter of a distinguished French banking family but had lost his fortune and moved to Massachusetts, where he had been a commissioned major during the War of 1812. After the war he had bought a farm which, however, barely sustained him, his second French wife and his many children.

Before Herman was born Thomas had allowed the Melville name to be dragged through the courts by being unable to pay his debts and eventually having to go to prison. Allan had rushed to Washington when he found out that his older brother's legal problems were jeopardizing their father's position as an officer of the Port of Boston, and Daniel Webster had interceded on behalf of Thomas Melville, Sr. A few years later, however, during Andrew Jackson's presidency, Major Melville, veteran of the Boston Tea Party, was removed from his office and, at age seventy-eight, was free to walk about Boston in his oldfashioned knee breeches and cocked hat. He became a public figure in the streets, especially after Oliver Wendell Holmes immortalized him as "The Last Leaf" on a forsaken bough.

The decline of fortunes in the Melville family was a fact of which Herman must have been sadly aware while he spent the summer on his uncle's farm. Compared to the Gansevoorts the Melvilles were indeed a blighted family. But Herman took a special kind of pride in his father's family, and uncle Thomas had, all the adversity in his life notwithstanding, an air of finesse which none of the Gansevoorts had. Leaning on his rake and taking a pinch of snuff, the gray but elegant figure of his uncle would later remind Herman of "a courtier of Louis XVI, reduced as a refugee, to humble employment, in a region far from the gilded Versailles."¹⁰ And with his gentle, aristocratic manner, "a faded brocade of old French breeding,"¹¹ his uncle seemed to him very special and admirable. All of his life, in fact, Herman Melville was to retain a sense of great pride in his family's relationship with European aristocracy as well as in its role in American history.

There are indications that young Melville, steeled by his bitter experiences and nourished by his dreams of becoming a man equally distinguished as the travellers, soldiers and adventurers in his family background, was beginning to show amazing initiative, assertiveness and pride. In January 1835, at fifteen years of age, he joined the Albany Young Men's Association for Mutual

¹⁰Howard, p. 10.

¹¹Tyrus Hillway, Herman Melville (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1973), p. 31.

Improvement, a club for reading and debating which, in the absence of public libraries, was an effective means for self-education.

In the spring of the same year he joined Gansevoort in the fur business, and for the next two years he worked as a bookkeeper and retail sales clerk in their now flourishing firm. In addition, he seems to have found time to attend the Albany Classical School, where he was later remembered as an undistinguished mathematician but an enthusiastic writer of essays. During the next two years he acquired enough education to qualify as an elementary school teacher.

Once again, however, the Melville family was to be struck by misfortune, when in the fall of 1838 a minor economic depression began to trigger financial problems in Gansevoort's business. The lack of free capital which could sustain the firm during periods of slow cash return proved fatal for the young Melvilles, who had optimistically allowed their salesmanship to outrun their collections. On April 15, 1837, despite his valiant efforts to save the business, Gansevoort, like his father before him, was forced into bankruptcy. Both Gansevoort and Herman were now left to find some kind of employment which would not only support themselves but also help to support a desperate family in Albany; for, upon Gansevoort's bankruptcy, Maria Melville had signed a fifty thousand dollar bond and now kept making desperate and bitter appeals for assistance to her brothers as well as to her sons.

If the financial situation of the Melville's had been precarious before Gansevoort's bankruptcy, it was now utterly dismal. Maria could ill resign herself to face reality and continued to spend money--insofar as any was available--in a sometimes irresponsible manner, thereby greatly irritating her brother Peter on whom she perpetually depended for funds. The worries about providing for the family must have been a constant and unrelenting strain on the Melville sons, of which Herman, for one, was free only during the time he was at sea. Indeed he was to spend most of his life in bitter pursuit of some manner of obtaining enough cash to support either his mother and sisters or, later, his own family.

After Gansevoort's bankruptcy, Herman took a job as an elementary school teacher in a rural school near Pittsfield, where of his thirty students some were as old as he himself but still lacked basic skills in reading and writing. Conditions at the school were grim, and there is evidence that, in order to control his unruly group, Melville sometimes had to resort to using physical force. By Christmas, however, he had resigned from this job and moved back to Albany, where he reorganized and became president of the Philo Logos Society, a debating club. During this time he became involved in a public argument, in the pages of the Albany Microscope, with the former president of the club, a young man by the name of Van Loon.

Melville's exchange with his former friend is interesting in that it reveals a considerable amount of high-spirited pride

and aggressive self-assertion in a young man who had been described as a "slow" and "docile" child. Van Loon, declared Herman Melville, was a "silly and brainless loon," who was obviously "in the van" of the "class of individuals, who are of so narrow-minded and jealous a disposition that deserving merit when developed in others, fills their bosom with hatred and malice." Van Loon, for his part, wasted no time in calling Melville a "moral Ethiopian" and a "Ciceronian baboon."¹² Unfortunately, however, the dispute seems to have died down before it revealed further insights into the moral Ethiopian's public attitudes and character.

By May of 1837, the Melvilles' financial problems were so acute that the family was forced to move from Albany to Lansingburgh, where living expenses were considerably lower. With the financial aid from Peter Gansevoort they lived there for a number of years, during which Maria never managed to reconcile herself to the fact that they were poor and could not even keep up the appearance of prosperity. Gansevoort had gone to New York to try his luck at law, but he was beginning to suffer from the illness which he ultimately could not overcome. (He was to die young and much in the same manner as had his father.) Herman, in turn, worked intermittently on his uncle's farm and was taking a course in engineering and surveying at Lansingburgh Academy, in hopes of obtaining a job in the construction of the Erie Canal. But much as his studies broadened his knowledge of science, they proved fruitless in

¹²Howard, p. 12.

aiding him to secure the employment he sought--his own and his relatives' efforts notwithstanding.

While waiting for a job offer, Melville occupied his time with writing his first published essays, which appeared on May 4, and 14, 1839, in The Democratic Press and Lansingburgh Advertiser. These "Fragments from a Writing Desk," while amateurish in content, nevertheless indicate an individuality not previously revealed in the letters of his family. For a young man who was supposedly chiefly concentrating on commerce, he was apparently quite literary, irrepressibly high-spirited and able to parody, however crudely, the popular sentimental fiction of his day. His comic sense was, in the words of Leon Howard, for "the son of Allan and Maria . . . almost unbelievable," and his essays give evidence of "abundant energy and more animation of mind than he seems to have allowed himself to display within the family circle."¹³

This aspect of Melville's personality, in fact, is noteworthy. He not only seems to have suppressed his sense of humor and animation of mind in his parents' house but, later, in his own as well. Through most of his life we catch glimpses of a bright, sparkling personality, but such flashes of animation seem never exhibited within the confines of his own family. Whether this is a fact conditioned by his own character or by that of the women in his life--his mother, his sisters, his wife--is, of course, debatable, but one suspects the latter.

¹³Ibid., p. 15.

It is easy to see, however, that high spirits and good cheer were somewhat out of place in Maria's house. The financial depression which had been fatal for Gansevoort's business in 1837, had worsened and become more severe than any previous one the country had suffered. Melville was without a steady job and unable to contribute to the support of a nearly destitute family. Gansevoort had rescued Melville's younger brother Allan from a clerkship in uncle Peter's office by taking him to New York and had promised to look around for something which might interest Herman. Soon Gansevoort wrote that he had secured a berth for him aboard a packet ship which was sailing on June 5, for Liverpool.

Thus Herman Melville was introduced to life at sea. But it was not to be the kind of experience a son of a gentleman could normally look forward to--not the life of a young man of good family who travelled, as his father had done, to see the world and to supplement his education. Melville was not to be a passenger but the lowest ranking member of the crew, and he was not to sleep in a stateroom but in a narrow berth in the fore-castle. He would, after all, get an education, but it would be an altogether different one than, with his birth and family background, he had been entitled to expect. Yet, ultimately it was to prove more valuable (at least to his development as an artist) than any he might have obtained on land by a more conventional process. Like Ishmael, Melville could later say that his education had been at sea, his university a ship. And this experience was now to begin.

Melville put to sea as an unskilled sailor, or "boy," on the vessel St. Lawrence, bound for Liverpool with a cargo of cotton. What we know of his feelings about the ensuing adventure we know only through Redburn, the title hero of his first novel; and one must, of course, be aware of the fact that Melville, despite all the autobiographical aspects of this and other works, was using artistic license in writing about his experiences and possibly also about his attitudes and emotions. Still, it is most likely that Redburn's state of mind was largely Melville's own, for the autobiographical elements in the delineation of the hero's background and experiences are predominant.

But, because of the intensity and ambivalence of Redburn's emotions as he is preparing to leave the relative safety and comfort of the land (and of his past), critics seem at odds about Melville's own feelings at this stage in his life. Thus Leon Howard, for instance, argues that he was complacent, if not to say happy, anxious to prove his manhood and relieved to have temporarily escaped the burden of family obligations. Lewis Mumford, on the other hand, sees him as overwhelmingly downhearted and feeling cast off: "an infant Ishmael"¹⁴ without the comforts of home and family. In truth, Melville probably felt both dejected and elated, fearful and courageous, entrapped and free. The dual personality of which we earlier get slight glimpses--and which was to define him as

¹⁴Ibid., p. 16.

a man and as an artist--was beginning to become more clearly drawn. Perhaps his mother in describing him, however generally, as being "happy . . . but at heart . . . rather agitated,"¹⁵ provides the briefest but generally most accurate summary of his state of mind at this crucial phase in his life.

The Melville family, of course, was reluctant, if not unable, to admit the real nature of Herman's trip, preferring to pretend that he had "gone abroad" for reasons of health and education. So much, in fact, was made of Melville's good name and superior upbringing that it allowed the shrewd captain of the St. Lawrence to withhold the customary advance given to crew members for the time between signing on and sailing, by pretending that it would be unnecessary, if not insulting, to make such provision for him. Thus Melville was forced to start his sea voyage (which was delayed one day) hungry and insufficiently supplied with proper clothing--an ironic consequence of family pride and pretension.

Melville's education started with the almost immediate realization that a ship at sea was a world unto itself, an immeasurable distance removed from the niceties, conventions and pretensions of land life. The fact that he was more than two years older than most apprentice sailors did little to ease his lot; in fact it must have made his situation more difficult. For, as the lowest-ranking member of the crew, he was given the dirtiest and most demeaning tasks aboard, among them the daily cleaning

¹⁵Howard, p. 16.

of the chicken coops and pig pens on deck and, worse still, the application of rancid grease to the masts and spars. But worst perhaps was the constant needling from members of the crew, for whom he was by virtue of his station the traditional object of ridicule and target of crude and sarcastical jokes. Melville would have liked to speak to men of his own social class and upbringing, but he found out almost immediately that the hierarchy of a ship was absolute and permitted no such transgressions. One can imagine his surprise and humiliation when, all dressed up to pay a social call to the captain, he had an encounter with a stupefied and enraged mate who had discovered Melville's purpose barely in time to order him back to his quarters.

There is no doubt that Melville found life aboard ship brutal and oppressive: "Miserable dog's life is this of the sea: commanded like a slave and set to work like an ass: vulgar and brutal men lording it over me, as if I were an African in Alabama."¹⁶ But eventually he began to realize that, on the whole, his fellow sailors were less innately depraved (save Jackson, of course, who later became his prototype for Claggart) than brutalized by the kind of life they were subjected to; and, furthermore, the prevailing cruelty and violence of the crew were offset by acts of human kindness, such as the Greenlander's bringing him rum during his first bout with seasickness. Melville, grateful for the attention, thus

¹⁶Redburn, p. 66.

broke his pledge of abstinence--a virtue he subsequently never strove to regain.

Although it appears that Melville's relationship with the crew members at large never transcended the state of tacit tolerance on both sides, yet by the end of his voyage he had apparently won their respect. Though curiously and often irritatingly unable to resist moralizing and expressing himself in the strange tongue of a wellborn and educated young man, the novice sailor was willing to do what he was told and able to perform even the most difficult and demanding tasks of the common seaman. There was, of course, in his eyes, an aura of excitement and adventure about these veterans of the sea, who had sailed around the world and visited strange and exotic ports of call; but their talk and their tales tended to recount only the most ordinary and crude of experiences, testifying to an apparent lack of sensibility and consciousness of all but the most primitive sensations. This fact alone doubtless constituted an insurmountable wall between Melville and his fellow crew members--as did the unquestionable remoteness of the figures of authority on board. But his emotional and intellectual isolation was also conducive to the kind of detached introspection so important to Melville's artistic development. He was, even on his first voyage, ostensibly part of this microcosm at sea--and yet he was not. He was a free man, and yet a slave; he was obedient, and yet defiant.

If life aboard ship was in many ways a negative experience for Melville, so was the reality of his port of call. His excited expectations, raised by his father's descriptions of Liverpool, were to be bitterly disappointed, and his guidebook to the city of his father's youth had become not only an unreliable but an ironically misleading source of information. There were, to be sure, some pleasant impressions during the six weeks he spent in the city, but the prevalent picture was one of ugliness and vice, of poverty, debasement and corruption. Some of the realities that confronted Melville--the idealistic and innocent young sailor suddenly thrust into the squalor of a nineteenth century harbour district--are thought to have been critical to his personal development. Mumford, for instance, speculates that Melville's exposure to the brutality and degradation of the brothels and doss-houses "explain, in some degree, the inhibitions and regressions of his own sexual life--since his first glimpse of sex was in association with these filthy dives and their inmates."¹⁷

Be that as it may, Melville's initiation into the realities of the world at large was sudden and shocking; and if heretofore he had thought himself treated unkindly by society and by providence, he now began to realize that such unkindness was universal and, if anything, more relentless and horrid than he himself had experienced it. Perhaps the central occurrence to illustrate and

¹⁷p. 21.

verify the existence of such societal and universal malevolence was Melville's discovery, in the open vault of a warehouse cellar, of a motionless, emaciated woman and her starving children. The woman held a baby at her breasts and was flanked by two blue-skinned children who clung to her. Desperately Melville, who could not reach the starving group in the vault, kept trying to persuade constables, watchmen and passersby to intervene and save the lives of the woman and children: his pleas fell on deaf ears. The little group in the vault was left to die and got the attention of authorities only when the stench of their bodies began to demand action. One day the returning young sailor found that the bodies had perished in a load of quicklime which had been dumped into the vault.

From all we know, Melville learned his lessons well, and consciously or unconsciously he was already on the way to get his own kind of education. His first sea voyage had, in this respect, taught him more than years at Harvard or Yale could possibly do. He would return, no longer an innocent youth, no longer an unquestioning believer in the inherent goodness and compassion of society or of his creator. And always, after this voyage, there would lie under the veneer of his conformity a critical, questioning mind--and under his compliance a proud and rebellious spirit. For if on one hand life aboard a sailing ship demanded submission and subservience to higher authority, however vulgar and brutal, on the other it provided a chance for a young man to test his

physical courage and stamina. In Melville's case it did far more than that: it gave him moments of wild euphoria, emanating from a sense of strength, pride and autonomous power.

Before his trip was over he had learned a fair amount of seamanship and delighted in "furling the top-gallant sails and royals in a hard blow," for

There was a wild delirium about it; a fine rushing of the blood about the heart; and a glad thrilling, and throbbing of the whole system, to find yourself tossed up at every pitch into the clouds of a stormy sky, and hovering like a judgement angel between heaven and earth; both hands free, with one foot in the rigging, and one somewhere behind you in the air. The sail would fill out like a balloon, with a report like a small cannon, and then collapse and sink away into a handful. And the feeling of mastering the rebellious canvas, and tying it down like a slave to the spar, and binding it over with a gasket, had a touch of pride and power in it, such as young King Richard must have felt, when he trampled down the insurgents of Wat Tyler.¹⁸

No longer the sad and displaced boy he was at the beginning of the voyage, the young sailor now appears proud and powerful--like an angel or (even better?) like a king--and for a moment he is a superhuman figure, like Ahab or Tamburlaine, or Faustus.

Intellectually and emotionally Melville had now found his niche in the world--high up in the rigging of a ship in a stormy sea. He would remain there for the rest of his life, tossed about between heaven and earth in a heroic effort to subdue the forces of both.

On October 1, almost four months after his embarkation, Melville was back in New York and free to return home. He made

¹⁸Redburn, pp. 115-116.

no effort, at that time, to secure a job on another ship, but had he known what was awaiting him in Lansingburgh, perhaps he would have done so. On arriving there he found his family in worse financial troubles than ever. Maria's creditors could no longer be put off and were threatening with the sale of her furniture. She, in turn, bitterly blamed her two brothers for her plight, insisting that they provide a fixed sum of money for her and her four daughters' support, and Herman, who had immediately upon his return started to work as a teacher in nearby Greenbush, was dispatched to Albany in order to confront his uncle Peter with his mother's demands. Peter Gansevoort, by now a veteran of such struggles with his sister, once more pointed patiently to the facts that times were difficult, that he already had assumed responsibility for large sums of money owed after his nephew Gansevoort's bankruptcy, and that he felt unreasonably burdened in this matter. He nevertheless gave Herman fifty dollars and once more disaster was, for the moment, averted.

But, on the whole, Maria's financial crisis did not abate, and by Christmas 1839 she was threatening to disgrace her brothers by breaking up her household and sending her children to live with different relatives or, for that matter, with anyone who might have them. The atmosphere at the Melville house had never been more tense and overwrought, and Herman was beginning to react to it. Like his uncles, he realized that his mother's problems were less due to genuine poverty than to her insistence on unrealistic

standards of living--for instance to her resolve to keep a full-time maid for herself and the girls. Herman had promised her at least one hundred and fifty dollars by the end of the school year, but Greenbush Academy was experiencing financial problems and could not even pay him enough for his room and board.

By January 1840, Melville was so drained of emotion and energy that he dreaded to go to the post office to pick up his mail; unable to keep his promise to his mother, he withdrew from the family. Gansevoort, in a letter to Allan, tried to explain Herman's peculiar state:

I know no other reason for his remissness but laziness--not general laziness by any means--but that laziness which consists in an unwillingness to exert oneself in doing at a particular time, that which ought to be done--or--to illustrate--that disinclination to perform the special duty of the hour which so constantly beset one of the most industrious men of the age--Sir Walter Scott.¹⁹

But by the end of winter Herman's "laziness" changed to apologetic unhappiness and guilt. It was now clear that the school board could not pay him, that in fact the school had to close early for lack of money. On May fifteenth he walked home to Lansingburgh and gave his mother all the money he had--three dollars. Maria, unable to pay the previous quarter's rent, was indebted for one hundred and fifty dollars, the exact amount Herman had promised her at the beginning of the fall term.

It was now clear to Melville that he had to find a better way to help support his mother and sisters--or, perhaps, that he

¹⁹Howard, pp. 29-30.

had to get away from them. Thus, in June he set out with his close friend, Eli Fly, to seek his fortune in the West. His uncle Thomas had moved to Galena, Illinois, and Melville wanted to visit him and explore the possibilities of finding a job there. But Thomas Melville, still struggling to support his own family, was unable to secure employment for his nephew, so the two young men decided to invest what little money they had in a steamship excursion up the Mississippi to the falls of St. Anthony and then downstream to the Ohio at Alton. From there they headed home, having gained nothing but experience.

The search for employment brought Melville and Fly to New York, where Gansevoort, still studying law and ailing, was supporting them in their efforts. Melville, anxious to find employment, was willing to make concessions to convention, causing Gansevoort to report that "Herman has had his hair sheared and whiskers shaved and looks more like a Christian than usual."²⁰ But while Eli eventually found a position as a copyist, Melville, whose problematic handwriting disqualified him from such employment, was without success. Reluctant to go back to Lansingburgh, he was forced to make a crucial decision: by Christmas Day he was resolved to sign on the whaling ship Acushnet, sailing out of Fairhaven, Massachusetts, for the South Seas. Thus Melville would take to the sea, once more, because the land would offer him no sustenance. And his voyage would turn out to be a memorable one--for himself and for literary history.

²⁰Ibid., p. 38.

The Acushnet, under the command of Captain Valentine Pease, Jr., left New Bedford Harbour on January 3, 1841, for her maiden voyage to the South Seas whaling grounds. The trip, which lasted from 1841 to 1845, did not follow the same route later mapped out by Melville for the Pequod, nor were the officers and crew identical to those in Moby Dick. Instead, after two months of successful whaling the Acushnet set course for Rio de Janeiro to transfer 150 barrels of oil to a homeward-bound ship. She then sailed southward, around Cape Horn, which she rounded without major difficulties. In May of 1842 the ship was west of Valparaiso, in the Pacific, and on June 23 she anchored in the harbour of Santa, Peru. From there she sailed north, as far as the Galapagos Islands, and then west along the equator. But the Acushnet's initial luck did not hold, and for eleven months she roamed the whaling grounds of the Pacific without killing a substantial number of whales.

The ship itself was brand-new. Standard in design (two decks, three masts, square stern), she could hold a maximum of twenty-eight hundred barrels of sperm and whale oil which, in the unlikely event that she would return loaded to capacity, would make her cargo alone worth more than the approximate fifty thousand dollars of her total value. In comparison to the majority of whalers, the Acushnet was a relatively comfortable and pleasant ship which provided modern facilities and fairly adequate living space for its crew.

Like the ship, the crew of the Acushnet appears to have been of above-average quality. Whereas on most whalers in

Melville's time the crew members, on the whole, were extremely young, in this instance only four of the men were under twenty, while six were in their thirties. And while the crew did, of course, include a few young men of questionable origin and background, the vast majority of Melville's companions were Americans with good New England names. Melville, now twenty-one and having a degree of experience in seamanship (he had been hired as a common, though not yet an able sailor) doubtless found his new situation far more acceptable than he had on his previous voyage. In a letter to Gansevoort, in fact, he sounded well pleased with his lot and took special pride in the fact that he was part of "a crew so much superior in morale and early advantages to the ordinary run of whaling crews."²¹

But by midsummer of 1842 it was clear to captain and crew that the Acushnet's luck had run out. Judging by the rate at which the ship's casks were being filled, it would be a long and frustrating trip. To make things worse, Captain Pease, who had part ownership of the ship and had expected a short, successful voyage which would ensure his retirement, was beginning to be plagued by poor health and became increasingly irritable and arbitrary. His ill temper caused him to quarrel violently with his first and

²¹Metcalf, p. 27. This letter does not seem to have been preserved. Its contents is known through Gansevoort's reference to it in his letter to Lemuel Shaw of February 5, 1841. (The Letters of Herman Melville, ed. Merrell R. Davis and William H. Gilman [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960], p. 310; hereafter cited as Letters.)

third mates, impelling them to leave the ship at the first opportunity. The disposition of the disappointed and sick old man was, as Howard puts it, "even less endurable to the touchy and somewhat thin-skinned Herman Melville, who had no eye for extenuating circumstances and who, for years afterward, was to explain that his subsequent actions were compelled by the captain's brutal cruelty."²²

On July 9, therefore, while the Acushnet was anchored in the harbour of Nuku Hiva, in the Marquesas Islands, to take on water and other provisions, Melville accompanied by Richard Tobias Greene, a fellow crew member, deserted ship.

In order to lessen the possibility of being caught by their doubtless irate captain, the two young men had arranged for their escape to take place just before their ship was to leave the harbour. Having learned as much as they could about the island and its people and carrying a meager supply of food and gifts for their potential hosts, they struck out for a valley inhabited by the Happa tribe which they knew to be friendly to white sailors. But the high cliffs surrounding the bay and the jagged, wild interior made it impossible for them to orient themselves, so that, after five days of struggling with the hostile terrain, the exhausted and starving young sailors found themselves in the territory which they had been most anxiously trying to avoid: the valley of the Typees, the dreaded cannibals whose very name meant "eater of men."

²²Ibid., p. 48.

Much has been said in speculation about the particular state of mind which caused Melville to seek the dubious adventure of a long, perilous sea voyage and then to complicate his situation even further by abandoning ship and risking his life in the faraway, uncivilized territory of head hunters and cannibals. The Melville one comes to know from his writing would, of course, suggest a certain misanthropy and defiance of laws and conventions. But that Melville was, by then, a consummate artist, who, though writing biographically in many respects, never lost track of his artistic purpose. For the time being, however--and always of course seemingly following some unconscious drive in preparation of something unfathomable--Melville was hardly more than a healthy young man, anxious for adventure, proud and disdainful of authority and recklessly impetuous. His adventure in the valley of the Typees would eventually launch his career as a writer, so, error and miscalculation notwithstanding, he found himself in what now seems to us to have been exactly the right spot.

Despite their savage reputation, the Typees proved to be gracious and benevolent hosts. The two young men were admitted to the main village and allowed to participate in its everyday affairs as honored and privileged members of the community. Melville, who had suffered a mysterious leg injury during his escape, was nursed with care, and when after a couple of weeks his ailment persisted, Toby was given permission to leave the valley in search of medical aid. He did not return, however, and it would be

years before Melville would learn about the fate of his companion.

Though completely alone among the Typees now, Melville enjoyed the comforts and delights of island living in his own South Sea paradise. In this valley none of the evils of civilization had yet been introduced:

There were none of those thousand sources of irritation that the ingenuity of civilized man has created to mar his own felicity. There were no foreclosures of mortgages, no protested notes, no bills payable, no debts of honour in Typee; no unreasonable tailors and shoemakers, perversely bent on being paid; no duns of any description; no assaults and battery attorneys to foment discord, backing their clients into a quarrel, and then knocking their heads together; no poor relations everlastingly occupying the spare bed-chamber and diminishing the elbow-room at the family table; no destitute widows with their children starving on the cold charities of the world; no debtors' prison; no proud and hard-hearted nabobs in Typee; or, to sum up all in one word--no Money! That "root of all evil" was not to be found in the valley.

In this secluded abode of happiness there were no cross old women, no cruel step-dames, no withered spinsters, no lovesick maidens, no sour bachelors, no inattentive husbands, no melancholy young men, no blubbering youngsters and no squalling brats. All was mirth, fun, and high good humour. Blue devils, hypochondria, and doleful dumps went and hid themselves among the nooks and crannies of the rocks.²³

It is interesting that, in extolling the virtues of Typee, Melville gives an accurate insight into his own experience and state of mind. Most of these evils he was more than passingly familiar with; most of them he would come back to. But for the

²³Typee. A Peep at Polynesian Life, I (1968), 126.

time being he enjoyed the absence of social and moral convention in a setting devoid of all artificiality and inhibition. How different this place was from America! And how different from the harbour district in Liverpool, where convention and inhibition were mocked as well! Here, among the Typees, Melville discovered the kind of grace, dignity and beauty which is inherent in simplicity and innocence. And he found these virtues among heathens--among cannibals! His discovery was to constitute a major phase in his education, for as he came to see cannibals as more innately civil than civilized Man, he began to inverse other values and principles--and with that tendency another cornerstone was laid for his future habit of thinking.

The irony of Melville's experience in his cannibal paradise was that it taught him not only one but two fundamental lessons. Given all the pleasures Typee had to offer (including the enchanting Fayaway), could he stay? The answer was no, of course--the biblical legend inevitably had to repeat itself. And whatever Melville's secret fears may have been about eventually having to submit to tattooing or becoming the victim of his hosts' cannibalism, by the time he wrote Typee the overwhelming reason for Tommo's escape is his spiritual and intellectual isolation. Tommo cannot be content forever on the placid little lake on which Fayaway's flowing robe acts as a sail for his little canoe. He must break away and take his chances on the open, windswept sea. And he must do so in defiance of the omniscient ruler of his little world, even if

the price is murder. Tommo, in that sense, is part Adam and part Cain; neither the fallen world nor paradise can offer him contentment, and he is destined to defy the authorities of both. In this aspect, of course, Melville's first work is a kind of seed for his future efforts and the beginning of the formulation of his central thought.

On August 9, 1842, exactly one month after deserting the Acushnet, Melville made his escape from the island to the relative safety of another whaling ship, the Australian Lucy Ann. His departure from the Typees was probably not as dramatic as he describes it in Typee and doubtless facilitated by the fact that the Lucy Ann's captain was in dire need of men and had heard about Melville's stay among the Typees. But if conditions on the Acushnet had been bad, on the Lucy Ann they were intolerable. Its captain was incompetent, its mate perpetually drunk, and a good number of its crew in irons aboard the nearby French warship La Raine Blanche for mutiny. After a few turbulent weeks the by then again ailing Melville found himself put ashore at Papeete, along with several crew members, all facing trial as mutineers.

The officials in Papeete, however, had neither adequate facilities nor inclination to keep a close watch on the unruly sailors, so that it was easy for most of them to escape. Consequently Melville was soon free to do as he pleased and set out to explore his new environment, accompanied by his friend John B. Troy (Dr. Long Ghost, in Omoo), a demoted former surgeon who had

been steward of the Lucy Ann. For the next two months they roamed Tahiti and the neighboring island of Eimeo, working briefly on the plantation of a Yankee from Maine but being chiefly occupied with avoiding responsibility and arrest. Troy, a well-read and well-travelled young man a few years older than Melville, was quick-witted, entertaining and irrepressibly reckless--the perfect companion for this picaresque interlude which, if it lacked purpose and direction, was surely therapeutical for a young man who had barely ever lived free from outside pressure and tension.

But, as before, Melville's haphazard adventure was also very educational. The actualities of this episode were to be recorded in Omoo, along with the skillful and amusing characterization of Dr. Long Ghost; the dream-like, drifting quality of these weeks was to be evoked most effectively in Mardi. Last, and perhaps most importantly, his accidental vacation gave Melville a chance to witness the methods and results of the "Christianization" of Tahiti. Coming, as it did, soon after his stay among the Typees, this proved to be a deeply emotional and lasting experience, one which would confirm and focus his earlier, perhaps only vaguely felt notions and lead him directly onto a path he was never thereafter to abandon.

By the end of October 1842, Melville seems to have had his share of adventures on Tahiti and found a whaling captain willing to take him on without asking too many questions about his background. By November 7, he was sailing on the Charles and Henry,

his third whaler, on which he was probably hired as a harpooner. (Troy, who had apparently been untypically luckless in his attempt to win the captain's favor, had been left to his own, usually impressive devices.) After spending a few months in a rather futile pursuit of whales, mainly near the coast of South America, the ship returned to the Hawaiian Islands, and on May 2, 1843, Melville was officially discharged at Lahaina after what appears to have been, for him at least, an agreeable if largely luckless voyage. A few days later he was in Honolulu, where he signed a contract for work as a clerk and bookkeeper for Isaak Montgomery, a local merchant. He wrote home that he was planning to spend the entire next year in Honolulu but apparently changed his mind and on August 17 enlisted as an ordinary seaman on the American navy frigate United States.

It is likely that Melville's decision to leave Honolulu was the result of his active involvement in the political tension and upheaval which characterized the city during the summer of 1843. Isaak Montgomery, a young Englishman three years Melville's senior, was an active and articulate opponent of the American missionaries in the Hawaiian Islands and an avid supporter of Lord George Paulet, the administrator for the English government which at that time ruled the islands. Like Paulet, Montgomery was implacably antagonistic toward the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, a powerful religious and political force in the islands; and Melville, less patriotic than anti-missionary,

had found in Montgomery's circle support and added fuel for his growing contempt for the missionary system.

But the political climate had begun to turn against Paulet's rule. On July 26 Admiral Richard Thomas had arrived on the British frigate Dublin and, in response to an earlier protest by the United States to Britain, had announced his intention to restore the Hawaiian Islands to their native government. Since the Hawaiian king was controlled by the missionaries, this step had in effect been a restoration of the missionary regime. Thus July 31, which for most natives and Americans in Honolulu had been a day of celebration, for Melville and his friends had been a day of defeat and bitter reflection. Under the reinstated regime his radically anti-missionary friends would hardly have the power to protect a common sailor and former deserter who could not avail himself of consular services and had fewer rights and privileges than the meanest of natives. Melville's decision to return to the United States as a sailor on one of its naval vessels was, therefore, a prudent one in that it reestablished his legal status as a citizen and eliminated the possibility of future personal disenfranchisement.

The last phase of Melville's voyage--that is to say of his education--was to be as important and fruitful as the previous ones, for in White Jacket and in Billy Budd the setting is a warship which allegorically represents Melville's notions of the world at large. (The complete title of White Jacket, in fact, includes

the words The World in a Man-of-War, which hint that the author sees the world as a man-of-war.) His experiences on the United States, then, were not only important in that they supplied Melville with enough knowledge of the extraneous aspects of life on a battleship, but also in that they gave him a frame of reference and emblematic association for his deepest thoughts and attitudes.

As the ship took a leisurely course toward the Marquesas, sailing through parts of the Pacific by now familiar to him and making stops at Nuku Hiva and Tahiti, Melville had the opportunity to ponder his past adventures in these wellknown surroundings. Returning to the Americas, the frigate anchored at Valparaiso and then at Callao, where he probably first heard the news of the U.S.S. Somers affair, a dramatic and mysterious story about a mutiny which had resulted in the hanging (on the ship's yardarm) of three sailors, one of them a midshipman by the name of Philip Spencer, the son of Secretary of War John C. Spencer. Although the story was at that time on the mind and tongue of every sailor, for Melville it was to become a subject of obsessive concern because his own cousin, Lieutenant Guert Gansevoort, had been in charge of the court-martial. He had always admired his cousin and was stunned by the fact that Guert had apparently become the villain in so grisly an incident. Melville was to agonize many hours over the issues of individual liberty, justice, and the Articles of War, and the Somers affair did much to sharpen his analytical and critical faculties.

It did not take the Somers affair, however, to make Melville realize that individual rights and human dignity were irreconcilably in conflict with the military order aboard a battleship--and bound to lose each bout. He had long become accustomed to the tedious necessities and unsparing demands of effective seamanship, but he found naval discipline arbitrary and far too often senseless, a galling provocation to his proud and rebellious nature. The full extent of this martial harshness and lack of humanity had been clear to him from the beginning of the trip, when the Articles of War had been read to the assembled crew, and the cold, flat voice of the captain's clerk had recited a seemingly endless liturgy of transgressions, all of them accompanied by the notice that the offender in any of such instances "shall suffer death!"²⁴ This ritual was repeated on the first Sunday of every month--a grim and heartless "sermon," as it were--reconfirming in Melville his darkest thoughts about the inherent savagery of civilized society and its institutions.

Less terminal but equally brutal as the death sentence was the much-practised and feared naval tradition of flogging, a punishment dealt out freely for a wide variety of major and minor offenses. The victims were stripped to the waist, tied by their ankles and wrists, and lashed with a "cat-o'-nine-tails," consisting of nine knotted leather thongs attached to a heavy wooden handle. A dozen

²⁴White-Jacket or The World in a Man of War, V (1970), 293-294.

strokes (the average punishment) raised one hundred and eight bloody welts on the victims' back. Melville, who was witness to the flogging of one hundred and sixty-three crew members, including some young apprentices who were children, was never to get used to or to forget this sight.

A flogging conducted with all the formality of institutionalized civilization became his symbol of all the indignity that man could heap on man, and that symbol was to dance before his eyes during his entire term of naval service and remain vividly in his memory for many years thereafter.²⁵

But not all of Melville's impressions and experiences were negative. Of his twelve hours of daily duty, for instance, he spent six far up on the platform of the main-top, seventy feet above the overcrowded deck. And since it was his particular duty to attend to the mainroyal (the topmost sail on the ship), he was often free to spend hours on the main-royal yardarm from which he could look down onto the curiously small ship almost two hundred feet below. The hours spent there alone, surrounded by the sea, the sky and the billowing, straining canvas, were perhaps the most important and productive ones in his life, for they seem to have bred that peculiarly unique solitary reflectiveness which even in the midst of turbulent action characterizes his subsequent writing.

The fruitful solitude of his high perch, furthermore, was interspersed with equally gratifying periods of good companionship,

²⁵Howard, p. 96.

for Melville had the extraordinary good luck to meet John Chase, an Englishman who was his immediate superior. Jack Chase had served in the British and subsequently in the American navy, from which he had deserted in order to serve in the Peruvian navy during the war with Bolivia. After the war Chase had returned to the American navy with a personal request from the Peruvian admiral that he be pardoned for his desertion. The request was granted, and Chase was transferred to the United States where, after a few weeks of serving as an ordinary seaman, he had been promoted to captain of the maintop. When Melville met this remarkable man he had been in charge of the maintop for over a year and was admired by officers and crew alike for his superior seamanship, intelligence and ability to lead his men.

Jack Chase was not only a man of action, he was also a man of reflection. Well-read and with a knack for languages, he was not only familiar with English literature but could also recite vast portions of Camoëns' sailors' epic and The Luciad in the original Portuguese. Like all the men in his crew, Melville adored Chase and soon became his close friend. And since both men spent several hours daily on the platform of the maintop, Melville not only learned to take pride in superior seamanship and in his position as a maintopman, but he also became increasingly interested in literature. He had always been an avid reader, and now, for the first time in his life, he found occasion to discuss his reading and broaden his mind by exchanging ideas with other literary people.

For Jack Chase, though exerting the strongest influence on Melville, was not his only like-minded companion. In the circle around Chase Melville found other literary company, notably Ephraim Curtiss Hine, a fellow New Yorker who wrote poetry and, most important, the mysterious, withdrawn Edward Norton. While Norton's reserve was generally impenetrable, one night when both men had night watch together Melville apparently managed to break through the dignified silence of his companion. "That night," he wrote in White-Jacket, "we scoured all the prairies of reading; dived into the bosoms of authors, and tore out their hearts; and that night White Jacket learned more than he has ever done in any single night since."²⁶

Sixteen years would pass before Melville was to learn that Norton's real name was Oliver Russ and that he had subsequently settled down, married and named his son Herman--a fine compliment to the young man whose brief friendship with him many years ago had made such a deep and lasting impression on Russ. By that time Melville had already immortalized the "Man-of-war Hermit," as he had his friend Jack Chase to whom he would also dedicate Billy Budd. Melville never saw Chase again, but his influence was of utmost importance to the developing young artist. The memories of his "noble friend Jack" would sustain Melville on many a dreary day, and the spirit of this best and boldest of all sailors would shine brightly in him, even to the end of his life.

²⁶This and the next two quotations are from White Jacket, pp. 51, 50, 16.

On October 3, 1844, fourteen months after sailing from Honolulu, the United States anchored in the Boston harbour, and Melville was discharged from naval service. He bade his friends good-bye, tossed his later-to-become-famous white jacket overboard (an act for which he subsequently called himself "a great fool")²⁷ and proceeded to Lansingburgh, where his family was anxiously waiting for him. His unconventional education completed, he was now to begin a new phase in his life--a phase during which his mind would retrace his travels and draw from them not only an account of the actualities but, more important, an emblematic configuration for the future voyages of his thought.

Upon his arrival in Lansingburgh Melville learned--doubtless to his great relief--that during his four year absence the family's fortunes had somewhat improved. Gansevoort, still ailing, had chosen a political career in New York; Allan had become a successful Wall Street attorney; young Thomas, at fourteen, was still living at home, and so were all four of the Melville girls. Soon the world traveller was telling spellbinding stories of his adventures which, by all accounts, utterly captivated his audience. Melville's ability to present his experiences in a dramatic, compelling manner must have been considerable. Later, for instance, when he described to Nathaniel and Sophia Hawthorne an incident during which he had swung a club, the Hawthornes found themselves searching the house for the imaginary club they thought he had left behind. It is not surprising, then, that the author of the "Fragments from a

²⁷Letters, p. 107.

Writing Desk" was easily persuaded to write a book on the most popular of his adventures: his escape from the Acushnet and subsequent stay among the Typees.

While the encouragement of friends and relatives was doubtless a factor in Melville's motivation to write an account of his adventure among the cannibals, he had other interests as well. Since returning home, he had eagerly followed the political news from the Pacific islands and discovered that it was biased in favor of the views of the American Board of Foreign Missions, in Boston. The laudatory descriptions of the missionaries' lives and methods of conversion seemed blatant falsehood to the young sailor who had considerably different impressions and perspectives regarding this matter. Thus, writing a book about his experiences and observations--novice that he was in this field--he apparently felt no compunctions to speak his mind:

Look at Honolulu, the metropolis of the Sandwich Islands!--A community of disinterested merchants, and devoted self-exiled heralds of the cross, located on every spot that twenty years ago was defiled by the presence of idolatry. What a subject for an eloquent Bible-meeting orator! . . . But when these philanthropists send us such glowing accounts of one-half of their labours why does modesty restrain them from publishing the other half of the good they have wrought?--Not until I visited Honolulu was I aware of the fact that the small remnant of the natives had been civilized into draught horses and evangelized into beasts of burden. But so it is. They have been literally broken into the traces, and are harnessed to the vehicles of their spiritual instructors like so many dumb brutes.²⁸

²⁸This and the next quotation are from Typee, pp. 196, 198.

Melville's criticism, however, was aimed not only at the missionaries but at the "civilized" world, per se:

In justice to the missionaries . . . I will readily admit, that whatever evils may have resulted from their collective mismanagement of the business of the missions, and from the want of vital piety evinced by some of their number, still the present deplorable condition of the Sandwich Islands is by no means wholly chargeable against them. The demoralizing influence of a dissolute foreign population, and the frequent visits of all descriptions of vessels, have tended not a little to increase the evils alluded to. In a word, here, as in every case where civilization has in any way been introduced among those we call savages, she has scattered her vices, and withheld her blessings.

Throughout Typee Melville seems to substantiate the points made here, and his attitude stems not nearly so much from a romantic tendency to glorify the Noble Savage as from accurate observation and honest appraisal of actualities. His attack on the missionaries--and indeed on the entire civilized world--is therefore essentially an attack on conventional Christianity, for he believes that its representatives, regardless of their nationality and purpose, have nothing to offer the heathens and cannibals which is in any way superior or even comparable to what they had had before. Melville's reasoning is of course consequential to his method of reversing the value system of the civilized world and thus negating all of its so-called positive aspects--a mental habit he would later refine and perfect.

When Typee was published in 1846 (first in England, then in the United States), it was in spite of its underlying antisocial

attitude an immediate success. Literary circles on both sides of the Atlantic were astounded at the talent, skill and charm of so inexperienced a young writer for whom they had every reason to predict a long and distinguished career. But while Melville could on one hand enjoy his sudden prominence, on the other he was disturbed at the somewhat irrelevant charges that the book was not a truthful account of his experience, that in fact it was "a piece of Munchausenism--from beginning to end."²⁹ Little concerned with the artistic aspects of Typee, some critics were occupied with its literal veracity and debating whether it should be called a romance or a book of travel. (The word romance, in fact, became for many of Melville's detractors a code word for lie.)

More serious were charges which arose from the very excellence of Typee. The British newspaper John Bull, for instance, along with others questioned Melville's authorship of the work. The defense of Lord George Paulet alone (in the Appendix of the book), said John Bull, "would almost justify the suspicion that the work is not written by an American at all." Furthermore, considering "the style of composition, so easy, so graceful, so graphic, we own the difficulty we feel in believing that it is the production of a common sailor." Fortunately for Melville, however, his former companion in the adventure, Richard Tobias

²⁹This and the following quotations from the reviews of Typee are from Hetherington, pp. 38, 24, 46-49, 23, 53, 51, 65.

(Toby) Greene read about the controversy and in a public letter testified to his old friend's veracity. The two men, who had not heard a word of each other in four years, had a joyful reunion, and Melville added a sequel to the revised edition of Typee in which he told Toby's story.

But much as the disbelief concerning authorship and veracity of Typee bothered Melville and caused him publicly to explain and defend himself, he was apparently unbothered by the outcry of clergymen and missionaries and unwilling to make amends. "The onslaught made on his first book by the American journals of professional piety was a terrific one," for while secular critics were either indifferent or cautious enough to ignore the combative antimissionary attitude of the work, ironically the religious world understood very clearly what, in the largest sense, Typee was all about. The charges of malice against Christianity, of course, had to be coupled with a denunciation of Melville's moral character in order to negate whatever sound and sensible points he had made. The New York Evangelist of April 9 is typical of the kind of reviews which were to be published by religious magazines:

If this be not sheer romance (which there is reason to suspect), it is the extremely exaggerated, but racily written narrative of a fore-castle runaway from an American whaleship. . . . He had life among the Marquesean cannibals to his liking; a plenty of what pleases the vicious appetite of a sailor, or of sensual human nature generally. . . . The book abounds in praise of the life of nature alias savageism, and in slurs and flings against missionaries and civilization.

The author, probably the Reverend George B. Cheever, then quaintly assumes that Typee had been written not for Americans but for the morally inferior readership in London, "where theatres, opera-dancers, and voluptuous prints have made such unblushing walks along the edge of modesty" and are "rather more admired than we hope they are among us." "We are sorry," he adds, "that such a volume should have been allowed a place in the [Wiley and Putnam] 'Library of American Books.'"

The Christian Parlor Magazine, not to be outdone, published a ten-page attack in July under the heading "Typee: The Traducer of Missions." The author of this diatribe, the Reverend Darius Mead, described Melville's book as "An apotheosis of barbarism! A panegyric on cannibal delights! An apostrophe to the spirit of savage felicity!" Melville's treatment of the missionaries throughout the book he found to be "a tissue of misinterpretation, and detraction of the devoted men and women who have exiled themselves" to bring "the blessings of the gospel to some of the most degraded and benighted children of Adam." Ordinarily, wrote Mead, such a trivial work would not be "worth an extended notice," but unfortunately its publishers and its dedication to Supreme Court Justice Lemuel Shaw "had given it respectability." At the very least, Mead concluded, Typee's author "deserves a pointed and severe rebuke for his flagrant rages against civilization."

But it would be erroneous to believe that only the lay magazines were hostile in their reviews. Also in July, the New

Englander, one of the best religious quarterlies and the voice of the still prevailing orthodoxy of Yale, published an article which found Typee's author to be "actuated, either by a perverse spirit of intentional misrepresentation, or . . . utterly incapable, from moral obtuseness, of an accurate statement . . . fretted out of humor with civilized life." Yet surprisingly enough not even the most vociferous of Melville's critics insisted that Typee was void of any literary merits. The almost unanimous concession that it was "vivaciously" or "charmingly" or at least "cleverly" written only made it more "dangerous" for a presumably chaste and virtuous readership.

What most disturbed men like Cheever and Mead, of course, was the fact that Typee was an almost phenomenally successful book. (By 1891 it had been reprinted ten times in America, seven in England.) Melville, commented Columbian Magazine, "like Byron, went to bed unknown to find himself famous when he got up in the morning. Typee has been read, we suppose, by every man, woman, and child in the Union who undertakes to keep pace at all with the march of current literature." Melville had created something new in the literary world of the nineteenth century: a relief from the didactic novels, the conventional journals, the piously rhapsodic accounts of travel in the Holy Land. "It presented," wrote Nathaniel Hawthorne understandingly but with a somewhat puritanical distance, a "freedom of view--it would be too harsh to call it laxity of principle--which renders [Melville] tolerant

of codes of morals that may be little in accordance with our own." But judging from the enthusiasm with which Typee was received by the vast majority of its readers, Melville's "freedom of view" seems to have been quite readily accepted. Perhaps it provided an already Victorian readership with a sense of "relief, escape, if you will. Deliverance which gave its readers a sense of the lifting of the onerous taboos of the Occident, the outward token of which was the vicarious divesting of their own voluminous and restrictive garments as Tommo and Fayaway stripped to bathe together in the limpid tropical lake."

The popularity of Typee notwithstanding, Melville's publishers (Wiley and Putnam) were becoming increasingly worried about its "raciness" and the hostile reaction from the missionaries. Their pressure, politely but persistently applied through Evert Duyckinck, one of their readers and a friend of Melville--and probably through his family as well--prompted him to consent to the bowdlerization of the book's new edition. Thus, during the summer of 1846 Melville wrote somewhat facetiously to Duyckinck: "The Revised (Expurgated?--Odious word!) Edition of Typee ought to be duly announced--as the matter (in one respect) is a little delicate, I am happy that the literary tact of Mr. Duyckinck will be exerted on the occasion."³⁰

Mr. Duyckinck's literary tact promptly eliminated Melville's overt attack on the missionaries and two humorous, charming anecdotes with sexual overtones: one about Queen Pomaree, the other about a missionary's wife. But by fall Melville was at work

³⁰Letters, p. 43.

on Omoo, a sequel to Typee, in which his criticism of the missionaries in Tahiti was even more scathing than it had been of the ones in Hawaii. Duyckinck, unable to understand the underlying motive for Melville's rancor against the evangelical delegations in the Pacific islands, thought it to be no more than "a sailor's grudge."³¹ But although he had doubtless taken personal offense at the missionaries, Melville's relentless campaign against them had deeper origins and aims. The sight of robust, well-dressed matrons (wives of Honolulu missionaries) riding through the dusty streets of the city in carts drawn by nearly-naked natives, became for him a symbol of all the social, political and religious inequities which increasingly preoccupied him. Like the naval tradition of flogging, therefore, Melville saw the "Christianization" of the islanders as a spectacle of disenfranchisement and subjugation--and consequently of demoralization and debasement. That these time-honored institutions were sanctified by state and Church made them so much the worse, and Melville meant to draw attention to them and expose their inhumanity.

Melville's publishers, however, were not inclined to champion his unconventional causes. After reading his completed manuscript their criticism was severe, and Melville, realistic enough to realize that he needed to sell his book, offered to make revisions. The extent of Omoo's expurgations is not known, for ultimately John Riley's tender sense of propriety advised him against publishing another book which was certain to incur charges of licentiousness

³¹Howard, p. 101.

and antireligious sentiment. Omoo was consequently published by Harpers, who had no such scruples. It was another instant success and caused an even greater storm of protest and denunciation from the missionaries and their promoters.

Although the publication of Omoo gave rise to the same kind of controversy which had been caused by Typee, this time Melville seems to have kept himself rather aloof from public quarrels and outside disturbances. As the now famous author of two popular books, he might well have seen authorship as a means to a financially secure future, but surprisingly enough he appears to have had no thought of pursuing a literary career and instead made every effort to obtain a job as a clerk in the Treasury Department in Washington. The attempt (unsuccessful as it turned out to be) was doubtlessly prompted by the fact that he was planning to get married and felt he needed a more reliable and steady income than writing could guarantee. The young lady of his choice was Elizabeth Shaw, a close friend of his sister Helen, the only daughter of Judge Lemuel Shaw who had long been a friend, advisor and benefactor of the Melville family.

On August 4, 1847, Melville married Elizabeth and, together with his brother Allan who was also newly married, bought a house in New York large enough to accommodate not only the two young couples but also the entire family--Maria and the four girls. The arrangement was to give Mrs. Melville the opportunity to enjoy the company of her two sons (Gansevoort having died suddenly in

June of the previous year and Thomas having left the family to become a sailor). It would also enhance the social opportunities of the still unmarried Melville girls. In this somewhat congested and female-dominated household Melville, without any other prospects for making a living, settled down to the task of writing his next book.

Mardi, as his new book would be titled, posed an immediate problem for Melville in that it would not deal with his personal experiences. Having successfully told a continuous tale of his adventures in the South Seas, he had exhausted his material, for what remained of that part of his travels had not been eventful and uncommon enough to be worked into yet another book. (Since he had deliberately omitted any account of his whaling experience, one tends to suspect that he had tentative plans for some future use of that subject.) For Mardi he would have to invent a structure of outward events entirely unrelated to personal experience, and it would therefore become his first real novel. Nevertheless, having publicly promised a "sequel" to Omoo, Melville needed to find a unifying narrative which would in some way tie in with his previous book. Overriding all other concerns, however, was Melville's compulsion to give expression to his own literary and intellectual state of mind. Since his return to America he had been voraciously reading a wide variety of books, from classical to contemporary, and coupled with the stimulus of his own experiences and observation the impetus of his intellectual growth was by now an irresistible force in his life.

The somewhat uneasy balance between physical and intellectual adventures is, of course, manifestation of a basic flaw in the structural unity of Mardi. The book begins as a romantic South Seas adventure and ends as a relentless parody of the social and religious institutions of Western civilization. But Mardi is a world in and of itself, a remarkable and unique achievement in Melville's literary career. It has, as Mumford puts it in his admirable evaluation, "all the promise of imperfection."³² Melville, "in the guise of king, poet, philosopher . . . became a philosophic commentator, retelling the story of Europe and Christianity and faith and doubt and religion and science, disclosing in Babbalanja's demonic inner man, Azzageddi, his own ultimate perceptions."

But if Melville's deeper self sought expression through Azzageddi, his more conventional self never disappeared entirely. It was present in the Melville who married and settled down to the conventionalities of a Victorian household, applied for clerical jobs in governmental agencies, stayed within the perimeter of accepted social conduct, and visited the Holy Land. The Melville who wrote Mardi, however, is the one who rises victoriously from the struggle with his conventional self. And this Melville is possessed by "a hard, defiant, adamant self that springs out of his deepest consciousness of life, and is ready to assault, not merely human convention, but the high gods themselves." This

³²This and the next two quotations are from pp. 60, 63, 69.

Melville had begun his relentless assault on some, perhaps yet but dimly perceived elemental "chronic malady of the universe," which "checked in one place breaks forth in another."³³ "Had I not written & published 'Mardi,'" he wrote, "in all likelihood, I would not be as wise as I am now, or may be. For that thing was stabbed at (I do not say through) & therefore I am wiser for it."³⁴

Unfortunately, Melville's readership seems not to have been wiser for reading Mardi. Like his previous books, it first appeared in England (on March 17, 1849), where it was probably the first American novel published in three volumes and the most expensive book by an American ever to be published. But when a few days after its publication various London literary magazines printed reviews of Mardi, their prevailing sentiments ranged from cautious defense to utter damnation. Bentley's Miscellany, perhaps Melville's staunchest defender, argued that, though "guilty of great extravagance," the author should be forgiven because of his successful creation of an exotic, captivating world in which "he contrives to interest us in his creations, to excite our passions, to astonish us with the wild grandeur of his imagination."³⁵ Blackwood's Magazine, by comparison, was "sadly disgusted on perusal of a rubbishy rhapsody, entitled Mardi." The first part was quite

³³Mardi and a Voyage Thither, III (1970), 529.

³⁴Letters, p. 96.

³⁵This and the following quotations from the reviews of Mardi are from Hetherington, 107, 110, 106, 109, 129, 134, 105-107.

pleasing, said the author of this "review," though by no means comparable to the "nautical funk" of Typee and Omoo. "What trash is all this!" he concluded, "mingled, too, with attempts at a Rabelaisian vein, and with strainings at smartness--the style of the whole being affected, pedantic, and wearisome exceedingly."

The rest of the English reviews were somewhere between Bentley's and Blackwood's. Most of them acknowledged Melville's "exciting description," his "glowing imagination," his "poetic power," and the "shimmering, dazzling beauty of his imagery," but all of them found Mardi at least puzzling, if not unintelligible. Yet only John Bull and New Monthly took issue with the religious unorthodoxy of the book. The former professed "profound regret that a pen so talented . . . should have been made use of for the dissemination of sceptical notions . . . to talk down the verities of the Christian faith by sophistry." This was "a grave offense," and Mr. Melville, "without introducing crude metaphysics and unsound notions of divinity," should have stuck to subjects which were not above his intellectual capacity. The New Monthly seconded John Bull's indignation and objected to Babbalanja's "unorthodox theology." Such views did not entice the public to undertake the somewhat difficult task of reading Mardi. It soon passed from relative obscurity to total oblivion and was not reprinted in England until 1923.

Surprisingly enough, the American reaction to Mardi, after its publication on April 14, was nearly devoid of criticism on

religious grounds. Although he had satirized Christianity and, through its central hero, Taji, rejected it, the angry reaction which Melville had perhaps expected from missionary circles did not materialize. One possible reason for the curious silence of Melville's opponents was the fact that the manner in which he had treated the subject was not as direct and specific as it had been in his previous books. For in Mardi he had outgrown his habit of interspersing his stories with witnessed, journalistically effective accounts of the misdoings of specific missionary groups. His quarrels, here, were no longer with particular contingencies of Christians; they were with the general ideas and doctrines of Christianity. Melville had, furthermore, acquired greater skill in hiding the deepest, most provocative level of his book's meaning. And although intellectually and temperamentally more than ever compelled to formulate essentially heretical views, he had, through his reading, gathered enough knowledge and means to couch such views into rhetoric and imagery which would lead the careless and shallow reader to other, more conventional and acceptable patterns of interpretation.

Doubtless Melville had expected that discriminating readers would understand and appreciate Mardi. Considering himself an "eagle-eyed reader,"³⁶ he had hoped that his book would compel other "thought-divers" to sound the depth of his perception.

³⁶"Hawthorne and His Mosses. By a Virginian Spending July in Vermont" in The Portable Melville, ed. Jay Leyda (New York: The Viking Press, 1952), p. 418.

"I love all men who dive," he wrote in a letter to Duyckinck.

"Any fish can swim near the surface, but it takes a great whale to go down stairs five miles or more; & if he don't attain the bottom, why, all the lead in Galena can't fashion the plummet that will." He was talking of "the whole corps of thought-divers," he explained, "that have been diving and coming up again with blood-shot eyes since the world began."³⁷ For such readers he had written Mardi, and such, he had hoped, would recognize his deeper purpose and his accomplishment. But very few of his readers seemed able to decipher the book--even among the most literate of critics. The ironic confirmation of Melville's words to Duyckinck (and one of the most typical, somewhat sarcastical reactions to Mardi) came from one critic who wrote that in this book Melville seems to have "some purpose too deep for our plummet to fathom."³⁸

What irritated and hurt Melville most, of course, was the fact that this book, in which he took such pride, was condemned most consistently for its alleged lack of literary value. "He had gambled everything on Mardi as literature; and he felt that he had lost. It was a bitter anticlimax that such a book should be so assaulted after the universal acclaim of its pedestrian predecessors as aesthetic triumphs." He could only dream that Mardi might some day "flower like the aloe, a hundred years hence," or

³⁷Letters, p. 79.

³⁸This and the next quotation are from Hetherington, pp. 102, 133.

perhaps, he added bitterly resigned, "not flower at all for some aloe never flower."³⁹ Melville would not live to see this flowering, but in somewhat less than a hundred years the aloe would certainly burst into bloom.

Mardi was not very successful at the bookstores, and its publishers were losing money on it. Thus Melville, who in addition to his wife now had his firstborn son to support, was desperately in need of money for his large household. For "it is not with a hollow purse as with a hollow balloon," he wrote to Duyckinck; "for a hollow purse makes the poet sink--witness 'Mardi!'" And since the reception of Mardi was leaving no doubt that his readers expected realistic "nautical tales" rather than intellectual-philosophical allegory, he acquiesced to public taste and to his own financial needs. His hastily prepared new book would be yet another "autobiographical" tale of adventures on land and sea, dealing with his first trip to Liverpool. That Melville neither enjoyed writing nor later remembering the book seems clear, for he always retained a low estimation of its literary worth. "When a poor devil writes with duns all round him, & looking over the back of his chair & perching on his pen & diving in his inkstand--like the Devils about St. Anthony--what can you expect of that poor devil?--What but a beggarly 'Redburn!'"

Melville's words seem to reveal more than a harrassed, irritated writer trying to make a living somehow; in fact, when

³⁹This and the next three quotations are from Letters, pp. 102, 96, 95.

one considers Redburn, they seem to say quite a lot about Melville's state of mind. For he appears like a man driven backward into an experience he probably wanted to forget--an experience which had arisen from deprivation, rejection and humiliation and had offered little more than a bleak, uncertain future in exchange for a youth of broken dreams and dashed expectations. In Redburn there is no secure, important place in the world for the young sailor. He is treated like a beggar, must work at the most menial tasks, stay out of the way of proper, polite society. There is no one who appreciates the finer qualities, the aspirations, the potential of Redburn; and like Melville the boy, Melville the mature man and artist must again feel the pain and the loneliness of rejection. Society does not understand his thoughts and dreams, appreciate his achievement, allow him his rightful place among other artists. There seems to be no better place for the man than there was for the boy: the world, if it wants anything from Melville, wants his lowest efforts, not his highest.

And so Melville threw himself into the task of staving off bankruptcy by producing first Redburn, which he would later call "trash . . . to buy some tobacco with,"⁴⁰ and, immediately following, White Jacket, of which he was not quite that contemptuous but by no means proud. Between the beginning of May and the end of August

⁴⁰Journal of a Visit to London and the Continent By Herman Melville 1849-1850, ed. Eleanor Melville Metcalf (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1948), p. 23.

1849, while the blue cholera was raging in New York and during its peak killing about three hundred people a day, Melville remained at his desk, and his family remained in New York. It was a particularly hot and humid summer, made even more unbearable by the fact that it was too dangerous to eat summer staples such as fresh fish, vegetables and fruits. Outside activities were obviously curtailed by the threat of the epidemic and the prevailing public hysteria about it, and in the hot, somewhat crowded city house on Fourth Avenue there were two teething, cranky babies (his own and Allan's). Through all this Melville wrote, about three thousand words a day, galley proofs and a variety of household interruptions notwithstanding. Two major works in scarcely one hundred days--an almost superhuman accomplishment! By the end of the summer he had, in the words of Leon Howard, "paid for his intellectual growth revealed in Mardi and had become a tired and somewhat bitter man."⁴¹

It is ironical that, having been forced, in effect, to write Redburn and White Jacket, Melville himself seems to have underestimated his achievement. Most likely his often expressed disdain for these books was, at least in part, an emotional reaction against the circumstances which forced him to write them and the prevailing conditions while doing it. In any case, he seems to have been unable to appreciate their merit and to recognize his impressive degree of artistic control over the material, not to mention the unconscious power of thought and imagination which pervades both

⁴¹Howard, p. 134.

works. They fell short, to be sure, of the high standards he had by now set for himself; and perhaps, in yet another twist of irony, the very fact that they enjoyed moderate critical and financial success was to him proof of their inferiority. He had managed to assuage both critics and the readership at large--that was what he had needed to do and what he had done. If no one saw any anti-Christian elements in Melville's new books, it was not because his attitudes had changed, his obsession ceased; it was because his attack had become so artful and obscure that few readers would suspect it.

Toward the end of the summer it was probably evident that Melville needed some kind of vacation or change of scene in order to recover from the previous months of overexertion. As early as September 3, therefore, his father-in-law had obtained letters of introduction to London literary and publishing circles, and on October 11 Melville left New York on the packet ship Southampton bound for England, ostensibly to arrange for the publication of White Jacket and to collect possible material for a future book. This was his first sea voyage as a passenger and, with a large comfortable stateroom and a sociable captain who was interested in literature and had due appreciation for his distinguished passenger, Melville was free to spend his time any way he pleased, either alone or in company with his fellow travellers, or even--to the awed admiration of passengers and crew--high in the rigging, where he could feel like a sailor again.

The trip across the Atlantic proved a stimulating experience for Melville's intellect as well. For among the passengers, which were a better group than he "had dared hope,"⁴² there was "Adler, a German scholar," with whom he could talk "til midnight about Fixed Fate, Free will, and foreknowledge absolute."⁴³ There could not have been any topic more interesting to Melville, who, however unconsciously, was preparing himself for his next, giant task; and Adler seems to have been exactly the right kind of person to have long, thoughtful conversations with. His philosophy, explained Melville, was "Coleridgean," (apparently meaning that he accepted the divine nature of the scriptures but denied their infallibility and all-pervasiveness), and on the morning after their first long discussion he wrote: "He believes that there are things out of God and independent of him,--things that would have existed were there no God . . . for it is not that God so decrees mathematically, but that in the very nature of things, the fact is thus." Here, evidently, was the ideal companion for a man who had long been preoccupied with just such considerations. Adler's philosophy was "a sort of friendly bridge" between the German metaphysics and Melville's own less conscious metaphysics, his "hitherto dim doubts and intuitions."⁴⁴ No wonder, then, that his new

⁴²Mumford, p. 80.

⁴³This and the next two quotations are from Journal of a Visit to London and the Continent, pp. 4-5.

⁴⁴Mumford, p. 80.

acquaintance became his close companion on the ship, in London, and in Paris.

The Southampton reached Dover on November 7, but by that time the impatient Melville, accompanied by Adler and another passenger, had left the ship to be beached at Deal and from there to walk eighteen miles to Canterbury. After seeing the sights and spending the night, the friends took a third-class open car for their cold trainride to London, where Melville took a room in a very modest hotel and started to pursue his business affairs and the general exploration of the city. Thanks to Judge Shaw and Evert Duyckinck, he was able to meet some interesting and hospitable people and experience the London of the cultured upper middle class. But although, as guest of his acquaintances, he had access even to exclusive men's clubs, he found that there was a great discrepancy between his social and his financial standing; for throughout his stay he was forced to room in embarrassingly inexpensive quarters which made it impossible for him to receive callers and awkward even to reveal his address. He had, furthermore, arrived in a completely outdated green overcoat which often seemed to be an object of curiosity and politely concealed amusement and of which he was able to divest himself only at the very end of his stay, when his publishers had agreed to advance him some money on his soon-to-be-published book.

After a brief trip to France and Germany, Melville returned to London and booked passage on the sailing vessel Independence,

which left England on Christmas Day. Anxious now to get back to America, he had reluctantly sent his regrets to the Duke of Rutland, who had invited him for a visit at Belvoir Castle. Ostensibly Melville was homesick for his family, but the emotional ferment in which he found himself had other, perhaps subconscious causes. Adler, in a letter to Duyckinck (who had introduced him to Melville), gives an important clue to his friend's mental agitation. Adler wrote that he "regretted his [Melville's] departure very much," but that all his efforts "to check and fix his restless mind for a while at least," had been "of no avail." He ascribed his friend's turbulent emotional state in part to "the instinctive impulse of his imagination to assimilate and perhaps to work up" the materials he has already gathered, which "would not allow him to prolong his stay."⁴⁵

By the time Melville returned home, however, he seems to have had a change of heart about the nature of his next novel, for instead of realizing his earlier plans to write about the life of an American Revolutionary patriot who had been exiled in England, he now determined to write a perhaps long reserved or postponed book about the whaling fishery. As early as May 1, 1850, he wrote to Richard Henry Dana, Jr. that he had "half-way" completed such a book, and on June 27 he promised his English publishers "a romance of adventure, founded upon certain wild legends in the Southern Sperm Whale Fisheries, and illustrated by the author's own personal

⁴⁵Metcalf, p. 73.

experience of two years & more, as a harpooner."⁴⁶ The book on which he had apparently worked since spring, was to be finished "in the latter part of the coming autumn," in time to save the family from by then arising critical financial problems.

"But we that write & print have all our books predestined," Melville had written earlier, in defense of Mardi, "& for me, I shall write such things as the Great Publisher of Mankind ordained before he published 'The World'--this planet, I mean--not the Literary Globe." Obviously, then, in the foreordination of Melville's literary career, the most fateful period was about to dawn. He would, in the course of his literary and spiritual whaling expedition, meet with, identify and confront that "chronic malady of the universe," and his relentless battle with this personified enemy of mankind would become the tragically triumphant battle of his life. But before this encounter could begin he needed to muster all his strength and discover all the sources of power which could be brought to bear against the monster.

For the time being, Melville took his "daughter-full house"⁴⁷ to Pittsfield for a late summer vacation. His newest book was almost complete, and Evert Duyckinck, who apparently read it while visiting the Melvilles in August, reported to his brother George that it was "a romantic, fanciful and literal and most enjoyable

⁴⁶This and the next three quotations are from Letters, pp. 107, 109, 96.

⁴⁷This and the next two quotations are from Metcalf, pp. 115, 84.

presentment of the Whale fishery--something quite new." Duyckinck's long and minutely detailed accounts of his stay with the Melvilles give no hint of a problem with this "mostly done" autobiographical romance, on which Melville would subsequently spend a year of agonizing effort in order to transform it into a powerful, dramatic novel. But Duyckinck does shed considerable light on the outward events which, during the relaxed and pleasant late-summer days of 1850, initiated a period of crucial importance in Melville's life and literary career.

The central event of that summer, "the trigger action for his explosion into greatness,"⁴⁸ as Howard has put it, occurred on August 5, when one of Melville's neighbors arranged an outing for the literary celebrities who customarily spent their summer in the area. The guests, including Oliver Wendell Holmes and Nathaniel Hawthorne, climbed to the top of Monument Mountain, where elevation, champagne and a sudden thundershower combined to create a mood of high-spirited conviviality. Arriving at the summit,

Melville found a projecting rock which resembled the bowsprit of a ship, scrambled out to the dizzy end, and began to pull on imaginary rigging. Holmes affected the symptoms of vertigo and declared himself "epigastrically affected" by the height. Hawthorne peered around for the great carbuncle about which he had written a story thirteen years before.

The day, which marked his acquaintance with Hawthorne, was perhaps one of the happiest in Melville's life and one of the most

⁴⁸This and the next quotation are from Howard, p. 115.

fruitful in American literary history. Soon the young man was a regular guest at the Hawthorne home in Lenox, and apparently well liked by the entire family. Even Sophia Hawthorne, who adored her husband and was usually preoccupied with his praise, could not help being fascinated by Melville, and her characterization of him is by now famous. Melville, she wrote to her mother, was

A man with a true, warm heart, and a soul and an intellect,--with life to his finger-tips, earnest, sincere, and reverent; very tender and modest. And I am not sure that he is not a very great man. . . . He has very keen perceptive power. . . . He seems to see everything very accurately. . . . His nose is straight and rather handsome, his mouth expressive of sensibility and emotion. He is tall and erect, with an air free, brave, and manly. When conversing, he is full of gesture and force, and loses himself in his subject. . . . Once in a while, his animation gives place to a singularly quiet expression . . . an indrawn, dim look, but which at the same time makes you feel that he is at that instant taking deepest note of what is before him. It is a strange lazy glance, but with a power in it quite unique. It does not seem to penetrate through you, but to take you into himself.⁴⁹

And yet another of her letters needs to be quoted here, for Melville has never been analyzed with such perceptive and intuitive penetration by any other of his contemporaries.

Mr. Melville is a person of great ardor & simplicity. He is all on fire with the subject that interests him. It rings through his frame like a cathedral bell. His truth and honesty shine out at every point. At the same time he sees things artistically, as you perceive in his books. . . . He told me he was naturally a silent man, that he was complained of a great deal on this account; but that he found himself talking to Mr. Hawthorne to a great extent. He

⁴⁹This and the next four quotations are from Metcalf, pp. 91-92.

said Mr. Hawthorne's great but hospitable silence drew him out--that it was astonishing how sociable his silence was.

Sophia then reports that Melville has bought a farm, only six miles away, "so we shall have him for a neighbor."

It is likely that Melville's decision to move to the country had been considerably influenced by the prospect of being Hawthorne's neighbor. The opportunity to be near this man for whom he had almost instantly felt tremendous admiration and love must, in view of the subsequent development of their relationship, have been no less than a powerful incentive for his leaving New York. That his decision came rather unexpectedly seems evident in George Duyckinck's letter to a friend of the Melvilles, in which he reports that "Herman Melville has taken us by surprise by buying a farm of 160 acres in Berkshire County. It is mostly woodland which he intends to preserve and have a road through, making it more of an ornamental place than a farm. Part of it is on a hill commanding a view of twenty miles, where he intends eventually to build." And Sophia Hawthorne, elaborating on this intention, told her mother of Melville's plans to "build a real towered house--an actual tower." Evidently Melville had overcome his earlier depression and, for the time being, was full of energy, confidence and plans for the future. That Hawthorne was to play an important role in that future Melville seems to have been taking for granted.

Much has been written about Melville's relationship to Hawthorne which, in Lewis Mumford's words, "proved one of the

tragedies of his life . . . and not a minor one."⁵⁰ But while Hawthorne's ultimate influence on him is perhaps inestimable, Melville's essay "Hawthorne and His Mosses," written almost immediately after their initial meeting, bears witness to Hawthorne's incredible impact on the life and work of the younger poet. The "soft ravishments of the man," which so utterly captured Melville and spun around him "a web of dreams,"⁵¹ seem only in part due to Hawthorne's writing, much as that enchanted Melville. It was the man himself, "this Hawthorne's spell," which "magically stole over" Melville and in his steadily growing emotional and intellectual isolation became a focal point for his all-too-strong and turbulent feelings. That Melville felt alone, his marriage marked by disappointment, frustration and concealed unhappiness, has now been established. And that the long suppressed emotional needs of his high-spirited nature would eventually break loose and assert themselves was therefore only a matter of time and circumstance.

But it would be simplistic to suggest that Melville's immediate and overwhelming attachment to Hawthorne came simply by way of his emotional affinity. Doubtless he saw in him an intellect close to his own, a kindred spirit:

For spite of all the Indian-Summer sunlight on the hither side of Hawthorne's soul, the other side--like the dark half of the physical sphere--is shrouded

⁵⁰p. 97.

⁵¹This and the following quotations from Melville's essay are from "Hawthorne and His Mosses," pp. 402, 403, 406, 418, 400, 408.

in a blackness, ten times black . . . and this great power of blackness in him derives its force from its appeals to that Calvinistic sense of Innate Depravity and Original Sin, from whose visitations, in some shape or other, no deeply thinking mind is always and wholly free. For, in certain moods, no man can weigh this world, without throwing in something, somehow like Original Sin, to strike the uneven balance. . . . Now it is that blackness in Hawthorne . . . that so fixes and fascinates me.

Thus, in explaining what he believes to be Hawthorne's deepest thoughts and concerns, Melville actually reveals his own. And if he is right about Hawthorne's ultimate purpose, then he, like Melville, cannot risk to speak the truth openly but must contrive clever devices "directly calculated to deceive--egregiously deceive--the superficial skimmer of pages." So clever is Hawthorne at this, Melville writes, that a couple of times he actually managed to "dupe no less an eagle-eyed reader than myself." It is clear from these barely veiled comments that Melville considered his new friend a comrade in arms in the same relentless battle which he himself is waging. If there were any doubts, he refers to a passage in "Young Goodman Brown" as a "strong, positive illustration" of the otherwise more obscure "blackness" of Hawthorne:

"Faith!" [ostensibly his unfaithful wife's name] shouted Goodman Brown, in a voice of agony and desperation; and the echoes of the forest mocked him, crying--Faith! Faith!" as if bewildered wretches were seeking her all through the wilderness.

Small wonder that Melville was irresistibly drawn to the man whose heart and mind he felt to be his own, to a man whom in deepest reverence and admiration he compared in greatness to Shakespeare!

Ironically, much of the praise Melville lavished on Hawthorne was praise he would merit himself, for after the completion of Moby Dick it was Melville, of all American writers, who had probably come closest to the eminence of Shakespeare. At the time he wrote his essay on Hawthorne he was on the threshold of creating a work which would carry him to the lofty heights of universal greatness. Perhaps he intuitively felt, even then, that something almost miraculous was about to happen, that a process was about to begin during which he would bring to bear almost superhuman energy and creativity.

Nevertheless, a strange calm seems to have preceded this gigantic mental battle. Melville had found Hawthorne and in his own mind made him his brother, his confidant, his idol. Such inspiration, perhaps, he needed in order to begin his task, and it explains at least one of the often-cited mysterious "internal events" which prompted the creation of Moby Dick. At the beginning of his essay on Hawthorne, Melville wrote:

Some charm is in this northern air, for love and duty seem both impelling to the task. A man of a deep and noble nature has seized me in this seclusion. His wild witch voice rings through me; or, in softer cadences, I seem to hear it in the songs of the hill-side birds that sing in the larch trees at my window.

These "softer cadences" were almost entirely missing in his next work, but otherwise the passage might have been written by Melville as he prepared to rewrite Moby Dick.

There can be no doubt that Hawthorne's friendship and presence, nearby, was of utmost importance to Melville as he began

his revision. But exactly when the revised idea, the central theme of the new book was born, is impossible to say. His excited stimulation, arisen from his recent reading of some of the masters "of the great Art of Telling the Truth," had been intensified by his discovery of Hawthorne's "blackness," and, combined with his by now habitual manner of unorthodox thinking, gave rise to the kind of creative obsession which was now to take hold of him. Compelled to give voice to his crystallizing religious-philosophical convictions, his almost completed romantic narrative took on an entirely different form, in essence if not in superficial appearance. The captain, thus, would become the central figure, and his only worthy counterpart would be the whale, Moby Dick. Despite the almost epic proportions of the work, therefore, its dramatic development is entirely dominated by the climactic confrontation between Ahab and the whale, to which all action and devices are directly or indirectly tributary.

That Melville's deepest and "blackest" concerns in Moby Dick were reflections of his own (or Ahab's) passionate anti-Christian defiance is demonstrable throughout the book, but two crucial passages should suffice to indicate the essence of this rebellion:

Ahad had cherished a wild vindictiveness against the whale, all the more fell for that in his frantic morbidness he at last came to identify with him, not only his bodily woes, but all his intellectual and spiritual exasperations. The White Whale swam before him as the monomaniac incarnation of all those malicious agencies which some deep men feel eating

in them, till they are left living on with half a heart and half a lung. That intangible malignity which has been from the beginning; to whose dominion even the modern Christians ascribe one-half of the worlds; which the ancient Ophites of the east revered in their statue devil;--Ahab did not fall down and worship it like them; but deliriously transferring its idea to the abhorred white whale, he pitted himself, all mutilated, against it. All that most mad-dens and torments; all that stirs up the lees of things; all truth with malice in it; all that cracks the sinews and cakes the brain; all the subtle demonisms of life and thought; all evil, to crazy Ahab, were visibly personified, and made practically assailable in Moby Dick.⁵²

The exact nature of this creature is a mystery to Ahab, but, he explains:

All visible objects, man, are but as pasteboards masks. But in each event--in the living act, the undoubted deed--there, some unknown but still reasoning thing puts forth the mouldings of its features from behind the unreasoning mask. If man will strike, strike through the mask! How can the prisoner reach outside except by thrusting through the wall? To me, the whale is that wall, shoved near to me. Sometimes I think there's naught beyond. But 'tis enough. He tasks me; he heaps me; I see in him outrageous strength, with an inscrutable malice sinewing it. That inscrutable thing is chiefly what I hate; and be the white whale agent, or be the white whale principal I will wreak that hate upon him.

But if Ahab's struggle with Moby Dick was taking on epic proportions, Melville's own battle was no less heroic. For his "Whale" (as he had come to call his book) was at once his enemy and his creature. And whereas, like Ahab, he was predestined to lose the battle with the "universal malice" that was the Whale,

⁵²This and the next two quotations are from *Moby-Dick*, ed. Harrison Hayford and Hershel Parker (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1967), pp. 160, 144, 379.

he nevertheless meant to gain victory over the monster that was of his own making. That he was conscious of the magnitude of his undertaking is clear in the work itself which gives occasional insight into his personal state of mind while he was working on

Moby Dick:

How, then, with me, writing of this Leviathan? Unconsciously, my chirography expands into placard capitals. Give me a condor's quill! Give me Vesuvius' crater for an inkstand! Friends, hold my arms! For in the mere act of penning my thoughts of this Leviathan, they weary me, and make me faint with the outreaching comprehensiveness of sweep, as if to include the whole circle of the sciences, and all the generations of whales, and men, and mastodons, past, present, and to come, with all the revolving panoramas of empire on earth, and throughout the whole universe, not excluding its suburbs. Such, and so magnifying, is the virtue of a large and liberal theme! We expand to its bulk. To produce a mighty volume you must choose a mighty theme. No great and enduring volume can ever be written upon the flea, though many there be who have tried it.

The snowy isolation of the winter months in the Berkshires seemed to lend itself well to the condition of the poet, who by now was barely living outside his book; and, considering its vast symbolic structure of land and sea consciousness, it is not surprising to read in one of his letters to Duyckinck:

I have a sort of sea-feeling here in the country, now that the ground is covered with snow. I look out of my window in the morning when I rise as I would out of a port-hole of a ship in the Atlantic. My room seems a ship's cabin; & at nights when I wake up & hear the wind shrieking, I almost fancy there is too much sail on the house; & I had better go on the roof & rig in the chimney.⁵³

⁵³This and the next quotation are from Letters, p. 117.

This "sea-feeling," in fact, seems to have intensified Melville's creative excitement, and the internal storm which had set in with Moby Dick reveals itself, here, in the most positive terms of enthusiastic ambition and energy:

Can you send me about fifty fast-writing youths, with an easy style and not averse to polishing their labors? If you can, I wish you would, because since I have been here I have planned about that number of future works and can't find enough time to think about them separately.

But unfortunately the emotional agitation which so often accompanies periods of intense intellectual activity was largely incomprehensible to Melville's wife, mother, and sisters. In their inability to understand, furthermore, they tended to attribute it--however subtly and covertly--to an appearance of the same malaise which had marked his father's, and to some extent Gansevoort's last few weeks of life. Their concern about Herman's "peculiar"⁵⁴ behavior seems to have arisen during this winter and, much to Melville's annoyance--and consequently increasing "peculiarity," one would imagine--not to have abated until he acquiesced to undergo an examination concerning his mental health. This "chimney inspection," as he called it, apparently proved him unimpaired, and he was subsequently to write a humorous but biting story entitled "I and My Chimney."

For the time being, however, there was Hawthorne, and to him Melville responded with an unreserved openness and honesty

⁵⁴Metcalfe, p. 150.

which, for the first time in his life, enticed him to reveal much of what he was and hoped to be. His letters to Hawthorne, during their close friendship which not-so-surprisingly coincided with the creation of Moby Dick, are therefore of utmost importance as a testament to his state of mind during that crucial period. And since Hawthorne was, in Melville's mind, inextricably connected with his book, these letters are of great value in that they provide intimate insight into the author's mind during and immediately after its completion. Thus, in a mood of despondency, he ponders the practical benefits of writing what he was "preordained" to write: "Try to get a living by the Truth--and go to the Soup Societies."⁵⁵ And in the midst of yet another financial and domestic crisis caused by the long delay of revising his "Whale," he observes in bitter frustration:

In a week or so, I go to New York, to bury myself in a third-story room, and work and slave on my "Whale" while it is driving through the press. That is the only way I can finish it now,--I am so pulled hither and thither by circumstances. The calm, the coolness, the silent, grass-growing mood in which a man ought always to compose,--that, I fear, can seldom be mine. Dollars damn me; and the malicious Devil is forever grinning in upon me, holding the door ajar.

And as always, of course, Melville is vexed by the fact that he cannot openly write as he wants to: "What I feel most moved to write is banned. . . . Yet altogether write the other way I can't. So the product is a final hash, and all my books are botches."

⁵⁵This and the next three quotations from Melville's letters to Hawthorne are from Letters, pp. 129, 133, 135, 143, 142.

But although he had such occasional doubts about the artistic value of his work, at other times he seems well aware of its merit. It was, after all, by his own admission not written for the taste of the world at large, and if it pleased the masses it would, he assures Hawthorne, only prove its inferiority. "All Fame is patronage," he concludes. "Let me be infamous; there is no patronage in that." It would be enough for Melville to know that some "deep-thinking" men like Hawthorne understood and appreciated Moby Dick, for Melville had written two books in one, "of which the world shall only see one, and that the bungled one. The larger book, and the infinitely better," is meant for "his [the author's] own private shelf. That it is whose unfathomable cravings drink his blood; the other only demands ink."⁵⁶

As his task neared completion, Melville's letters to Hawthorne reflect a proud, almost defiant sense of mastery. At the beginning of the summer the "Whale" was "'in his flurry,'" and Melville was "going to take him by his jaw . . . and finish him up in some fashion or other."⁵⁷ And a few weeks later he writes:

Shall I send you a fin of the Whale by way of a specimen mouthful? The tail is not yet cooked--though the hell-fire in which the whole book is broiled might not unreasonably have cooked it all ere this. This is the book's motto (the secret one) - Ego non baptiso te in nomine--but make out the rest yourself.

⁵⁶Mumford, p. 102.

⁵⁷This and the following quotations from Melville's letters to Hawthorne are from Letters, pp. 129, 133, 135, 143, 142.

Artistically, at least, Melville had won his relentless struggle with the "Whale," and if he was not exactly certain of just how well he had written, yet he knew that he had created his masterwork. But the exigent efforts of the past year had taken a high toll: Melville was drained of energy, physically and emotionally exhausted and overwrought. In a strangely prophetic assessment of his inner state, he confided in Hawthorne:

Until I was twenty-five, I had no development at all. From my twenty-fifth year I date my life. Three weeks have scarcely passed, at anytime between then and now, that I have not unfolded within myself. But I feel that I am now come to the inmost leave of the bulb, and that shortly the flower must fall to the mold.

In this precarious state of mind Melville, unable to draw support and strength from his family, turned to Hawthorne with all the emotional intensity that Moby Dick had released in him and that had no outlet in the everyday world of his private life. He had dedicated his newly published book to Hawthorne, and when he received a letter from him, apparently approving or perhaps even praising parts of it, Melville responded with such fervor to this "plain, bluff, letter," that it appears his raison d'être was to gain Hawthorne's approval. He has "written a wicked book," he confides, but feels "spotless as the lamb" now that Hawthorne has understood it. In this state of "unspeakable security" he experiences "a strange feeling--no hopefulness is in it, no despair. Content--that it is; and irresponsibility; but without licentious inclinations." The letter continues:

Whence come you, Hawthorne? By what right do you drink from my flagon of life? And when I put it to my lips--lo, they are yours and not mine. I feel that the Godhead is broken up like the bread at the Supper, and that we are the pieces. Hence this infinite fraternity of feeling. Now, sympathizing with the paper, my angel turns over another page. You did not care a penny for the book. But, now and then as you read, you understood the pervading thought that impelled the book--and that you praised. Was it not so? You were archangel enough to despise the imperfect body, and embrace the soul. Once you hugged the ugly Socrates because you saw the flame in the mouth, and heard the rushing of the demon,--the familiar,--and recognized the sound; for you have heard it in your own solitudes.

What exactly Hawthorne had written to elicit such a rhapsodic response is unknown, though often speculated upon; and whether Melville accidentally destroyed Hawthorne's correspondence or, as Eleanor Melville Metcalf suggests, deliberately burned it in "a later mood of despondency,"⁵⁸ has often been speculated upon. Be that as it may, Melville's most revealing letter was to be the last of its kind: the friendship between the two men was abating for reasons no one but Hawthorne and Melville seems to have known. It has been suggested that Hawthorne's "great but hospitable silence" had to a considerable extent been misinterpreted by Melville from the start--that he had projected onto Hawthorne feelings and attitudes which the older poet either shared only to a limited degree or not at all. Melville, for instance, saw Hawthorne, somewhat inaccurately, as an artist who said "No! in thunder,"⁵⁹ to all the powers of the universe, and this was one of the bases for his

⁵⁸This and the next quotation are from pp. 128, 91.

⁵⁹Letters, p. 125.

intense feeling of kinship with Hawthorne. It is possible that in other matters as well Melville misinterpreted, assumed too much. Hawthorne, by contrast, possessed above all other traits an almost impenetrable reserve. Perhaps he could not possibly respond to Melville's passionate candor--perhaps he found it embarrassing or even alarming.

By the end of November the Hawthornes had removed themselves to Concord, and the close relationship between Melville and Nathaniel Hawthorne had ceased to exist. They were to see each other only a few more times within Hawthorne's lifetime but would not be able to bridge the gap that had developed between them. Hawthorne died in 1864, and, upon being informed of his death, Melville would write a poem entitled "Monody," memorializing his deep and painful attachment to Hawthorne:

To have known him, to have loved him
 After loneliness long;
 And then to be estranged in life,
 And neither in the wrong;
 And now for death to set his seal --
 Ease me, a little ease, my song!

By wintry hills his hermit-mound
 The sheeted snow-drifts drape,
 And houseless there the snow-bird flits
 Beneath the fir-tree's crape:
 Glaced now with ice the cloistral vine
 That hid the shyest grape.⁶⁰

Melville's pain over his sudden estrangement from Hawthorne, coinciding with the Hawthornes' move to Concord, was probably even more

⁶⁰Collected Poems of Herman Melville. The Hendricks House Edition of Complete Works of Herman Melville, ed. Howard P. Vincent (Chicago: Hendricks House, Inc.), XIV (c1947), 228-229.

acute than that evident in the poem. Virtually isolating himself from friends and family, he spent his waking hours in his room, obsessively working on yet another novel (Pierre) and giving rise to his family's increasingly persistent speculations about his mental health.

"Would that a man could do something & then say it is finished -- not that one thing only, but all others -- that he has reached his uttermost, & can never exceed it," Melville had written two years earlier.⁶¹ In Moby Dick he had done this; and there can hardly be any doubt that he was certain of the fact. "For there is a sure though secret sign in some works which proves the culmination of the powers . . . that produced them,"⁶² he had observed in 1850, and that he recognized this sign in his own work seems evident from his letters to Hawthorne. That he had not expected the world at large to recognize and appreciate the greatness of his book is also evident from these letters, but yet it is hardly surprising that he was curious, if not to say anxious, to see how the world would respond to his masterwork, his first book in which he had been in full command of all the powers of intellect, perception and instinct which had to be orchestrated in the process of creating Moby Dick.

The world's reaction, while not unexpected, was nevertheless bitterly disappointing and discouraging for Melville. The book

⁶¹Letters, p. 83.

⁶²"Hawthorne and His Mosses," p. 421.

had appeared in England, in October 1851, under the title The Whale, and while some of the most influential critics could not help acknowledging Melville's "extraordinary gift" and the book's "great merits,"⁶³ yet they tended to be quite unspecific in their praise and overly harsh in their condemnation of what they considered to be its serious flaws. The most often mentioned objections were to the lack of conformity regarding the canons of the novel, to the strange, wild language, and--most vociferously--to the "worse than heathenish" attitudes and the "occasional thrusts against revealed religion." That Melville's impiety so struck the English critics seems somewhat astounding in view of the fact that every direct reference to the Bible which appeared the least bit irreverent had been carefully expurgated along with the more overt profanity and the "improprieties" which might have offended the nineteenth century readership.

But although the immediate reviews in England had been on the whole more neutral than negative, the ultimate critical response to The Whale was utmost condemnation. Not content with their disparaging commentaries on the book, furthermore, most subsequent reviewers took the opportunity to insult its author as well. Typical of such an attack is William Harrison Ainsworth's, in the New Monthly Magazine of July 1853. The Whale's style, he wrote, "is maniacal--mad as a March hare--mowing, gibbering, screaming,

⁶³This and the following quotations from the reviews of Moby-Dick are from the Hetherington, pp. 292, 199, 193, 222, 225, 207-209.

like an incurable Bedlamite, reckless of keeper or strait waistcoat." The author, according to Ainsworth, was "maundering, drivelling, subject to paroxysms, cramps and total eclipse," and the book at large "a huge dose of hyperbolical slang, maudlin sentimentalism, and tragic-comic bubble and squeak." This "critique" was one of the last ones to be published in England until over thirty years later, and transatlantic readers were given ample opportunity to become familiar with it since it was twice reprinted in America.

Melville could hardly have had a chance to learn of the British reaction to his book when, on November 14, the American edition appeared under the title of Moby Dick and published by Harpers, who had bravely decided to print it in its original, unexpurgated form. Predictably, early reviews tended to be by critics who were vague, if fairly neutral, giving the impression that either they had not even bothered reading the book or else they had, like the New Haven Daily Palladium, seen it as the "lively, roving story of Moby-Dick," complete with "thrilling sketches of sea life, whale captures, shark massacres." But even the most inept of the early reviewers expressed shock and contempt for Melville's increasing "impiety," his "wild language," and his "affected conceits." Skimming the surface level of Moby Dick, they either considered its author "one of the most spirited, vigorous, good-natured writers in existence . . . sparkling, and racy . . . with a constant flow of animating descriptions and thrilling incidents," or else, having grown "wilder and more untameable" with each book, as now having

"reached the very limbo of eccentricity." By the following January the negative reactions were beginning to outweigh neutral ones, and although there were some isolated reviews in America as well as in England which did more justice to Moby Dick, the ultimate American reaction was, much as the British, one of puzzlement, boredom or, most often, either contempt not only for the book but for its author as well.

Had Melville had the comfort of close and supportive friends and family members, he might have weathered the emotional crisis which had begun as a virtual eruption of creativity and in its wake now threatened to take an irreversible toll on his artistic as well as his personal resources. But Hawthorne was gone, and so was the closeness of their friendship which had so beneficially influenced Melville. His wife, furthermore, strained and incognizant of the true nature of his inner turmoil, was adding to his distress by nervously discussing his "condition" with family and friends, thus adding fuel to the spreading conviction among them that Herman was "crazy." She finally took their children to Boston, leaving him alone in his wintry desolation, deprived even of the company and assistance of his sister Augusta, who was spending the winter with friends in New York. To make Melville's sense of isolation and alienation complete, Evert Duyckinck, long one of his closest of friends, saw fit to write a review which revealed that he had utterly failed to recognize the meaning and value of Moby Dick. Duyckinck, while deploring Melville's impiety, magnanimously

pronounced the book "an intellectual chowder of romance, philosophy, natural history, fine writing, good feelings, bad sayings."⁶⁴

Melville thereupon cancelled his subscription to the Literary World and, one must assume, his close friendship with Evert Duyckinck.

There can be no doubt that the obtuseness and overt ignorance which marked the general reception of Moby Dick had deep and irreversible effects on its author. Lewis Mumford sees this rejection as the centrally decisive factor in his development as an artist. The "flat stupidity" of his critics, he writes, affected Melville to the point at which

The writer begins to doubt the possibility of literature in a world that so flagrantly misunderstands or ignores its higher manifestations. Faced with such contemporaries, the artist may retire within himself, as Bach or Ryder or Cézanne did; but it will only be a miracle that will keep him from taking into his retirement a deep contempt for the people around him. That contempt is worse than isolation; it brings isolation without hope. . . . There was nothing in the reception of Moby-Dick that would have lessened Melville's scorn, or helped him to fortify himself against his own weaknesses. Quite the contrary. Like Pierre himself he was to learn "and very bitterly learn, that though the world worship mediocrity and commonplace, yet hath fire and sword for contemporary grandeur."⁶⁵

In this attitude of quiet and proud contempt Melville most likely remained for the rest of his life, shutting himself off from the positive influence of society as well as from its deficiencies. One can, of course, speculate that, in the process

⁶⁴Moby-Dick, p. 613.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 136.

of writing Moby Dick, he permanently exhausted his artistic energy and impulse--that he had made the ultimate effort which in and of itself precluded subsequent evocation. None of his later writing, after all, came up to the standards he had set in Moby Dick, not even Billy Budd, the final and probably best work of his later years. He was never again to experience the fame nor even the notoriety of his earlier life and became literally forgotten by the public. After unsuccessful attempts to support his family with his writing and with lecture tours, he was further disappointed in his attempts to secure a consular appointment abroad. In 1866 he managed to secure a position as a district inspector of customs for New York harbor, a job he held until his retirement nineteen years later. During this time he seems to have lived quietly, if not happily, the main events in his life having been the untimely deaths of both of his sons: Malcolm, who died at eighteen, apparently by suicide, and Stanwix, whose much-troubled life ended at twenty-five in a public ward of a San Francisco hospital.

It would be an error, however, to assume--as has often been done--that Melville's relative silence was indicative of his submission to, or reconciliation with, the powers he had fought so courageously. Although he seemed no longer at open war with the powers of Heaven and earth, he continued to voice his rebellion--this "willful defiance,"⁶⁶ as Mumford has called it--through

⁶⁶Ibid.

practically every piece of writing, prose or verse. His voice was, to be sure, no longer that of Ahab, nor of Pierre; it was a more subdued, a more restrained, a more ironical voice--one which spoke from bitter resignation, perhaps, but certainly not from defeat and never from lack of determination. Melville was Bartleby, perhaps, who determines to obliterate himself rather than to make any concession which would diminish his absolute self-assertion. The "victim of innate and incurable disorder"⁶⁷ (that same malignancy which is recognized by Taji, Ahab, and Pierre) Bartleby habitually expresses his passive but relentless resistance in the calm, emotionless words: "I would prefer not to." Bartleby does not stand comparison, in temperament and stature, to Melville's superhuman heroes, but in his "unswerving allegiance to destiny" he is indeed related to them. It is a trait which was essential also to the character of Melville himself and which was the source of his topmost greatness as well as his topmost grief.

⁶⁷This and the next quotation are from "Bartleby the Scrivener," in The Complete Stories of Herman Melville, ed. Jay Leyda (New York: Random House, c1949), pp. 25 and passim.

CHAPTER IV

MARLOWE AND MELVILLE: A BIOGRAPHICAL COMPARISON

It may seem difficult, at a glance, to attempt to draw comparisons between the lives and characters of two men so far removed from each other in time and space as Christopher Marlowe and Herman Melville. That Melville was influenced by Shakespeare is often recognized and acknowledged by American scholars; that he was influenced by Elizabethan literature per se is noted but not so far thoroughly investigated; and that his heroes are essentially Marlovian in conception is sometimes mentioned but never followed up. In view of the fact that there is evidently a connection between Marlowe's and Melville's heroes, it is equally surprising that scholarly focus has not been drawn to the relationship between these two writers, especially since it is well known that both men tended to write largely autobiographically and almost inevitably, therefore, must have had in common certain prerequisite experiences and attitudes which compelled them to create such strikingly similar aspects in their writing. One cannot, to be sure, hope to prove the connections between the characters of Marlowe and Melville, for details about the Elizabethan's life are scanty and have been further obscured by the passage of almost four centuries. But what we do know about Marlowe lends itself surprisingly well to an overall comparison with Melville, especially since it seems

to confirm some general observations about human development and subsequent behavior.¹

As earliest environment is always of utmost importance in the development of an individual, so it seems to have been with Marlowe and Melville. Both came from families in which there was inordinate stress on material possessions and concern about public image. While Marlowe's family was not of the prosperous upper middle class as was Melville's, yet there was much conscious effort to rise on the social ladder and to project an image of prosperity and affluence, even in face of the fact that debts were left unpaid and not infrequently had to be settled by court action. Such financial instability, coupled with the innate Geltungsbedürfnis which seems to have marked the character of both Marlowe's and Melville's parents, often produces children who are extraordinarily proud and yet essentially insecure.

¹The facts about the life of Marlowe and Melville come primarily from the following sources. For Marlowe: Frederick Boas, Christopher Marlowe, A Biographical and Critical Study (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1940); A. L. Rowse, Christopher Marlowe, A Biography (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1964); Samuel A. Tannenbaum, The Assassination of Christopher Marlowe (A New View), (Hamden, Conn.: The Shoe String Press, Inc., 1928; reissued 1962); A. D. Wright, In Search of Christopher Marlowe, A Pictorial Biography (New York: The Vanguard Press, Inc., c1965).

For Melville: Lewis Mumford, Herman Melville (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1929; rev. ed. 1962); Leon Howard, Herman Melville (Berkeley: University of California Press, c1951); Eleanor Melville Metcalf, Herman Melville: Cycle and Epicycle (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953).

But perhaps more crucial to Marlowe's and Melville's development was the fact that apparently neither of them could profit from the presence of a strong father-figure. Marlowe's father was, according to the account of William Urry, little more than a noisy, pugnacious fool, for whom a boy of Christopher's perception and intelligence could hardly have had more than the most superficial respect. Allan Melville, on the other hand, was a tense and unaffectionate man, who seldom laughed, was overly critical and obviously did not favor his son Herman. If Herman elevated him almost to sainthood after his death, the eventual disillusion he experienced in regard to his father was, according to his biographers, a serious emotional shock from which he never totally recovered.

The most striking, and perhaps important factor in their family environment, however, is that both men had lived in households which were utterly dominated by women. Of her nine children, Catherine Marlowe apparently had lost one daughter and three sons; thus Christopher was the only surviving boy in a family of four girls. Melville, of course, had brothers, but he, too, was living in a female-dominated household which also contained four girls and--as in Marlowe's case--a rather strong-willed, emotionally overwrought mother. That the Marlowe household must have been in its own way a hectic, unstable environment is pointed out by Urry; that the Melvilles' "daughter-full"² household (as Evert

²See Chapter III, footnote 47.

Duyckinck liked to call it) was almost constantly upset during Herman's childhood and youth is well documented. After Marlowe got away from "his women," there is no evidence that he remained closely attached to them. Melville, on the other hand, though periodically attempting to escape, remained tied to, and too often responsible for, his mother and sisters for most of his life. It is important to remember, however, that both men in their childhood and early youth had similar experiences in this respect, and that their attitudes and associations in regard to women, in their personal lives as well as in their writing, may well have been shaped by them.

The financially-strained Marlowe and Melville households, furthermore, were unable to provide college education for their children. Christopher Marlowe, therefore, had to compete (fiercely, one suspects) for scholarships at the King's School and later at Cambridge, while Herman Melville had to go to work as a bank clerk before he was quite thirteen. Doubtless both were bitterly aware of their poverty which was in sharp contrast with the wealth of their peers. Of Marlowe's classmates at King's School, and later at college, most came from wealthy, titled families and surely looked down on the "cobbler's son." Similarly, Melville's cousins, with whom he had grown up, had considered the Melville boys below their own social and financial standing even before their father had died, knowing that their own parents were materially supporting the indigent Melville family. Such conditions tend to have serious

and ineradicable effects on children. We know that his poverty was deeply humiliating to Melville, as it must have been to Marlowe, and that it was a major factor in the development of the kind of deep and somewhat contemptuous pride which marked the character of both men and provided much incentive for their ambitious pursuit of early fame.

There can hardly be any comparison between the formal education of Marlowe and the sketchy, haphazard one of Melville. It is evident that Marlowe was extremely well educated, and considering the obstacles a poor boy had to overcome to get the kind of training he received, it is only logical to assume that he was studious and, at least on the surface, humble and deferential toward his patrons. There was probably a great difference between the intelligent, gifted child who caught the attention of his early benefactors and the Cambridge graduate who had learned to dissemble and keep his own interests foremost in his mind. One might say that Marlowe learned to survive (at least for the moment) by way of getting an education, while Melville got an education by way of surviving. Both were, to be sure, in a cold, harsh, ruthlessly disciplinarian world in which the slightest infraction of rules could have the most severe consequences; both not only survived but, by sheer determination and stamina, successfully completed their education--that which came from books and that which came from experience. It is evident, however, that both retained a deep distaste for any kind of personal disenfranchisement and an unabating contempt for authoritarian rule of any kind.

In yet another way do the two poets' early experiences seem to run on parallel tracks. Having come from homes in which women were dominant (which, as we know now, is always an extraordinary challenge to the emotional balance of male children), both were suddenly thrown into totally male-oriented environments. To cite Rowse once more: the young men at Corpus Christi were "intimately thrown together," and experienced in college "the vivacity, the brittle disputations . . . the entire masculine tone of it all, the spartanism, the boredom, not without its occasional consolations."³ All these were crucial elements which shaped Marlowe's tastes and attitudes. Rowse might as well have been writing this about Melville (though perhaps the disputations aboard ship had not, as a rule, been quite as intellectually challenging). So close, in fact, was the psychological, if not the overtly educational milieu of shipboard life which Melville, through Ishmael, had called "my Yale College, and my Harvard,"⁴ that Mumford called it a "profane cloister." The young men on such ships were

cut off for six months at a time from the distractions of any port . . . in truth the best of universities for a young man, still not out of adolescence, to retire into. . . . The regular routine, the monastic discipline . . . even the restricted diet, were all favorable to a vivid and purposive inner life.⁵

³See Chapter II, footnote 12.

⁴Moby Dick, p. 101.

⁵Mumford, p. 46.

The comparisons are indeed striking, especially considering yet another point which is often overlooked or, understandably, treated with reluctance and discretion. But it is nevertheless important to realize that for young men--especially for those of backgrounds similar to Marlowe's and Melville's--such intense and exclusive interaction with members of their own sex is likely to have profound emotional and behavioral consequences. Whether these subsequently manifest themselves merely as a decided preference for male companionship or, more radically, as actual homosexuality, they are far more likely to be the result of basic changes in emotional self-identification than, for instance, of moral turpitude. That Marlowe's attitude toward sex was an example of such psychological realignment seems sufficiently evident in the comment attributed to him in the Baines Note, "That all they that love not tobacco and boys are fools."⁶ Nevertheless, this comment in itself still allows for the possibility that Marlowe was bisexual rather than homosexual in the strict definition of that term.

It should be clear that the evidence for Melville's biography inevitably gives rise to similar speculation. There are, to be sure, no explicit statements (such as that alleged in the Baines Note) which warrant comparison to Marlowe in this respect; yet the possibility that Melville was at least latently bisexual has been hinted at. The most persuasive "evidence" for such suspicion

⁶See Chapter II, footnote 24.

is, of course, the previously quoted letter to Hawthorne (see p. 134) and the entirely too emotional attitude which he so consistently displayed during the course of their close friendship. But of the many speculations about the possible reasons for the sudden, mysterious estrangement between the two men, none seems to explore a sexual one as a possibility. It should not, however, be considered impossible that Hawthorne, who is often blamed by Melville scholars for his aloofness, lack of genuine warmth, or even professional jealousy in regard to Melville, was simply becoming alert to and alarmed about the potential complications inherent in a continuing close association with his friend. Be this as it may, the ultimate truth about the change in this famous friendship seems to have been unknown to any outsider and is likely to remain so.

It does not, however, take concrete biographical evidence to conclude that women, much as they had been periodically evident in the lives of Marlowe and Melville, had not influenced their emotional and intellectual growth in any appreciable manner--except, most likely, in a detrimental one. Marlowe died too young to have proven conclusively that he had no intention to marry. Melville, though married, was not happy in this union. His discontent apparently started almost immediately after his wedding and seems to have been far more serious than generally thought.⁷ The intense

⁷Walter D. Kring and Jonathan S. Carey, "Two Discoveries Concerning Herman Melville," Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society, 3rd Ser., 30 (1975), 137-141.

intellectual curiosity and creative imagination which so strongly marked both men and which doubtless made themselves felt in their early childhood must have been stifled in the uninspiring, prosaic world of their respective families. From Urry's work about the Marlowe household one gets a fair insight into the cultural climate in this noisy, ill-mannered family; of Melville's family we know that it was unimaginative, humorless and generally stifling. No wonder, then, that both men preferred the company of their own sex--for those reasons which have been touched upon already as well as for the fact that virtually all growth, all excitement, all learning and adventure had come to them away from the women--away from the confines of home and family.

But although both Marlowe and Melville seem to have moved comfortably in the world of men, their relationship with their own sex was, to be sure, not always rewarding and beneficial; in fact, the often-mentioned wildness and rebelliousness in Marlowe's and Melville's characters are most likely attributable to that particular element in their background. That Marlowe (already having been born into a "fighting" family) had to fight physically as well as intellectually in order to assert himself, even at a very early age, seems evident. One can easily imagine the challenges to the pride of a young boy in a class-conscious environment in which practically everyone was his social superior. Melville, too, suffered from such experiences and for the rest of his life did not forget the humiliation of being the "poor boy" among his

rich cousins. Their insults and slights were as painfully and frustratingly exasperating as those of the sailors on the St. Lawrence, who had had their sport with the lowly "boy" on his initial voyage.

More serious, however, and infinitely more consequential to the two poets' ultimate character and development were the evident severity, corruption and lack of humanity of the systems in which they found themselves. It is probably true, of course, that neither all divinity students nor all sailors were adversely affected by such respective experiences, and it is obvious that both Marlowe and Melville in most respects benefitted tremendously from their training. But while overtly they survived and succeeded within these systems their ultimate measure of artistic success was ironically determined by the extent to which they came to hate and to rebel against them. It must be remembered that flogging and the stocks were the usual consequences for even the slightest of infractions of rules at Corpus Christi (especially, one suspects, if one's parents were not influential enough to prevent such abuse).

Flogging and the stocks were also the rule of the day on Melville's "floating universities." The practice, for which the assembled crew was customarily forced to be in attendance, never failed to outrage and sicken Melville, and he was perpetually haunted by the fear that sooner or later he himself might become its victim. But what seems to have terrified him most was not the thought of the excruciating pain (though that in itself seems strong enough a terror) but of the abominable, obscene debasement and humiliation

thus inflicted by human beings on human beings--any human beings. To recall a previously quoted comment: "flogging conducted with all the formality of institutionalized civilization became his symbol of all the indignity that man could heap on man." In view of this it is highly ironic, however, that Melville, like Marlowe, apparently developed the unfortunate tendency at times to imitate the very cruelty and violence they had doubtless been subjected to. We know that continuous exposure to violence almost inevitably breeds violence, even (perhaps especially) in young children and adolescents who fear and hate it. For these reasons, perhaps, Marlowe could at times not resist his impulse to resort to physical brutality as an outlet for his pent-up frustrations. And they most likely account for the fact that Melville, during his darkest moments of frustration and stress, apparently not only struck his children but, as recently discovered evidence seems to suggest, even his wife.⁸

Having very early in life felt the bitter sting of a sense of personal disenfranchisement--a providential withholding, as it were, of the bounty which seemed often so generously bestowed on others, less deserving, perhaps--the constant threat of further senseless punishment and curtailment of personal freedom by indifferent but seemingly malevolent agencies of authority must indeed have been a challenge to the pride of Marlowe and Melville. No wonder that it bred rebellious personalities with a certain rashness

⁸Ibid.

of temper and an inordinate sense of pride in their own unconquerable spirit. Both had, of course, learned that none of the societal institutions were to be rashly and openly defied--only fools would attempt to do that. But Marlowe obviously had had no scruples about rebelling when the time seemed right and it was profitable to his own purposes. One need only consider the fact that he apparently led everyone to believe that he was planning to take Holy Orders and then left unceremoniously as soon as he had obtained the maximum benefit from his scholarships.

Melville, in like manner, was quick to break his allegiance to the ships' masters when it was relatively safe for him to do so and to his own advantage. Like Marlowe, he was also to a considerable extent persuaded by the lure of adventure. Thus Marlowe had gone to Rheims on a highly risky government mission and had apparently remained involved in the innately lethal intrigues between Church and State. Melville, similarly, abandoned the relative safety of his ship and, thousands of miles from home, took off on foot with scarcely three days' provisions, taking his chances in wild, unfamiliar territory and actually living with a tribe of cannibals. And after his experience as a deserter, furthermore, he eventually became a mutineer as well. Most similar to Marlowe's experience as a government agent, however, is Melville's participation, in Honolulu, in a political conspiracy with heavily religious overtones.

Such unconventional activities were not, by this time, the initial stirrings of Melville's anti-Christian sentiments; they were, on the contrary, the first outward manifestations of his own crystallizing attitudes about the corruption, injustice and cruelty of yet another of civilizations' institutions--one whose tenets he equated with the dreaded Articles of War, a deadly "litany," as he observed, whose seemingly endless threats were hurled (an "amendment," perhaps, to the Ten Commandments) at the petrified sailors forcibly assembled for Sunday morning church services. In the "Floating Hells,"⁹ as he called these ships, the affairs of State and Church were almost as intrinsically tied together as those in Marlowe's days. Melville's contempt for this system is perhaps nowhere better and more ironically expressed than in Billy Budd, when he explains the function of the ship's chaplain, who having made a less than half-hearted and utterly unsuccessful attempt to convert and console the doomed young sailor, simply kisses him on the cheek (!) and leaves:

Marvel not that having been made acquainted with the young sailor's essential innocence the worthy man lifted not a finger to avert the doom of such a martyr to marshall discipline. To do so would not only have been as idle as invoking the desert, but would also have been an audacious transgression of the bounds of his function, one as exactly prescribed to him by military law as that of the boatswain or any other naval officer. Bluntly put, a chaplain is the minister of the Prince of Peace serving in the host of the God of War--Mars. As such he is as incongruous as a musket would be on the altar at Christmas. Why, then, he is there? Because he

⁹White-Jacket, p. 250.

indirectly subverts the purpose attested by the cannon; because too he lends the sanction of the religion of the meek to that which practically is the abrogation of everything but brute force.¹⁰

It does not take great perception to note the irony in this passage but perhaps some training in what Lawrance Thompson calls Melville's "double and triple-talk"¹¹ to decipher the full charge of this statement, especially awareness of Melville's constant hints that the world is like a battleship and that such "Floating Hells" operate under the martial law of God's rule.

The inevitability with which Melville and Marlowe were driven into their passionate and relentless battle against Christianity and ultimately against the Christian God himself was determined, of course, by the indisputable fact that neither at heart doubted the existence of such a God. It has been pointed out earlier that atheism in its modern definition was unknown in Marlowe's time, as it was, curiously enough, in the nineteenth century society of Melville. In fact, for both men to become involved in the process of thought which led them through such similar stages of intellectual development and eventual convictions, they had of necessity to have had the experience of early indoctrination into a rather absolutist canon of Christian thought; for always their personal as well as their artistic drama--that of the individual in and against society--is staged against the backdrop of a Christian

¹⁰Billy Budd, pp. 121-122.

¹¹Lawrance Thompson, Melville's Quarrel with God (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952), passim.

universe and the presence, stated or implied, of a Christian God who is the ultimate antagonist.

It might be argued that both poets were in the habit of voicing opinions which seem to make them sound like atheists. One need only recall some of Marlowe's utterances, for instance, as reported by Baines, Kyd and others, or such lines as

I count religion but a childish toy
And hold there is no sin but ignorance.
(T. Prologue, 14-15)

But such "evidence" is indicative of nothing more than the talk he had heard and participated in at Cambridge--fortified of course by his own extensive reading and unorthodox, analytical intelligence--and the conclusions he had most likely drawn from the religious madness of his own time, of which the history of Canterbury was but one persuasive example and his experience as a government agent another.

There are, furthermore, indications in Marlowe's writing which seem to indicate a kind of skepticism in regard to Christian dogma, for example, in Tamburlaine, where through Orcanes Marlowe seems to hint at a kind of ultimate power which, essentially dynamic and aesthetic in nature, apparently supersedes that of the Christian God whose attributes and demands are virtue and morality:

. . . he that sits on high and never sleeps
Nor in one place is circumscribable,
But everywhere fills every Continent,
With strange infusion of his sacred vigor.¹²
(IIT.II.ii.49-52)

But again, such occasional discrepancies which probably reflect his wide range of reading, his own sense of aesthetics and his strong Renaissance orientation, at variance here with the orthodoxy of his Mediaeval religious indoctrination, cannot withstand the massive and consistent evidence which points to his general acceptance, as truth, of the Christian doctrine.

It is exactly so with Melville. That he was equally conservatively educated in regard to Christian dogma and practices has been pointed out by William Braswell, who has examined the strong influence of the "Calvinistic tradition . . . on both sides of the family," which was established "generations before Melville was born,"¹² and the strict observances in Melville's home of all the customs and rituals which are the outward manifestations of religious conservatism. Allan Melville, according to Braswell, was a man who "saw in everything the hand of a benevolent but jealous god," and who in his many written explanations of this somewhat paradoxical notion explained it as follows: "That divine first cause who always moulds events to subserve the purposes of mercy and wisdom, often subjects poor human nature to the severest trials, that he may better display his sovereign power." Small wonder that a mind like Herman Melville's would become preoccupied with

¹²This and the following quotations pertaining to Melville's religious thought are from William Braswell, Melville's Religious Thought: An Essay in Interpretation (Durham: Duke University Press, 1943), pp. 4, 105.

the nature of God's dealings with Man, especially since his personal experience seemed consistently to verify at least the second part of his father's conviction! Braswell also comes to the conclusion that "it would have been odd if Melville had not given a great deal of thought to religious matters. His inherited theological cast of mind and the religious atmosphere that he was reared in would have made indifference on his part out of the ordinary."

His "obsession with religious problems," observes Braswell furthermore, "is a classic statement of Melville's spiritual condition during the latter half of his life." Why, then, he calls this obsession "one of the strangest and most pathetic cases in his century," is puzzling indeed! Like Rowse, who suggests that Marlowe might more wisely have ignored the nonsensical religious beliefs of his time, Braswell seems unaware that, first, it was to Melville's credit to fight against the oppressive, downright illogical and degrading notions inherent in a religious dogma such as that summed up in Allan Melville's remarkable statement and that, second, and more important, it was precisely this obsession which, given artistic expression and dimensions, made Melville what it made Marlowe: one of the greatest, universal poets in Western literary history. That Melville was not as "relatively contented and optimistic" as "Emerson and Thoreau . . . Longfellow, Lowell, and Holmes," nor "even Hawthorne" who, though "often morose on the problem of sin, was contented enough in his beliefs

to pity Melville," may be quite true. But what any of these men (including Braswell) seemed unaware of was that Melville's artistry would ultimately be judged superior to their own, his personal lack of "contentment" and "happiness" notwithstanding.

Nor did Hawthorne, while being in some respects correct about Melville's essential nature, actually understand the complexity and depth of his personal and intellectual struggles which in turn informed and defined his artistry. After his last meeting with Melville in England, while Hawthorne was Consul at Liverpool, he wrote in his journal:

He stayed with us from Tuesday till Thursday; and . . . we took a pretty long walk together. . . . Melville, as he always does, began to reason of Providence and futurity, and of everything that lies beyond human ken, and informed me that he had "pretty much made up his mind to be annihilated"; but still he does not seem to rest in that anticipation; and, I think, will never rest until he gets hold of a definite belief. It is strange how he persists--and has persisted ever since I knew him, and probably long before--in wandering to-and-fro over these deserts, as dismal and monotonous as the sand hills amid which we were sitting. He can neither believe, nor be comfortable in his unbelief; and he is too honest and courageous not to try to do one or the other. If he were a religious man, he would be one of the most truly religious and reverential; he has a very high and noble nature, and better worth immortality than most of us.¹³

This is the final testimony about Melville by the man to whom he had revealed his innermost heart and soul. It reflects some of the greatness of the author of Moby Dick, but, sadly and

¹³The English Notebooks (New York: Russell and Russell, 1962), pp. 432-433.

ironically, it also reveals the acuteness of his intellectual isolation in a society which would or could not keep in step with him--either intellectually or imaginatively. Like Marlowe, Melville was compelled to probe "the very axis of reality,"¹⁴ but unlike Marlowe, he did not even have the intellectual gratification of having found the company of a group of like-minded individuals with whom he could really debate, really communicate. And while the penalties for Melville's social and religious heresies were not, as they had been in Marlowe's time, the rack and the stake, yet they were in a sense more difficult to bear, more discouraging and, it seems quite evident, more "deadly" in their psychological effects upon the creative instincts and energy of the artist. Marlowe, who was apparently equally incapable of public forbearance when it came to arguments about religion, took the gravest of risks with his life; Melville simply encountered genteel contempt, charges of moral licentiousness, and worse: insinuations concerning his sanity in view of such observations. Everyone, including his friends, was upset or embarrassed about them, and this, wrote Mrs. Morewood to George Duyckinck, "is a pity" because "he will not be popular in society here on that account."¹⁵

Melville's aberration was, even as was Marlowe's, his intellectual superiority over his contemporaries and, as Rowse

¹⁴"Hawthorne and His Mosses," p. 418.

¹⁵Metcalf, p. 133.

has put it (defining a chief aspect of Marlowe's character), "the edge on his temper whenever he thought of orthodox Christian belief and the hypocrisy and cant with which Western society shrouded the subject." And if "Marlowe's mind, maturing, was moving toward the expression of his fundamental concern--the question of religious beliefs and challenge they posed to reason and a rationalising mind,"¹⁶ then one can hardly envision a work in which, given the time into which he had been born, he could have superseded his achievement in Dr. Faustus. Melville, of course, lived for many years after he had written Moby Dick, but with its creation he had, as he had quite prophetically foreseen, come to that ultimate stripping away of the "inmost leaf of the bulb,"¹⁷ which had left him virtually exhausted and drained not only of the energy but also the possibility of duplicating or exceeding that effort. For, like Marlowe's works, Melville's were written within an astonishingly short period of time and with what appears to have been a virtual explosion of creative powers and an accelerative artistic perception virtually unequalled in Western literary history.

The early and sudden fame bestowed by their contemporaries on Marlowe and Melville, while yet another parallel in their lives, is in a sense ironic and almost irrelevant in the overall context

¹⁶Rowse, p. 71.

¹⁷See Chapter III, footnote 57.

of this study--not because it was not fully merited (for reasons too obvious to have to be enumerated here) but because it was not given in recognition of the awesome complexity and astonishing greatness of their work. It would take centuries for Marlowe's plays to receive their proper acclaim--if indeed we now do have a definitive appreciation of their ultimate worth. Perhaps Marlowe, like Melville, had reflected bitterly on his contemporaries' failure to understand his deepest meanings. Perhaps, on the other hand, he had prided himself on egregiously deceiving them, for "the Truth," as Melville wrote and Marlowe doubtless knew, could be revealed only "covertly, and by snatches"¹⁸ and was never appreciated by the world at large.

Their measure of fame notwithstanding, the bitter alienation and frustration of men who were ahead of their time, even while being among its most courageous and eloquent spokesmen, must have been perceived by them as one of the worst "punishments" for such relentless pursuit of the truth. "Though I wrote the Gospels in this century, I should die in the gutter,"¹⁹ Melville had written after the completion of Moby Dick. What prophetic irony (if not in an all-too literal sense)! Marlowe might have said that as well for, as Kocher put it:

on the conscious intellectual level he threw himself . . . into the war on Christianity . . .

¹⁸"Hawthorne and His Mosses," p. 415.

¹⁹Letters, p. 129.

exerting himself to spread his own kind of gospel to others, trying to rid men of superstition, satisfying his feelings of superiority and comradeship as well as his need for keen mental activity.²⁰

And in a sense, of course, they had indeed written a kind of gospel-- each for his own time but each also for many generations to come.

²⁰Kocher, p. 332.

CHAPTER V

MARLOWE'S INFLUENCE ON MELVILLE:

FACT AND THEORY

It seems hardly possible, assuming a familiarity with Marlowe's Dr. Faustus, that anyone could read Moby-Dick without being struck by the similarities between these two works and without being convinced that Melville was well acquainted with the work of this particular Elizabethan poet. The fact that (as this study has attempted to illustrate) the personal history, general character and frame of mind of the two men were remarkably similar, doubtless accounts for much of the comparable dramatic configuration and vision evident in their major works. But there seems to be evidence beyond the accident of relative parallelism of experience and intellectual-emotional development, of Melville's personal acquaintance with and profit, consciously or unconsciously, from the discovery of a mind so similar to his own and so committed to a cause in which he himself was passionately engaged. But before a general blueprint of textual similarities can be drawn (and it should be pointed out again, here, that this study attempts only to outline broadly not analyze in detail such similarities), it is important to consider the factual evidence of Melville's personal acquaintance with Marlowe's plays.

Such acquaintance was first documented in Merton M. Sealts, Jr.'s book Melville's Reading, which records that Melville purchased

a copy of "Marlowe's Plays" for five shillings in London, probably on December 24, 1849 (p. 77, Plate IV).¹ The particular edition was not identified until Sealts subsequently recorded, in Pursuing Melville, that it was "The Dramatic Works . . . with Prefatory Remarks, Notes, Critical and Explanatory. By W. Oxberry. London, W. Simkin, R. Marshall, C. Chapple, [1820?]," which contains "eight plays separately paged: The Jew of Malta (1818), Edward II (1818), Dr. Faustus (1818), Tamburlaine, I and II (1820), Dido Queen of Carthage (n.d.)," and has been marked by Melville.²

The 1982 publication of Pursuing Melville thus in effect records the discovery of Melville's copy of Marlowe's plays which had apparently been missing since the time of Melville's death. During a personal conversation with Prof. Sealts, on April 23, 1983, furthermore, he explained to me (knowing that I had been interested for some time in a comparative study of Marlowe and Melville) that he had recently been offered this edition, had seen it, but had ultimately decided to suggest sale of the book to the Houghton library at Harvard, which is now in possession of it. Prof. Sealts, however, was kind enough to send me his notes pertaining to Melville's markings to which I will subsequently refer.

The discovery of this annotated copy of Marlowe must remove any doubt that Melville had read at least Edward II, Tamburlaine,

¹(Madison, Milwaukee, and London: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1982), p. 352.

²Sealts, Pursuing Melville 1940-1980 (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1982), p. 352.

I and II, The Jew of Malta, and Dr. Faustus, for those are the plays which bear his markings. But we can assume that Melville had read all of the plays, for (as mentioned previously) on February 1, 1862, suffering from one of his bouts with rheumatism which left him occasionally bed-ridden, he wrote to Evert Duyckinck: "I want you to loan me some of those volumes of the Elizabethan dramatists Send me any except Marlowe, whom I have read."³ In view of the fact that he was apparently disposed to read "any except Marlowe," one may well deduce that he was more thoroughly familiar with Marlowe (whose works he not only had read but indeed was in possession of) than with any of the other Elizabethan dramatists--Shakespeare excluded.

Melville's initial discovery of Marlowe, however, predates his purchase of the Oxberry edition on Christmas Eve of 1849. We know, for instance, that the library of the United States, on which he completed the final part of his world travels, contained one of Marlowe's plays. White-Jacket, in a chapter entitled "A Man-of-War Library," gives some valuable information about Melville's reading at the time of his service as a United States sailor. Describing White-Jacket's reading on the Neversink, he writes that it included:

some old volumes of plays, each of which was a precious casket of jewels of good things, shaming the trash nowadays passed off for dramas, containing "The Jew

³The Letters of Herman Melville, ed. Merrell R. Davis and William H. Gilman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960), p. 213; hereafter cited as Letters.

of Malta, Old Fortunatus, The City Madam, Volpone, The Alchymist," and other glorious old dramas of the age of Marlowe and Jonson.⁴

Melville's appreciation of Marlowe's plays is obvious, here-- even for so controversial a play which doubtless The Jew of Malta must have been during the middle of the nineteenth century. Putting it at the head of this list of plays, Melville considers it one of the "glorious old dramas," and seems to reveal, perhaps unconsciously, evidence of its impression left on him in the use of the term "a precious casket of jewels"--which, of course, immediately brings to mind Marlowe's predominant wealth imagery and the stage property used in this particular work. The impact of such reading, available to him for the first time aboard a ship and intensified by the fortunate accident of being able to discuss it within the circle around Jack Chase, was a great one indeed. For while he acknowledges the "imposing air" of the public libraries and the "invaluable volumes" to be found there, the luckiest chances for picking up the most memorable books, "those which seem put into our hands by Providence; those which pretend to little but abound to much," he found in such unlikely places as the library of a battleship. It is difficult to imagine that Melville read The Jew of Malta without recognizing the deep-running irony in this, Marlowe's most overtly anti-Christian play; and his relatively early acquaintance with it may account for the fact that, in its most violently

⁴This and the next two quotations are from White-Jacket, pp. 168-169.

anti-Christian passages, it is the most extensively marked of the plays in his subsequently purchased edition.

But his accidental discovery of Marlowe aboard ship (as well as his later acquaintance with him through the purchase of his plays, in London) has remained totally ignored by Melville scholars, even by those who have dealt extensively with his reading as an intrinsically decisive factor in the formation of his thought. A noteworthy exception to this universal critical neglect is Mumford, who sees Melville's exposure to The Jew of Malta as an event with important consequences, and whose comments regarding this event seem worth quoting in their entirety:

The hours spent with Chase on the maintop were happy hours indeed; and no less so were those that Melville spent with books, Walpole's Letters and the Jew of Malta and Volpone, as well as earlier books of travel and adventure, such as Morgan's History of Algiers, and Knox's Captivity in Ceylon. Coming as they did, after a long period of abstention and thirst, these books had a profound influence upon Melville: and they give his literary pedigree. Through his experience of life, he broke away by necessity from the weak romantics of his youth, and, seeking the nearest parallels to his own adventures and meditations and visions, he found them in the Elizabethan dramatists and the seventeenth-century travellers and literary philosophers. Melville's genius followed two separate lines of growth, which joined in Moby Dick: one of them was that of Marlowe and Webster, with their untrammelled emotions, their stertorous vitality, and their keen transposition of dream into reality and of reality into dream--the other was that of Knox's Captivity, direct, honest, well ballasted. Had not these books been in the ship's library, Melville might have taken much longer to find himself.⁵

⁵Lewis Mumford, Herman Melville (New York: Harcourt, Brace, rev. ed. 1962), p. 36.

Mumford, thus, is saying that while the outer form of Melville's books (most notably of course of Moby Dick) was shaped by his own and other writers' physical experiences of travel, the inner form, the configuration of the idea, was shaped with the help and inspiration of Elizabethan dramatists--notably of Marlowe.

There is yet another indication of Melville's familiarity with and apparent admiration for Marlowe. It occurs in a passage of "Hawthorne and His Mosses," where, after elaborately praising Shakespeare, he suddenly seems to reverse himself by pointing out that surely Shakespeare "cannot be regarded as in himself the concretization of all the genius of his time; nor as so immeasurably beyond Marlowe, Webster, Ford, Beaumont, Jonson."⁶ He himself, writes Melville, is quite capable of conceiving that

there were dramatists in Elizabeth's day between whom and Shakespeare the distance was by no means great. Let anyone, hitherto little acquainted with those neglected old authors, for the first time read them thoroughly, or even read Charles Lamb's specimens of them, and he will be amazed at the wondrous ability of those Anaks of men, and shocked at this renewed example of the fact that Fortune has more to do with fame than with merit--though, without merit, lasting fame there can be none.

This is Melville's only direct, personal statement, published during his lifetime (though anonymously), which indicates his apparently thorough acquaintance with Marlowe's plays. Yet he does not, here or in any other instance, set Marlowe apart from other Elizabethan

⁶This and the next two quotations are from "Hawthorne and His Mosses," pp. 430, 407, 418.

playwrights or discuss any of the aspects of the kind of "blackness" which so fascinated him in Shakespeare and in Hawthorne--although the respective "blackness" which typifies both Shakespeare's and Hawthorne's writing is not really equatable with his own. It seems curious, somehow, that Marlowe, who in many respects practically spoke with the tongue of Melville, was not singled out by him as an example of the kind of thinker and writer with whom he could identify. This fact may, of course, signify nothing: perhaps Melville was not sufficiently aware of his personal and artistic kinship with Marlowe--perhaps he had not read Marlowe as "deeply" and with as much "eagle-eyed" attention as that with which he normally examined the writing of men he admired. But all indications seem to discount this possibility. He was, after all, as he explains in a letter to Duyckinck, in 1849, well aware of "the muzzle which all men wore on their souls in the Elizabethan day," and of the fact that frankness and total honesty are impossible "in this intolerant universe."⁷ Men who dared even to approach the dangerous topic of religious unorthodoxy were jeopardizing themselves, for "in this world of lies, Truth is forced to fly like a scared white doe in the woodlands; and only by cunning glimpses will she reveal herself, as in Shakespeare and the other great masters of the great Art of telling the Truth,--even though it be covertly and by snatches."⁸

⁷Letters, p. 80.

⁸This and the subsequent quotations are from "Hawthorne and His Mosses," pp. 408-410.

Why then, one feels inevitably moved to ask, did Melville refrain from analyzing, discussing, praising Marlowe as liberally as he did other writers whose influence he not only acknowledged but literally publicized? It is useful to refer to "Hawthorne and His Mosses" once again, this most valuable of all of Melville's critical observations on literary values and on the state of American literature in regard to past and contemporary European literary achievement. Part of the answer lies, perhaps, in this essay itself, which is overtly--and quite sincerely, one suspects--about Hawthorne's achievement, about the literary merit of a man for whom Melville felt boundless admiration and whose distinction he enthusiastically compared to Shakespeare's. But a striking element in the essay is the fact that the attributes he bestows upon Hawthorne are on the whole better applicable to himself, especially after the completion of Moby Dick, a work which had already seized his mind and put him into a state of high creative excitement.

There can be no doubt that consciously and subconsciously Melville was preparing himself for a literary venture the magnitude of which he could by his own and by established norms not help but compare with the achievement of Shakespeare. "There are minds," he writes, "that have gone as far as Shakespeare into the universe. And hardly a mortal man, who, at some time or other, has not felt as great thoughts in him as any you will find in Hamlet." But "Shakespeare's unapproachability," he fears, has become an article of faith, and America itself seems unable to believe that men

approaching Shakespeare's genius are "being born on the banks of the Ohio." And now he seems to talk no longer of Hawthorne but, revealingly, of himself--of his own dreams and ambitions--as he lectures his countrymen:

The great mistake seems to be, that even with those Americans who look forward to the coming of a great literary genius among us, they somehow fancy he will come in the costume of Queen Elizabeth's day,--be a writer of dramas founded on old English history, or the tales of Boccaccio. Whereas great geniuses are parts of the times; they themselves are the times; and possess a correspondent coloring.

In the light of Melville's imminent achievement such a statement must be seen as more than mere praise of a fellow writer--more also than one of the commonplace, patriotically flavored assertions of American literary equality (or even superiority), and declarations of independence from the European tradition of writing. Yet it is a somewhat uneasy assertiveness, for that tradition looms large in the consciousness of any writer, and, as Melville almost immediately explains, even Shakespeare was jeered as "'an upstart crow' beautified 'with other birds' feathers.' For," he continues, "mark it well, imitation is often the first charge brought against real originality."

It is entirely possible that Melville, super-sensitive to the charge of imitation, was reluctant to call more attention to Marlowe. Of the writers he freely mentioned as having inspired him, none, after all, could be as closely compared to him in his overall vision as Marlowe could--not Shakespeare, Milton, Goethe, Carlyle, or Byron (to mention only a few, and not insisting, here,

that he admired all of them). That eventually he may well have been ill at ease about his comparability to Marlowe is understandable, not only from the viewpoint of his previous experiences with critics, who had questioned his honesty or seen him as an "upstart" American writer, but from that of an artist fiercely committed to creating an original work rivalling those of the greatest of the European poets and yet remaining independent of them. He had, after all, proclaimed the virtual inevitability of a kind of American Shakespeare appearing in his country's history, and he had predicted that he would not "come in the costume of Queen Elizabeth's day." Why then should he have drawn particular attention to Marlowe? If "lasting fame" was to be Melville's, then his originality and merit would ultimately be as unquestionable as Shakespeare's--or indeed as Marlowe's.

The theory that Melville was influenced by Marlowe in his conception of Moby Dick does, of course, need further exposition. It must be remembered that, when Melville went to England in 1849, he had had in mind a book about the life of an American Revolutionary patriot, which he was to begin writing upon his return home. By the time he returned, however, in January of 1850, his mind was changed and, by what most of his biographers tend to see as some rather mysterious and unexpected consequences of his trip, he was now determined to write an entirely different work in which, according to Howard,

such early reference to Ahab as "a mighty pageant creature, formed for noble tragedies" and his allusions

to the "tragic graces" to be woven around "meanest mariners" anticipate the stage directions, the dramatic form of certain chapters, and the soliloquies in high style which are visible evidences of his calculated intent to dramatize and poetize his fiction.⁹

What happened to bring about this sudden change--the feverish excitement which seized Melville as he became more and more deeply involved in this idea of creating a hero of epic proportions--has often been somewhat summarily attributed to Hawthorne's appearance in Melville's life and to the impact of this event on the younger man's life. But great as Hawthorne's influence was, no doubt, it seems to have accounted primarily for the creative motivation, not for the inception of the prevailing idea which, besides, appears to have taken hold of Melville before his famous meeting with Hawthorne. Melville may well have been inspired in the conception of the super-human figure of Ahab by his exposure to Marlowe's Tamburlaine, for instance, one of his larger-than-life dramatic heroes whom Marlowe introduces in the Prologue to Part One of the plays in the following words:

We'll lead you to the stately tent of War,
Where you shall hear the Scythian Tamburlaine
Threat'ning the world with high astounding terms
And scourging kingdoms with his conquering sword.
View but his picture in this tragic glass
And then applaud his fortunes as you please.
(Prologue 3-8)

Here was "a mighty pageant creature, formed for noble tragedies."
His weapon was the sword: Ahab's the harpoon. His ultimate purpose,

⁹Leon Howard, Herman Melville (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, c1951), p. 16.

like Ahab's, relentless war which challenged the very powers of Heaven. The entire story, furthermore, could be taken out of the "costume" of its Elizabethan creator and transposed into a contemporary American setting: a whaling ship over which the unquestioned commander was Ahab, who, like the Scythian Tamburlaine, had risen from a humble background to the loftiness of a God-defying leader of men. The idea of such a hero, then, gave almost inevitably context and form for a dramatic work of idea--such as those written by Christopher Marlowe.

It is by no means a great leap of the imagination to suggest that Marlowe's heroes (notably Tamburlaine and Faustus) had impressed themselves upon Melville's consciousness at precisely the time that he became obsessed with the creation of his greatest work. On his return voyage from London (between December 26 and January 30) he seems on the whole to have avoided socializing with his fellow passengers and secluded himself in his cabin, preoccupied with his reading--so preoccupied, in fact, that he hardly opened his journal which on the way out he had so assiduously kept. Mumford, as usual finely attuned to Melville's creative consciousness, describes his mental state on the homeward-bound vessel as follows:

What happens most importantly now, comes by way of books: DeQuincey, Rousseau's Confessions, Ben Jonson, Thomas Browne, The Castle of Otranto, Lamb's Essays, Hudibras, Marlowe, Anastasius, Vathek, Goethe's autobiography. The vessel is again one's cloister: but instead of a long, unconscious growth it contains a vivid and conscious development: every day one is aware of new shoots, ideas, emotions, feelings, insights, sprouting out of one: why, before one had

reached twenty-five one hardly had any growth one could point to at all. And now . . . If one could not write books one would bust. One is big with a book; it kicks at the walls of the womb; it wakes one in the night with its anticipatory motions.¹⁰

This, then, is an artist in his most excited stage of "expectancy"--just before the start of the "labor pains" which come with the creation he is about to give birth to. And in this excitement over the sudden synthesis of intellectual, imaginative and intuitive perceptions there appears, as if by accident, Marlowe again! Perhaps Melville had had him on his mind when he had been in Canterbury, some weeks earlier; to be sure, he had spent some of his meager funds on the purchase of Marlowe's plays (of all the books available in London). He had bought other books as well, of course, but of those none suggest themselves as anywhere near as important to the conception of Moby Dick as do Tamburlaine and Dr. Faustus. And when, in "Hawthorne and his Mosses," he mentions Marlowe as one of the "masters of the great Art of Telling the Truth," he is doubtless recalling the excitement of the discovery made on his voyage home.

Of Melville's many other comments and remarks which, made after his return from London, bear strong evidence of a new kind of attitude that one can hardly describe other than as Marlovian, only one more shall be quoted here. It is, again, written to Hawthorne and articulates Melville's deepest concerns and most lasting convictions:

¹⁰Mumford, p. 131.

By visible truth, we mean the apprehension of the absolute condition of present things as they strike the life of the man who fears them not, though they do their worst to him,--the man who, like Russia or the British Empire, declares himself a sovereign nature (in himself) amid the power of heaven, hell, and earth. He may perish; but so long as he exists he insists upon treating with all Powers upon an equal basis. If any of those other powers choose to withhold certain secrets, let them; that does not impair my sovereignty in myself; that does not make me tributary.¹¹

This is, of course, the man who, through a particular set of circumstances, experiences and dispositions, had developed the cast of mind we find in Christopher Marlowe, who had been described by Gabriel Harvey as "one that neither feared God, nor dreaded Diu'll."¹² But, more than that, surely, it is the man who has recognized and benefitted from his Elizabethan predecessor's artistic formulation of the central ideas and attitudes which were dominant in Melville's creative consciousness as well.

There are yet a couple of interesting, if not conclusively persuasive points to be made on this general topic. It is no coincidence that the Pequod sets sail on Christmas for her unholy pursuit, for it is appropriately ironic that Ahab begins his battle against God on the most holy of Christian holidays. It is also strangely coincidental that Melville's fateful journey home--during which he almost certainly conceived the idea of Ahab and his whale--began on Christmas, one day, in fact, after he had purchased the Marlowe

¹¹Letters, p. 128.

¹²Paul H. Kocher, Christopher Marlowe, A Study of his Thought, Learning, and Character (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1946), p. 29.

plays. And, to mention an even more peculiar coincidence: Moby-Dick begins with the words, "Call me Ishmael."¹³ Thomas Kyd, in fact, had described Marlowe as that "outcast Ismael," a term which was subsequently adopted by Marlowe's enemies and detractors and at the time of his death and long thereafter became literally synonymous with his real name.

Although Ahab, Melville's most grandly heroic character, seems to unite in himself many characteristics of Tamburlaine as well as of Faustus, perhaps the best way to begin a general comparison of Marlowe's and Melville's works is by pointing out some of the obvious similarities in Dr. Faustus and Moby Dick. Complex and multi-dimensional as these works are, they not only share consistently comparable heroes but some general aspects in their overall construction as well. Immediately noticeable, for instance, is the fact that Moby Dick, like Dr. Faustus, is an overtly moralistic story--indeed it is a kind of nineteenth century morality play--with a predetermined outcome. In this context, Ahab, like Faustus, is a man whose overbearing pride and egomania lead him to defy God, ally himself with the devil and ultimately die a terrible death, punished by God for his willful rebellion. Like Faustus, furthermore, Ahab is a man of superior faculties, aware of the consequences of his defiance and continually warned by outsiders to relent. It is interesting that Ahab, like Faustus, stands between two "angels,"

¹³Moby-Dick, p. 12.

whose function on the superficial plot level is opposite of that in the deeper meaning of the work.

In both works, furthermore, the hero is in constant central focus, even when he does not appear in a particular scene. As Faustus towers over all other characters in the play, so does Ahab over the cast of characters on the Pequod. Yet Moby Dick himself (the representative or personification of God) is Ahab's mighty adversary--the only "character" worthy of confronting Ahab. Faustus, though overtly in conflict with Mephostophilis, has the same omnipotent adversary; in Marlowe's play, however, God as the antagonist does not take on any material form, so that in this particular respect the central conflict is not presented in terms of a physical struggle.

But the absence of God as a tangible entity, be it "principal or agent" (p. 46), does not confine the conflict in Dr. Faustus to a merely internal one. Marlowe's particular affinity for dramatizing Faustus' struggle--externalizing the idea, as it were, through visual emblems--seems to have inspired Melville not only in his conception of crucial scenes in which he presents rituals of inverted worship, for instance, but in the very atmosphere of elemental grandeur which pervades them. Thus the settings for such scenes are usually described with the use of bold, primary colors (black, white, blood-red, interspersed with flashes of fire) and are always reminiscent of Marlowe, especially when combined with the kind of cosmic rhetoric and metaphor so typical of Faustus (and, to be sure, of Tamburlaine). And while there is, of course, a difference in the genres chosen

by Marlowe and Melville (one is a play, the other a novel) Moby Dick in its most gripping scenes does employ theatrical devices such as stage directions, dramatic dialogues, asides and soliloquies which heighten the dramatic impact of some of the most important events.

The most notable similarity between Dr. Faustus and Moby Dick, however, is the consistent tension between plot and meaning: the fact that each work is essentially the opposite of what it appears to be. In each case, therefore, the reader must be "eagle-eyed" (to recall Melville's phrase) in order not to be egregiously deceived; for the practice of revealing while at the same time concealing the underlying meaning of his work had, for Melville as for Marlowe, become more than a necessity; it had become the very essence of their art. Inversion, therefore, is not only a matter of method, but it is the central idea itself--the deepest meaning in their works--to which all mechanical, structural and thematic elements are subservient.

That Moby Dick, like Dr. Faustus, reveals an innate anti-Christian attitude even within its very first few lines is evident in the narrator's explanation that he must periodically take to the sea in order to avoid the grimness of death, that most terrible of all human certainties which, during his existence on land, confronts him daily in manifold ways and causes him to grow "grim about the mouth," have "a damp, drizzly November" in his soul, and entertain persistent thoughts of suicide (p. 12). It is the same attitude

of gloomy, bitter frustration which causes Faustus to comment, having just read in "Jerome's Bible" (the Vulgate) "Stipendium peccati mors est". . . . The reward of sin is death: that's hard" (Sc.i. 39-40). In both works, obviously, it is almost immediately suggested that God is unjust to Man, for he has made him in his own image and yet predestined his innate sinfulness and consequent death. It is thus impossible for Man to be totally good or to be totally honest; for "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and there's no truth in us," continues Faustus, still translating from the Bible. "Why then, belike we must sin, and so consequently die,

Ay, we must die an everlasting death.
What doctrine call you this? Che sarà, sarà:
What will be, shall be!

(Sc.i. 41-47)

Having thus summarily outlined the human condition according to the will of God, Faustus ends his amazingly brief deliberation on Christian theology and divine reason and justice with no more than two words: "Divinity, adieu!" Whether this is merely a rejection of theology as a worthwhile discipline or a heavily ironic farewell to the creator of Man's dilemma is for the reader to determine--chances are it is both.

Melville, commenting on the same paradoxical condition of Man, ironically quotes from Father Mapple's sermon:

But all the things that God would have us do are hard for us to do--remember that--and hence he oftener commands us than endeavors to persuade. And if we obey God we must disobey ourselves wherein the hardness of God consists (p. 45).

God, in Moby Dick and in Dr. Faustus, then, is a tyrant who decrees that Man do violence to his own, God-given nature in order to please his creator. For if Man is true to himself then he is inevitably defying God. Yet it is Man's duty to love God and to be profoundly sorry for all of his sins--that is to say for all that which is natural in him and therefore true to his own nature. What, then, is repentance, this most valued of all Christian virtues? It is to renounce all truthfulness and, as Melville puts it sardonically in the words of sincere old Father Mapple: it is to be "grateful for punishment" (p. 49). For an early revelation of Melville's view of the logic and the justice of the Christian doctrine one need only follow this sermon from the pulpit (particular and universal at once, grimly foreboding and yet grimly humorous in its paradoxical ambiguity):

Woe to him who seeks to pour oil upon the waters when God has brewed them into a gale! Woe to him who seeks to please rather than to appal! Woe to him whose good name is more to him than his goodness! Woe to him who, in this world, courts not dishonour! Woe to him who would not be true, though to be false were salvation! (p. 50)

Such is the state of Man in the universe, at least through the eyes of a simple old man who preaches God's message to some common sailors. The passage, all things considered, is also an excellent example for beginners in deciphering the nature of Melville's method of inversion (his double-talk) which obscures, confuses, but ultimately reveals the meaning of the work.

Not that Ahab (or Faustus) seeks to "pour oil upon the waters when God has brewed them into a gale!" The wrath of the Lord seems to fall indiscriminately onto all of his creatures, and neither Marlowe's nor Melville's hero seeks to please or appease his creator once he has gained some insight into the ways of God with Man. But Faustus and Ahab are no ordinary men and their rebelliousness against God arises not over petty matters of everyday sinfulness. Faustus, though "born of parents from base stock" (Prologue 4-11) has excelled in all the branches of knowledge and become so eminent among men that he has taken on superhuman aspects. Thus:

His waxen wings did mount above his reach,
And, melting, heavens conspired his overthrow:
(Prologue 21-22)

The hidden meaning, here, which is as pervasive in Melville's writing as in Marlowe's, suggests a malicious God, jealous of the lofty eminence of Faustus, of his searching mind, his adventurous, high-flying (Icarus-like) spirit, plotting his doom; for "learning's golden gifts" (Prologue 24), which have made Faustus aware of and unsatisfied with the narrow confines of his mortality, have also made him question the very nature of God. And since there is no possible way to do that and stay within God's grace, it follows that defiance is not only his choice, it is his only alternative--his only open road in the pursuit of the Truth.

As Marlowe elevates his character to the stature of a super-human tragic hero (in terms of his own time and experience) so Melville does with Ahab, who, though like Faustus of humble birth, is

a man of greatly superior natural force, with a globular brain and a ponderous heart; who has also by the stillness and seclusion of many night-watches in the remotest waters, and beneath constellations never seen here at the north been led to think untraditionally and independently (p. 71).

This man, possessed of a deep and searching intellect, an unorthodox past (and, like Faustus, put within the framework of the author's own time and personal experience) is, like Faustus (and, of course, like Tamburlaine), "a mighty pageant creature, formed for noble tragedies" (p. 71).

It must be remembered, of course, that, through the conventional trappings of the plot, Faustus and Ahab are often superficially portrayed as deluded, foolish, destructive or even mad, as their "horrible defiance" and blasphemy are brought into closer and closer focus. Yet, covertly it has already been suggested that the God they defy is not good to Man--indeed perhaps not innately good at all. Furthermore, Melville, like Marlowe, has subtly established that his hero is not only (to use Melville's term here) a man possessed of a "globular brain" but also of "a ponderous heart." Even so, it is all-too common to see Faustus as well as Ahab discussed by critics as characters who lack humanity and compassion for their fellow men. But while both doubtless have more than an average share of pride, of self-assertion, of impatience with and disdain for mediocrity: these are the traits of all true tragic heroes; and these traits should not obscure the fact that one unequivocal requirement in the nature of such heroes is their essential excellence

as human beings--their tragic flaws notwithstanding--which is precisely what prevents them from becoming fools, villains, or monsters.

It is equally important to remember that Faustus, before he defies God, has had a brilliant career and an excellent reputation. Has he not served Mankind as a great physician and advanced the cause of medicine,

Whereby whole cities have escaped the plague
And thousand desperate maladies been cur'd?
(Sc.i. 21-22)

His frustration, therefore, over his inability to "make men to live eternally/or being dead raise them to life again" (Sc.i. 23-24), is in essence as indicative of his humanitarian concerns--for if he had God's power he would evidently use it for the benefit of his fellow Man--as it is of his resentment over not being omnipotent. It must also be remembered that until his death he retains a circle of devoted friends--colleagues and students--with whom he apparently has a close, if not affectionate relationship. Finally, and most persuasively arguing for Faustus' inherent humanity is his internal conflict throughout the play, itself evidence of his "ponderous heart." Marlowe does not need to endow Faustus with sentimentality or with overt, conventional expressions of human sympathy and compassion: his humanity is evident in the very nature of his suffering.

And so it is with Ahab, who, like Faustus, has resolved to abjure God only after a lifetime of experiencing the innate injustice and malice of God, who has apparently created Man only in order to frustrate and torment him, not only physically but spiritually

as well. Thus, marked "from crown to sole" with a ghastly white scar (white being the very color of God), his artificial leg steadied by a peg which fits into a hole bored into a plank, he is introduced in person as he meets his crew:

His bone leg steadied in that hole; one arm elevated, and holding by a shroud; Captain Ahab stood erect, looking straight out beyond the ship's ever-pitching prow. There was an infinity of firmest fortitude, a determinate, insurrenderable wilfullness, in the fixed and fearless, forward dedication of that glance (p. 110).

And so, a symbol at once of God's power and of his own, "Ahab stood before them with a crucifixion in his face; in all the nameless regal overbearing dignity of some mighty woe" (p. 111).

He is a man totally committed to a voyage from which there can be no return, and he is leaving behind his very humanity in the persons of his young wife and child, whose presence and comfort he must reject for his pursuit of the white whale. His alleged lack of compassion or even concern for his family has been cited as "evidence" of his egomaniacal madness, as has the fact that he does not hesitate to sacrifice his crew. To argue like this, however, is to argue on plot level, for the epic battle in which Ahab is about to engage demands such sacrifices from him, as it does from any tragic hero. His very resolution, furthermore, is born from the unbearable knowledge of needlessly inflicted universal suffering for which no one but God himself is to blame (as his commentary on the subsequent fate of the poor little Black boy, Pip, serves well to illustrate). Ahab, like Faustus, is the spokesman for Mankind

(though by no means Everyman), and his crew consists of a very special group of men, each representative of a different corner of the world and each with a very special--if not always consciously perceived--mission:

They were nearly all islanders in the Pequod, Isolatoos too, I call such, not acknowledging the common continent of men, but each Isolato living in a separate continent of his own. Yet now, federated along one keel, what a set these Isolatoos were! An Anarchasis Cloatz deputation from all the isles of the sea, and all the ends of the earth, accompanying old Ahab in the Pequod to lay the world's grievances before that bar from which not very many of them ever come back (p. 108).

But, as in Dr. Faustus, any such undertaking by Man, in a system which neither admits to error nor acknowledges complaint, is anarchy; and thus outright defiance is the only possible way in which Man can air (if not avenge) "the world's grievances."

In Melville's work as well as in Marlowe's, however, the idea of Man's rebellion against heavenly power is given dramatic expression (even as, on plot level, "crazy" Ahab, like Faustus, needs to give concrete evidence of his devilish ways). Like Marlowe, Melville therefore devises two scenes in which the progressive "madness" of his hero compels him to invert sacred Christian rituals, committing himself and his crew (for Ahab, unlike Faustus, cannot act alone in this matter) to the devil by abjuring the scriptures. Faustus' initial renunciation of God comes when he conjures the powers of Hell by abjuring "the scriptures and his saviour Christ" (Sc.iii, 50), an act which brings about Mephostophilis' first appearance. He subsequently signs a pact with the devil (Lucifer)

in which he promises his immortal soul to him in return for twenty-four years of living in all the luxury and--perhaps more important to Faustus--with all the knowledge he can obtain through this contract.

But although Faustus is completely determined to enter the pact, at the moment at which he needs to sign it with his own blood it congeals, and he is unable to write his name. Faustus is perplexed at this phenomenon:

What might the staying of my blood portend?
Is it unwilling I should write this bill?
Why streams it not, that I may write afresh?
'Faustus gives to thee his soul': O, there it stay'd.
Why shouldst thou not? is not thy soul thine own?
(Sc.iv, 64-69)

It is not until Mephostophilis has fetched some fire to liquify the blood again, that Faustus can ratify his pact with Lucifer. Setting his will against his Creator is so horrible an act that his own body momentarily seems to refuse the command of his mind. Yet he does manage to do it, and in another blasphemous inversion of the last words of Christ on the Cross he exclaims: "Consummatum est: the bill is ended" (Sc.v. 74).

In Moby Dick, Ahab's unholy ritual has all the aspects of an inverted communion. His harpooners are his "sweet cardinals," and the goblets used are "murderous chalices" (p. 146). Like Faustus, Ahab's resolve is absolute, his mind even more relentlessly bent on accomplishing the abominable deed because he must not only accomplish it for himself but also impose it upon his crew. Commanding his three mates to cross their lances (thus forming a cross) he steps forward, demanding: "Let me touch the axis." But as he proceeds

to grasp the "radiating lances at their centre," his body during this crucial gesture momentarily revolts and Ahab "suddenly and nervously twitched them" (p. 146). Like Faustus', however, Ahab's will overrules this involuntary physical malfunction. Completely dominating the minds of his crew, which as one body submits to the hypnotic volition of its captain, the ceremony continues. "Commend the murderous chalices!" orders Ahab: "Bestow them ye who are now made parties to this indissoluble league." And then he turns to his first Mate, Starbuck (who throughout the story seems to act as a spokesman for God: one of Ahab's "angels," as it were), and with triumphant laughter shouts: "Ha, Starbuck, but the deed is done!" (p. 146).

But neither Faustus nor Ahab seems able to maintain this derisive attitude once the deed is done. Faustus, immediately after his blasphemous exclamation, makes a terrifying discovery:

But what is this inscription on mine arm?
'Homo fuge! Whither should I fly?
 If unto God, he'll throw me down to hell.--
 My senses are deceiv'd, here's nothing writ.--
 O yes, I see it plain; even here is writ,
Homo fuge! Yet shall not Faustus fly (Sc.v. 76-81).

The passage is typical of Faustus' state of mind and of his condition, especially in view of the fact that the word fly, here, can obviously be used in both of its meanings. To fly, thus means to soar up and be raised above the normal confines of humanity (but as we know, even from the Prologue, God does not allow that); and it means to flee (but we know that, what refuge God does offer, he offers only

on his terms and in his own manner). Faustus will forever be compelled to agonize over the consequences of his actions, and he must forever come to the same conclusion: he can neither fly nor flee to God, for to do one is forbidden, to do the other is to become untrue to himself.

Ahab, who has retired to his cabin immediately after the scene on deck, is equally troubled. Beholding the beauty of a sunset, he is overcome with a sense of burden and loss:

The diver sun--slow dived from noon,--goes down;
my soul mounts up! she wearies with her endless hill.
Is, then, the crown too heavy that I wear?
this iron crown of Lombardy. Yet is it bright
with many a gem. . . . 'Tis iron--that I know--
not gold. 'Tis split, too,--that I feel (p. 147).

His reflections are uttered in a soliloquy, preceded by stage directions, and are hauntingly reminiscent of Marlovian language. (It is also interesting to note, here, that one of Melville's markings in his edition of Marlowe's works is of the passage in which Edward, about to lose his crown, beholds it as a symbol of his burden and troubles as well as of its distinction and beauty.) But, like Faustus, Ahab must steel himself against the tender emotions which, if he lets them prevail, will undermine his will and his resolution. Thus, abruptly ending his reflections, he reminds himself: "No more. This lovely light, it lights not me; all loveliness is anguish to me, since I can n'er enjoy. . . . damned in the midst of Paradise!" and moving away from the window with a wave of his hand, he grows strong and determined again: "What I've dared, I've willed; and what I've willed I'll do!" (p. 147).

Ahab's attitudes and the progression of his thought are exactly like Faustus', who, in yet another moment of weakness, declares: "When I behold the heavens, then I repent" (Sc.vi. 1), but only moments later reveals that the thought of his submission to God's wrath is more unbearable to him than the consequences of his steadfast defiance:

My heart is harden'd, I cannot repent.
 Scarce can I name salvation, faith or heaven,
 But fearful echoes thunder in mine ears,
 'Faustus, thou art damn'd!' Then guns and knives,
 Swords, poison, halters, and envenom'd steel
 Are laid before me to dispatch myself;
 And long ere this I should have done the deed
 Had not sweet pleasure conquer'd deep despair.
 Have not I made blind Homer sing to me
 Of Alexander's love and Oenon's death?
 And hath not he, that built the walls of Thebes
 With ravishing sound of his melodious harp,
 Made music with my Mephostophilis?
 Why should I die, then, or basely despair?
 I am resolv'd Faustus shall not repent.--
 (Sc.vi. 18-32)

His thoughts of repentance, thus, are dispelled by the pleasures he has been experiencing--and which, incidentally, are aesthetic in nature, not vulgar and low. Marlowe's inversion of values, moreover, is very noticeable here, for it is God (and Heaven) which is the ultimate deadly threat and Hell which is the place where his soul would inevitably feel "at home," in company with the great men of antiquity--and, of course, with his Mephostophilis.

Ahab, too, cannot see God other than as a tyrant whose "right worship is defiance" (p. 416). For God is neither loving nor appreciative nor even deserving of love: "to neither love nor reverence wilt thou be kind; and e'en for hate thou canst but kill; and all

are killed" (p. 417). Ahab would pay tribute to God were it not for his indifferent cruelty and injustice:

Come in thy lowest form of love, and I will kneel
and kiss thee; but at thy highest, come as mere super-
natural power; and though thou launchest navies of
full-freighted worlds, there's that in here that still
remains indifferent. Oh, thou clear spirit, of thy
fire thou madest me, and like a true child of fire,
I breathe it back to thee (p. 417).

The outcome of such deliberations for Ahab as well as for Faustus seems always determined by their notion that God is unloving and uncompassionate. Faustus, in two lines expresses this dilemma:

Ay and Faustus will turn to God again.
To God? He loves thee not;
(Sc.v. 9-10)

and he therefore returns inevitably to his original position:

Now Faustus, must
Thou needs be damn'd and canst thou not be sav'd
What boots it then to think of God and heaven.
(Sc.v. 1-3)

Later, realizing even more acutely that he must cease casting his eyes upward, he promises Lucifer "never to look to heaven" (Sc.vi. 98).

Ahab, in this instance also under the watchful eye of his "bad angel," Fedallah (who, by some members of the crew is considered to be the devil himself, with whom "old Ahab" has a pact), gives rather unique expression to his determination no more to look heavenward. Angrily, destroying his quadrant, he rails:

Curse thee, thou vain toy; and cursed be all the things
that cast man's eyes aloft to that heaven, whose live
vividness but scorches him. . . . Level by nature
to this earth's horizon are the glances of man's eyes;
not shot from the crown of his head, as if God had
meant him to gaze on his firmament. Curse thee, thou
quadrant! . . . no longer will I guide my earthly
way by thee! (p. 412)

In Melville's secret language this is another of Ahab's assertions of independence. He will refuse to be guided by the laws of Heaven and henceforth chart his course without the "unnatural" tendency to cast his eyes aloft for assistance.

Ahab is, of course, subject to the constant influence of Starbuck on one hand and Fedallah on the other. As Faustus, between his good and bad angel, Ahab stands between these two men. Starbuck, the exemplary Christian, who always speaks "in God's name," warns constantly: "God, God is against thee, old man; forebear!" (p. 418) and pleads with him to change his course, to turn back and "make fair wind of it homewards" (p. 418). But there is also the dark, mysterious and ominous presence of Fedallah, the Parsee, who urges Ahab onward and who prophesies: "Though it come to the last, I shall still go before thee thy pilot" (p. 410). Starbuck and Fedallah, though well-drawn characters on the superficial level of the plot, are used by Melville in the same manner as the two angels are used by Marlowe. They are externalized projections of Ahab's own self--of the duality in his nature--and as such they represent and dramatize the psychological and spiritual conflict within him. But, even more interesting, they are like Faustus' angels in that they are actually the opposite of what they seem--in that their covert function is contrary to their overt one. Thus it is Starbuck, the "good angel," who tries to seduce Ahab to change his course and to turn back: "Away with me! Let us fly . . . let us home!" (p. 444). But it is also Starbuck who threatens and at one point comes very

near killing Ahab in his sleep. And, it is Fedallah, on the other hand, who supports and strengthens Ahab's resolve, who urges him to go forward (steer a "steady course") and who is recognized by Ahab as his "pilot."

Yet, it would be wrong to suggest that Ahab and Faustus are simply seduced by the dark powers which seek to draw them into their realm--that, again, would be to see them as characters in morality plays. For, like Faustus, Ahab sets his own will against the powers of Heaven and of Hell, using or defying them according to his own plan and purpose and insisting (as Melville had written) "upon treating with all Powers upon an equal basis," even if ultimately he cannot force them into submission. Of their relative freedom--of the options available to them in their condition--both are well aware. Faustus, like Ahab, knows the consequences of his rebellion against God: he will be damned and lose his immortal soul. But he also knows that this will happen only if he so chooses, because as long as he is alive he can repent and thus be saved:

Good Ang. Faustus repent; yet God will pity thee.
 Bad Ang. Thou art a spirit; God cannot pity thee.
 Fau. Who buzzeth in mine ears I am a spirit?
 Be I a devil, yet God may pity me;
 Yea, God will pity me if I repent.
 (Sc.vi. 12-16)

The problem is that Faustus has hardened himself against this God, who loves neither him nor the human race, to the point where repentance has become a psychological impossibility, not a theological one.

And so it is with Ahab. Continually reminded by Starbuck that he can be saved if only he chooses so, yet he will not grant God ultimate power over his soul. He is as aware as Faustus of the dreadful consequences of his attitude and of the deed he is about to commit, but his very being demands recognition as a power to be dealt with:

No fearless fool now fronts thee. I own thy speechless, placeless power; but to the last gasp of my earthquake life will dispute its unconditional, unintegral mastery in me. In the midst of the personified impersonal; a personality stands here. Though but a point at best; whencesoe'er I came; wheresoe'er I go; yet while I earthly live, the queenly personality lives in me and feels her royal rights (p. 417).

Against this "speechless, placeless power," then, which yet is manifest in the hated white whale, Ahab will invoke whatever powers he can; for if God can outrage Ahab, then Ahab can outrage God.

"Ego non baptizo te in nomine patris, sed in nomine diaboli!" (p. 404), he shouts defiantly as he uses some of the blood of his three pagan harpooners to "baptize" the weapons with which he will attempt to kill Moby Dick.

If there were any questions about the true meaning of Moby Dick, Melville's remark to Hawthorne regarding this ritual would be sufficient to dispel them. Ahab's words, in this scene, are the "secret motto" of Moby Dick, Melville confided, and of course they constitute a blasphemous inversion of one of the most sacred of Christian rituals. But, again, one must remember that the ultimate purpose of Ahab, like that of Faustus, is not merely to identify

himself with the powers of Hell (even if Hell, in the inverse world of Dr. Faustus and Moby Dick, were more acceptable to their heroes than Heaven). Rather it is that, as Ishmael explains in describing Ahab's "unappeasedly steadfast" determination,

his own supreme purpose . . . by its own sheer inveteracy of will forced itself against gods and devils into a kind of self-assumed, independent being of its own. Nay, could grimly live and burn, while the common vitality to which it was conjoined fled horror-stricken from the unbidden and unfathered birth (p. 175).

However complex the causes and reasons for such a state of being: it is unalterable and ultimately inexplicable. Faustus, in trying to explain his condition, exclaims:

. . . Ah my God, I would weep, but the devil draws my tears. Gush forth blood, instead of tears, yea, life and soul! O, he stays my tongue! I would lift up my hands, but see, they hold them, they hold them.

All: Who, Faustus?

Fau: Why Lucifer and Mephostophilis.
(Sc.xix. 56-61)

But whatever reasons Faustus cites for not repenting: he cannot do it; and however many reasons scholars might cite for this inability: in effect he will not do it. His suffering is unquestionable because it is worse than mere physical pain, and compared to it not even the pains of Hell may be as terrible; the concept of Hell, as a matter of fact, takes on new dimensions through Mephostophilis' explanation (and he, after all, ought to know):

Fau: Where are you damn'd
Meph: In hell.

Fau: How comes it then that thou art out of hell?
Meph: Why, this is hell, nor am I out of it.
(Sc.iii. 76-79)

Hell, then, for Faustus, too, is his earthly existence, and for his limitations, frustrations, failures and despair God is to blame--for if che sarà, sarà is the ultimate law of God, then he himself is the direct cause of everything, including Man's sinning and consequently his suffering. The notion that Man's existence on earth is Hell is further explained by Mephostophilis:

Hell hath no limits, nor is circumscrib'd
In one self place, but where we are is hell,
And where hell is, there must we ever be;
(Sc.v. 22-24)

and it is interesting indeed that of only two markings on Melville's copy of Dr. Faustus, one, a checkmark, is placed next to these lines. If the definition of Hell, therefore (for Marlowe as well as for Melville), is ultimately not a place but the human condition per se, then this notion is by implication the ultimate indictment of God. Again Marlowe's thought seems perfectly consistent with Melville's, for in Ahab's last great speech before he starts his final attack on Moby Dick he appears to expand on that very notion:

What is it, what nameless, hidden, inscrutable, unearthly thing is it; what cozening, hidden lord and master, and cruel remorseless emperor commands me; that against all natural lovings and longings, I so keep pushing and crowding, and jamming myself . . . recklessly making myself ready to do what in my own proper, natural heart I durst not so much as dare? Is Ahab, Ahab? Is it I, God, or who, that lifts this arm? But if the great sun move not of himself; but is as an errand-boy in heaven; nor one single star can resolve but by some invisible power; how then can this one small heart beat; this one small brain think thoughts; unless

God does that living, and not I? By heaven, man,
 we are turned round and round in this world, like
 yonder windlass, and Fate is the handspike. And all
 the time, lo! that smiling sky and this unsounded
 sea! (pp. 444-445)

What Ahab implies, here, is even more sinister than what he openly suggests. For if God himself has caused Ahab to strike out against him, then he is indeed a "cozening," a slyly and treacherously deceptive tyrant. Marlowe, with a little more caution, expresses the same idea--for instance, as he has the Pope exclaim, when he ascends his throne by stepping onto the crouching Bruno:

Thus as the gods creep on with feet of wool
 Long ere with iron hands they punish men,
 So shall our sleeping vengeance now arise
 And smite with death thy hated enterprise.
 (Sc.viii. 99-102)

The image of a deceptive, malicious God is the same, even if Marlowe puts the words--more safely--into the mouth of a Pope and refers somewhat obliquely to "the gods." The suggestion that Man is actually tricked into disobedience and rebellion is, after all, repeatedly evident in Marlowe's works and hinted at within the first few lines of the Prologue to Dr. Faustus, where we are introduced to the somewhat strange notion of a heavenly "conspiracy." By comparison to such a God, Man is almost inevitably (if somewhat inexplicably) morally superior in his "natural lovings and longings." As Ahab bitterly reflects on little Pip's cruel fate, he leaves no doubt about this:

Lo you believers in God's all goodness,
 and in Man's all ill, lo you! see

the omniscient Gods oblivious of suffering Man; and Man, though idiotic and knowing not what he does, yet full of sweet things of love and gratitude (p. 428).

Pip, of course, has become a victim of God's "cruel remorseless" obliviousness to Man's suffering--as all of Mankind must. That Man is powerless to change his fate is clear to Ahab, as it is to Faustus. Ahab probably does not expect to win his battle against Moby Dick, nor does Faustus expect to triumph over Heaven and Hell. And as Ahab feels "turned round and round . . . like yonder windlass," in this last of his quiet reflections before the great struggle commences, his words, in fact, seem to echo those in Mortimer's last speech (in Edward II), which Melville had marked in his copy:

Base fortune, now I see, that in thy wheel
There is a point, to which when men aspire,
They tumble headlong down: that point I touch'd
And, seeing there was no place to mount up higher,
Why should I grieve at my declining fall?
(Sc.vi. 59-63)

The familiar Renaissance concept of the wheel of fortune is obviously transposed by Melville into an almost identical yet quite original image: that of a windlass on a sailing ship. The circumstances, furthermore, are much alike. Mortimer, like Ahab, recognizes the inherent futility of his efforts and aspirations and the "cozening" treachery of "fate"; and, like Ahab, he shows neither remorse nor repentance and "scorns the world" (65), or rather the fate which has betrayed him.

Although, as stated earlier, Moby Dick and Dr. Faustus are most alike in general structure and delineation of their heroes, it should be fairly obvious to anyone familiar with Marlowe's major dramas that Melville had also read at least Tamburlaine and Edward II before he wrote Moby Dick. For aside from the fact that in his most important moments Ahab actually sounds like Faustus or Tamburlaine (even in his occasional use of alliterative language), there are small but important clues which testify to Melville's familiarity with Marlowe. In Ahab's final speech before the chase, for instance, he points to a seafowl and addresses Starbuck:

Look! see yon Albicore! who put it into him
to chase and fang that flying-fish?
Where do murderers go, man! Who's to
doom, when the judge himself is dragged
to the bar? (p. 445)

This bar, one needs to remember, is the one before which Mankind, represented by the crew of the Pequod, was to lay its grievances. But the judge himself turns out to be the murderer, and the flying fish--Man caught between the hostile elements of Heaven and earth--finds no refuge anywhere, for all around him is death. The passage can be compared to one in Marlowe's Edward II, where Edward asks Lancaster, one of his deadly enemies, about the motto on his shield and gets this reply:

My lord, mine's more obscure than Mortimer's.
Pliny reports there is a flying fish
Which all the other fishes deadly hate,
And therefore, being pursued, it takes the air:
No sooner is it up, but there's a fowl
That seizeth it; this fish my lord, I bear,
The motto this: Undique mors est.

(II.i. 22-28)

Lancaster uses the flying fish imagery on one level to hint to the king that there is a deadly conspiracy against Gaveston, his minion; but ultimately the king himself is surrounded by death on all sides, and the motto "Undique mors est" eventually takes on such universal meaning that it could be said to be the motto of the play--of all of Marlowe's plays, for that matter. Melville not only uses the same image as Marlowe does but, more importantly, he uses it in the same manner--in its broadest, most universal implications and as a clue to the central interpretation of his work. The seemingly incidental observation concerning the activity of a seafoal, therefore, (which Melville, the sailor, correctly identifies as an Albicore) is virtually Ahab's last utterance before he becomes involved in his relentless three-day battle with Moby Dick, and his words ironically recall not only the original quest of the "Isolatoos" of the Pequod, but also the beginning of the book, where Ishmael decides to take to the sea in order to escape the constant spectacle of death--the grim ritual of universal murder.

Having "tried" God, as it were, and found him guilty of the most sinister and malicious conspiracy against Man, even such super-human figures as Ahab and Faustus can do little more than defy him. The ultimate consequences of their defiance are (to stress this once more) clear to them from the beginning, and neither Ahab nor Faustus is ever really deluded about the inevitable result of his rebellion. Unlike Tamburlaine, therefore, they realize that they can never pose a threat to God's power over the world at large,

but they are aware that to some degree, however small, they can diminish this power by their insubordination. Thus, while Melville marked Tamburlaine's proud statement,

I hold the Fates bound fast in iron chains
And with my hand turn fortune's wheel about,
(I.ii. 74-75)

he may have done so aware of the irony of such delusion (especially by comparison to Mortimer's lines and to his own, echoing them) but also with a kind of proud acknowledgment of the fact that Man can, after all, to some extent determine his own fate by exercising his own will. In this sense Melville may have seen yet another "darker" meaning in Tamburlaine's assertion:

And sooner shall the sun fall from his sphere,
Than Tamburlaine be slain or overcome.
(pp. 76-77).

The boundless pride of Marlowe's heroes is, of course, another characteristic of Ahab, and in this particular aspect he resembles Tamburlaine more than he does Faustus. This is not to say that Faustus is less proud than Tamburlaine and Ahab, but the latter are primarily men of action, used to unquestioning obedience within their own realms over which they preside with all the regal, overbearing haughtiness of their god-like nature. Their manner, upon the slightest provocation, reveals how they conceive themselves not only in regard to the men around them but also in regard to the universe at large. "There is one God that is Lord over the earth, and one captain that is lord over the Pequod" (p. 394), Ahab icily warns Starbuck while pointing a rifle at his first mate who

had dropped a slight hint of criticism. Tamburlaine is equally imperious: "I speak it, and my words are oracles!" (III.iii, 103). At times, furthermore, both men tend to see themselves not so much as opposing, but indeed as serving God. Tamburlaine calls himself "the scourge of the immortal God" (II.iv. 80), and Ahab, again at odds with Starbuck, who implores him to cease chasing Moby Dick, angrily retorts: "Fool! I am the Fates' lieutenant; I act under orders. Look thou, underling! that thou obeyest mine" (p. 459).

But the nature of this kind of "obedience" to the will of God has already been discussed, at least in regard to Ahab and Faustus, and ultimately neither Marlowe's nor Melville's heroes are intimidated by the powers aloft. Starbuck, when he observes that Ahab "would be a democrat to all above; look how he lords it over all below" (p. 148), seems to describe each one of Marlowe's heroes as well. To be "a democrat," in this context, means to be on equal terms with the higher powers, and it is a notion shared especially by Tamburlaine, who, outraged over his wife's death, wants to assault Heaven itself:

Raise cavalieros higher than the clouds,
And with the cannon break the frame of heaven,
Batter the shining palace of the sun
And shiver all the starry firmament. . . .
(III.II.iv. 103-106)

This outbreak of anger is in attitude and use of imagery parallel to Ahab's, when he speaks of Moby Dick:

That inscrutable thing is chiefly what I hate; and
be the white whale agent or be the white whale principal,
I will wreak that hate upon him. Talk not of blasphemy,
man; I'd strike the sun if it insulted me (p. 144).

A large measure of this rage against divine power (in all of the characters discussed in this study) stems from the fact that God torments not only the soul but also the body of his creatures, whom he then ultimately kills. Ahab, who is physically maimed and scarred, will never forgive Moby Dick for having mutilated him and even to his last moment will retaliate by furiously attacking the whale with his lance: "Toward thee I roll, thou all-destroying, but unconquering whale; to the last I grapple with thee; from hell's heart I stab at thee" (p. 468). His end, in this respect, is much like Tamburlaine's, whose awareness of his impending death causes him to demand:

What daring God torments my body thus
And seeks to conquer mighty Tamburlaine?
(V.iii. 42-43)

He then calls on his men:

Techelles and the rest, come take your swords
And threaten him whose hand afflicts my soul;
Come let us march against the powers of heaven
And set black streamers in the firmament
To signify the slaughter of the gods--
(V.iii. 46-50)

but the irony of his physical condition is immediately made apparent, for he is forced to add:

Ah friends, what shall I do? I cannot stand.
Come, carry me to war against the gods.
(pp. 51-52)

Ahab is similarly hampered at the very end of his life--not by his will but by his physical infirmity--for during the second day of the chase his artificial leg of whale bone is snapped off,

even as his healthy limb had previously been torn off by Moby Dick. Frustrated and furious he mutters to Starbuck: "Accursed fate! that the unconquerable captain in the soul should have such a craven mate!" Starbuck, taking this as criticism, is concerned about this remark but is reassured by Ahab: "My body, man, not thee" (p. 458). This mortal dependence on the physical aspects of their being is a constant source of irritation to Marlowe's as well as to Melville's heroes. Ahab, during an earlier occurrence of problems with his whale bone leg, had startled the attending carpenter with an outbreak of frustrated impatience:

Oh, Life! Here I am proud as a Greek god, and yet standing debtor to this blockhead for a bone to stand on! Cursed be that mortal inter-indebtedness which will not do away with ledgers. I would be free as air. . . . By heavens! I'll get a crucible, and into it, and dissolve myself down to one small, compendious vertebra (pp. 391-392).

Ahab's wish to escape his body is, like Tamburlaine's, a wish to be unencumbered by the demands of bodily existence and to be able to transcend his mortal state. It is therefore not unlike Faustus' exasperation when, after having listed all his accomplishments, he concludes: "Yet art thou still but Faustus, and a man" (Sc.i. 23). It is, on the other hand, not unlike the passage in his last great soliloquy, where in mortal fear of the expected punishment he calls for his body to "turn to air" (Sc.xix. 183). Finally, Ahab's wish for extinction evokes the fate of Barabas, yet another of Marlowe's heroes, whose problems come to a sudden "dissolution" in a crucible (or at least in a cauldron), and although Barabas

is of a somewhat different cast than Ahab, Faustus and Tamburlaine, Melville was well enough familiar with him to have had him in mind when he wrote the little scene above.

Before turning to a different topic it should be noted that, in a more general manner than Dr. Faustus, Tamburlaine certainly must have had a profound influence on Melville. Ahab obviously owes much to Tamburlaine in his use of cosmic metaphor which appropriately reflects the grand, "heaven-insulting purpose" (p. 148) of his scheme. The recurring image of the sun and other heavenly constellations, for instance, is also evident in Dr. Faustus, and for that matter in Edward II, but in Tamburlaine it is more noticeably comparable to Moby Dick. Marlowe's "high-flying" language lends itself well to Melville's work, and this rhetorical "apotheosis," as it were, is one of the most ingenious aspects of the work; for, even rendered to prose, it enables Melville to integrate the more superficial and ordinary elements in the story with his higher poetic perception, an accomplishment which constitutes his ultimate artistry. As a final example of such synthesis, one may consider a passage in Chapter LVII, on the various images of whales and their pursuit of them which, Ishmael insists, cannot escape the consciousness of any human being:

Nor, when expandingly lifted by your subject
can you fail to trace out great whales in the starry
heavens, and boats in pursuit of them; as when long
filled with thoughts of war the Eastern nations saw
armies locked in battle among the clouds. Thus at
the North have I chased Leviathan round and round
the Pole with the revolutions of the bright points
that first defined him to me. And beneath the effulgent

Antarctic skies I have boarded the Argo-Navis, and
 joined the chase against the starry Cetus far beyond
 the utmost stretch of Hydrous and the Flying Fish.

With a frigate's anchors for my bridle-bitts
 and fasces of harpoons for spurs, would I could mount
 that whale and leap the topmost skies, to see whether
 the fabled heavens with all their countless tents
 really lie encamped beyond my mortal sight!

(p. 233)

But, while the spirit of Marlowe often seems to inform Melville's language and the general conception of his work, there is no apparent evidence that Melville borrowed unduly from his Elizabethan predecessor. Even where there are more direct clues to his familiarity with Marlowe, for instance, he always maintains his artistic integrity in that he independently and originally creates his own world and his own reality. In a very short chapter on Fedallah, for instance, (who is part "bad" angel and part Mephostophilis) Ishmael prefaces a comparison of Ahab with Tamburlaine ("Tamerlane") with the cryptic dialogue of two of Ahab's mates. One makes the point that the captain's leg, after all, had been ripped off well below the knee; the other replies: "I don't know that . . . I never saw him kneel" (p. 197). Immediately following this remark, is a consideration of whaling in regard to the captain's physical safety (and it must be remembered that, in a chapter as ambiguous as this particular one, the term whaling always stands for warring against God):

Among whale-wise people it has often been argued whether, considering the paramount importance of his life to the success of the voyage, it is right for a whaling captain to jeopardize that life in the active perils of the chase. So Tamerlane's soldiers often argued with tears in their eyes, whether that invaluable life of his ought to be carried into the thickest of the fight (p. 197).

The chapter, in essence, concludes that Ahab actually makes careful and calculated preparations for his daring assaults, his central purpose always being the confrontation of Moby Dick and his most reliable crew member in the boat always Fedallah, who might--for all that the rest of the crew knows about him--be "Beelzebub himself" (p. 198).

There is yet another important link between Marlowe's and Melville's works which, though vast in its ramifications, can perhaps best be approached by pointing to their respective use of a single phrase. It has already been established that Dr. Faustus contains in its Prologue a reference to a heavenly conspiracy against the hero. At the end of the play, in fact, Faustus realizes that neither Heaven nor earth will provide refuge for him: "Earth gape! O, no, it will not harbour me" (Sc. xix. 156). The same notion is expressed by Edward II, who, isolated and desperate, concludes that "heaven and earth conspire to make me miserable" (V.i. 96-97). This is an important attitude of all of Marlowe's tragic characters and one which they share with Melville's heroes. If one views Edward II and Faustus as Marlowe's two main tragic characters, then they can in this respect again be directly compared to Ahab and Pierre (Melville's major tragic heroes) against whom there is exactly such a conspiracy. Pierre realizes this fact more and more clearly as he nears his death, for not only does God want his destruction but the whole world is "banded against" him; and Ahab is constantly confronted with a hostile world--an earth which, even in its beauty

and harmony, seems but to mock his suffering. It is not surprising, therefore, that in Moby Dick Melville uses Marlowe's exact term to establish the notion that "heaven and earth conspire" (p. 97) against the individual who has chosen to assert his autonomy.

The short chapter on Bulkington, in which this reference occurs, has long been considered a kind of epitaph to the prototype of the Melvillian hero. For although "deep memories yield no epitaph," nevertheless, "This six-inch chapter is the stoneless grave of Bulkington," and within these few lines Melville seems to eulogize himself as well as his heroes. The abortive character of Bulkington, of whom we see only two glimpses in Moby Dick, yet crystallizes the attitudes and struggles of the individual who pitches himself against the norms of society and of the universe. Though under normal conditions providing him with "safety, comfort, hearthstone, supper, warm blankets, friends, all that's kind to our mortalities," the land, in a gale (and we must remember what Father Mapple said about God's gales), becomes the sailor's worst enemy which he must "fly." He must therefore crowd "all sail off shore," and in so doing fight "'gainst the very winds that fain would blow [the ship] homeward." If this is not clear enough, Melville adds:

Know ye now, Bulkington? Glimpses do ye see of that mortally intolerable truth; that all deep earnest thinking is but the intrepid effort of the soul to keep the open independence of her sea; while the wildest winds of heaven and earth conspire to cast her on the treacherous, slavish shore?

But as in landlessness alone resides the highest truth, shoreless indefinite, as God--so better is it to perish in that howling infinite, than be ingloriously dashed upon the lee, even if that were safety! For

worm-like, then, oh! who would craven crawl to land!
 Terrors of the terrible! is all this agony so vain?
 Take heart, take heart, O Bulkington! Bear thee grimly,
 demigod! Up from the spray of thy ocean-perishing--straight
 up, leaps thy apotheosis! (pp. 97-98).

Bulkington's fate of course foreshadows Ahab's and serves to put it into proper perspective. For Ahab will not "craven crawl to land" (nor, figuratively speaking, will Pierre, nor Faustus, nor Edward). The universal conspiracy against Man, though always deadly, becomes tragic only if he refuses to yield to its threats.

The passage is remarkable not only in that it contains verbal echoes of Marlowe but in that it gives an important clue to the interpretation of all of Marlowe's and Melville's tragedies. For while it is easy to compare Ahab to Faustus and possible to compare Pierre to Edward II, it is only in stepping back from the particular characters and their situations that one can see the general similarities between all of them. Thus while at first it may seem baffling that within a relatively short span of time Marlowe could create heroes as radically different as Faustus and Edward, and that Melville could create a character like Pierre to succeed Ahab, it can be seen that all of them are essentially alike in that they invoke a universal conspiracy against themselves by being compelled to be true to their own nature even if, as Father Mapple has obliquely suggested, "to be false were salvation" (p. 50). In this context it is irrelevant that Faustus and Edward II have practically no specific character traits in common--anymore than have Ahab and Pierre. What they do have in common is the fact that they are

unalterably committed to be themselves. Such men may, like Faustus, primarily want power, knowledge and immortality or, like Ahab, absolute justice and therefore vengeance on the powers which torment and defeat Man. Or they may, like Edward and Pierre, want the right to live according to the dictates of their own nature--their own moral codes--even if it clashes headlong with that of an unloving, unsympathetic God and His own hypocritical world. And always such heroes will be in conflict not only with God and the world but, no less important, with their own dual nature which on one hand bids them to conform and on the other compels them to defy.

The dramatic tension in Marlowe's and Melville's tragedies, therefore, is inevitably dependent on the possibility that the protagonist may ultimately repent. In Dr. Faustus this possibility provides practically all of the real dramatic conflict, and in Moby Dick Ahab is constantly subject to feelings of loss and despair which are conducive to a possible change of mind. It is interesting also that Pierre is very much like Moby Dick (and therefore like Dr. Faustus) in that its hero is constantly torn between his good and bad angel (Lucy and Isabel) and that, just as in Moby Dick, there is a gradual inversion of all values, including, of course, "goodness" and "evil." It is even more interesting that Pierre is thematically similar to Edward II in that all of the hero's problems are caused by his adherence to an unusual and conventionally immoral relationship--essentially an incestuous attachment to his half-sister Isabel. For Pierre, however, Isabel is part of his own self--a

part he is neither willing nor able to renounce. Such, of course, is the state of mind of Edward, who, his faults and weaknesses notwithstanding, is true to his innermost nature which compels him to love Gaveston. That his feelings are honest and deep cannot be denied, for upon being forced to part from Gaveston and being asked by him: "Is all my hope turn'd to this hell of grief?" (I.iv. 116) Edward replies:

Rend not my heart with thy too-piercing words:
Thou from this land, I from myself am banish'd.
(117-118)

This state of being "banished" from themselves is the intolerable condition of Marlowe's and Melville's heroes in a society--a universe--which exerts enormous pressure on them to confirm and brutal punishment to chastize nonconformance. That all of Marlowe's and Melville's heroes are ultimately victims of this system can of course be argued, but they are so, paradoxically, only to the extent to which they admit defeat; for to diminish the power of God is, in effect, to deny him the satisfaction of accepting his reign of terror and, in turn (once again!), to be "grateful for punishment" (p. 49). And while Edward may not be very assertive in this respect, Pierre is exactly like Tamburlaine, who, in reply to the charge that he is "Barbarous and bloody" (II.vii. 1), says that he is, after all, no different than God himself:

This thirst of reign and sweetness of a crown,
That caused the eldest son of heavenly Ops
To thrust his doting father from his chair
And place himself in th' empyreal heaven,
Moved me to manage arms against thy state.
What better precedent than mighty Jove?
(II.vii. 12-17)

Pierre, much like Tamburlaine, in his "reckless, sky-assaulting mood," points out that there is divine precedence for his dilemma also, and that, like the "doubly incestuous Enceladus," he is "on one side the grandson of the sky" (p. 347).

Pierre, unlike Tamburlaine, is well aware of his actual condition and, like Faustus, realizes that he has lost the chance to be happy on earth and "perchance" in Heaven. But, like Tamburlaine, he chooses to end his life in open and verbal defiance:

Now 'tis merely hell in both worlds.
Well, be it hell. I will mould a trumpet
of the flames, and, with my breath of
flame, breathe back my defiance.
(502)

The attitude is also like Ahab's; and the idea, as expressed through the imagery, is the same as in Dr. Faustus and in Edward II. There is no refuge on earth or in Heaven, "And where hell is there must we ever be" (F. Sc. V. 124).

Both Edward II and Pierre also relentlessly expose the hypocrisy of society, and it is interesting that in each work the woman closest to the hero (Edward's wife and Pierre's previous bride) is initially portrayed as an innocent victim of the hero's transgressions but ends up as a contributor to his doom--thus acting as a catalyst in the conspiracy against him. (This is quite obvious in Edward II and subtle but no less certain in Pierre). But while Pierre is ostensibly about the hero's dilemma regarding the women in his life, even so these women are not well-drawn, three-dimensional characters in their own right. Instead they appear, like Marlowe's

women, to be little more than "devices" to further the plot or, from another viewpoint, symbols whose function is to reveal and illuminate the psychological processes within the consciousness of the hero.

Of Pierre's many similarities, in language and theme, to Marlowe's works, few have been mentioned here. But since this novel closely followed Moby Dick and virtually marks the end of Melville's intense, highly productive artistic activity, it is important in that its structural similarity to Edward II provides even further evidence of Marlowe's pervading influence on Melville. Pierre, for instance, is a novel built around a tragic domestic situation, even as Edward II, for all its historical background, is essentially a domestic tragedy. Pierre, furthermore, is unlike any of Melville's previous works and (like Edward II, within the perspective of Marlowe's works) lacks not only the cosmic scope, but even the open, far-ranging perspective and vitality of his earlier works. Instead it shows a disturbingly narrow-minded, hostile world, in which most characters are hateful and treacherous. And, again as in Edward II, the scope of the work narrows steadily, literally and symbolically trapping the hero in ever-tightening circles of conspiracies against him until Pierre, like Edward, dies horribly within the stifling confines of a dungeon.

What is most memorable in Pierre, however (which in its critical assessment is still a very controversial work), is doubtless the psychological suffering of its hero, even as in Edward II this

aspect stands out and at times tends to make the play almost unbearably painful. Both Edward and Pierre live and die in a veritable Hell which, of course, could be said to be the result of their own dispositions and consequent actions. But the most consistent feelings evoked by both works are those of pity. Such suffering as Edward and Pierre must experience is neither logical consequence of nor just punishment for the offenses they have committed. They are, above anything else, victims of a cruelty so immense as to obliterate, by contrast, the very notion of "original sin"--in whatever meaning of that term. In this sense, and from that perspective, Edward II is as consistent with all of Marlowe's major works as Pierre is with Melville's.

The most striking similarity between Marlowe's and Melville's major works is, of course, the fact that they tend to write again and again on the same basic theme, the seeming disparity between the separate works arising mainly from the fact that the central subject is viewed from different perspectives. The entirety of each man's creative efforts, therefore, resembles the structure of a great symphonic work in which the major theme is stated, developed, embellished, interwoven with other themes and given dramatic dimensions. And although each movement is a unit unto itself and may vary in tempo, key and mood from the others, there is nevertheless a thematic link--a Leitmotif--which gives dramatic unity to the entire work. In this frame of reference (and not in the order of composition) Moby Dick, like Dr. Faustus, would certainly be the Finale, and

The Confidence-Man, like The Jew of Malta, would be the grimly comic Scherzo. It is surprising, as a matter of fact, that in the midst of the general silence regarding the relationship between Marlowe and Melville, Harry Levin, a Marlowe scholar, has apparently noticed the similarities between these two works. Discussing The Jew of Malta, Levin writes:

When every man looks out for himself alone and looks with suspicion on every other man, the ego is isolated within a vicious circle of mutual distrust. The moral of this drama could be the motto of Melville's Confidence-Man, "No Trust."¹⁴

Thus, while the variance between Dr. Faustus and The Jew of Malta, or between Moby Dick and The Confidence-Man, may seem incongruous at first, it is actually attributable to a logical extension or progression of thought. Tragedy such as Faustus' and Ahab's, or even as Edward's and Pierre's, can be created only once, for in that process it tends to exhaust the reserves and the possibilities in the author as well as of the subject matter. But since neither Marlowe's nor Melville's religious views underwent any essential change, each needed to find different forms for the formulation of his argument for which the premises were basically the same. It is an accepted notion in contemporary literary thought that endlessly prolonged tragedy inevitably becomes senseless and therefore comically absurd, but this notion is hardly a modern discovery. That Marlowe in approximately six years ran the gamut from high

¹⁴The Overreacher, A Study of Christopher Marlowe (Boston: Beacon Press, 1952), p. 78.

tragedy to what we now call "black comedy" is surely a critically demonstrable fact; and that Melville was aware of and impressed by this fact seems evident. We must not forget, after all, that his earliest acquaintance with Marlowe had come through The Jew of Malta, which is by far the heaviest-marked play in his copy of Marlowe's works. There is evidence that he was very receptive to the grim, often brutal irony and humour of the play, and it is likely that, as he grew increasingly bitter and disillusioned, it served as an important source in his conception of The Confidence-Man. By this time Melville's world had shrunk even farther than it has in Pierre. The whaling ship becomes a mere paddle boat; the open sea becomes a landlocked river; God becomes a liar, a swindler: a confidence man. The indictment is somewhat different, the contempt for this state of affairs greater than ever.

Although The Confidence-Man and The Jew of Malta are still relatively neglected and perhaps critically underrated, there is little doubt that in their overall literary importance they will never rival Moby Dick and Dr. Faustus. In concluding this study it is therefore fitting to return to these two works, particularly to their respective closing scenes. But whereas the death of Ahab is decidedly heroic, and--personal judgment as to his moral state notwithstanding--it can hardly be denied that he dies every inch an epic hero, the end of Faustus is still far too often seen as the spectacle of a weak, morally deficient man who has forfeited or missed his chance to gain salvation and who dies a coward, begging

in vain for divine mercy and grace. If this were the case, then Marlowe's work would indeed be flawed and ultimately reduced to yet another morality play. It would also (like Goethe's Faust for instance) be essentially different from Moby Dick, no matter how many general character traits and particular details one might invoke to demonstrate similarities between the respective heroes. The fact remains, however, that Dr. Faustus is consistent in that plot, structure and theme are carried to the inevitable conclusion which has been suggested, or hinted at, throughout the play and which is evident in the words: "I am resolved, Faustus shall not repent--" (Sc. vi. 32). The imperial use of third person, in such instances (a trait shared by Ahab), is on one hand indicative of the character of the hero; on the other it is a way in which the author himself can make a statement--and we need to be aware of the fact that neither Marlowe nor Melville misses any "trick" he can employ in order to convey the truth, though "covertly and by snatches."

The various assertions to the contrary notwithstanding, there is no evidence that Faustus is at any time, up to the very moment of his death, by theological laws unqualified to be saved. Neither his pact with the devil, therefore, nor his union with Helena has any ultimate bearing on this fact, and we must believe that Marlowe was knowledgeable enough on this subject to speak with authority when he has Faustus lecture the Bad Angel that, no matter what he might do, he does not lose the chance to be saved:

Be I a devil, yet may God pity me;
 Yea, God will pity me if I repent.
 (Sc. vi. 15-16)

Faustus is, after all, "but Faustus, and a man" (Sc. i. 23), and he remains what he is (for were he a spirit he would not be subject to death).

Exercising his choice to defy God even in the fact of his impending damnation, however, requires superhuman courage, willpower and endurance. And the final soliloquy, in its awesome beauty itself a testament to the heroic stature of Faustus, is at the same time an implicit indictment of the cruelty and malice of God, who has created Man in His image only to deny him his divine heritage and has apparently willed to increase the degree of his wretchedness by the very degree of his innate excellence. Faustus, like Ahab, suffers all the pains of Hell in retribution for the assertion of his own will; and although he does not die, like Ahab, in the relatively comforting state of turbulent physical action, he dies as relentlessly resolved as does Ahab. For whatever Faustus may blurt out in his anguish, whatever powers he may invoke in his despair, he will not relinquish his soul to God by saying the words which would constitute true repentance. He is in this, like Ahab, Man threatened, tormented, and lost, but he is nevertheless Man indomitable. He has come to realize that his only choice--his ultimate freedom--may be confined to the prerogative to negate (even as Lucifer did) and that this may be the only measure of triumph he can snatch from his inevitable defeat.

It is almost impossible to study Marlowe's and Melville's works without wondering now and then how Marlowe's thought might

have developed had he lived a few more decades and what Melville would have written had he been able to sustain the creative passion which for a few years so utterly obsessed him. The questions are unanswerable, of course. Perhaps both poets, by the very nature of their dispositions and convictions, were to a certain degree self-limiting--perhaps, having probed the ultimate height and depth of Man's condition, as they saw it, there may have been little left for them to say. Marlowe's violent and early death was proclaimed by his enemies as the inevitable manifestation of God's wrath against him and therefore (of course) as an example of God's "justice." But in the Epilogue to Dr. Faustus, the poet, commenting through the Chorus on the fate of the dead hero, seems prophetically and ironically to eulogize himself as well:

Cut is the branch that might have grown full straight
 And burned is Apollo's laurel bough
 That sometime grew within this learned man.
 Faustus is gone: regard his hellish fall,
 Whose fiendful fortune may exhort the wise
 Only to wonder at unlawful things,
 Whose deepness doth entice such forward wits
 To practice more than heavenly power permits.
 (1-8)

Melville lived out a normal lifespan. The fire and the passion of his genius, like Marlowe's, flashed briefly and brilliantly but permanently illuminated the annals of Western literary history. And although Melville's voice was never again to speak "in thunder," it had not been totally silenced. When it did speak, in fact, it did so with the same conviction, if not with the same volume as it had done earlier. Melville's life and death, like Marlowe's,

somehow seem yet another example of the ironical veracity of his lifelong argument. At the time of his death he left, along with the manuscript for Billy Budd, a character sketch entitled "Daniel Orme" (Orme: or me?). The fragmentary work, obviously a symbolic self-portrait, is about an old sailor who, like Ahab, bears a scar which leaves little uncertainty about its nature. He has

a crucifix in indigo and vermillion tattooed on the chest and on the side of the heart. Slanting across the crucifix and paling the pigment there ran a whitish scar, long and thin, such as might ensue from the slash of a cutless imperfectly parried or dodged.¹⁵

Melville's account of Orme's death (which is apparently overlooked by the critics who see him as "reconciled" with God at the end of his life) seems to provide a fitting conclusion for this study, for it is probably exactly what Melville wanted to say to the world upon his departure from it:

One fine Easter Day, following a spell of rheumatic weather, Orme was discovered alone and dead on a height overlooking the seaward sweep of the great haven to whose shore, in his retirement from sea, he had moored. It was an evened terrace, destined for use in war, but in peace neglected and offering a sanctuary for anybody. Mounted on it was an obsolete battery of rusty guns. Against one of these he was found leaning, his legs stretched out before him; his clay pipe broken in twain, the vacant bowl and no spillings from it, attesting that his pipe had been smoked out to the last of its contents. He faced the outlet to the ocean. The eyes were open, still continuing in death the vital glance fixed on the hazy waters and the dim-seen sails coming and going or at anchor near by. What had been his last thoughts? If ought a

¹⁵This and the next quotation are in Billy Budd and Other Prose Pieces, ed. Raymond Weaver, The Complete Works of Herman Melville (London: Constable and Company), XIII (1924), 120, 121-122.

reality lurked in the rumor concerning him, had remorse, had penitence any place in these thoughts? Or was there just nothing of either? . . . Even admitting that there was something dark that he chose to keep to himself, what then? Such reticence may sometimes be more for the sake of others than one's self.

At this point we must leave Daniel Orme (or Melville) beside his now obsolete battery of rusty guns, his eyes even in death still with a determined, "vital glance fixed"--just as Ahab's were when he first met his crew--on the now hazy, wide-open sea.

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VITA

Alisa von Brentano was born near Waldeck, West Germany, on February 26, 1934. She attended elementary schools in Saarbrücken, Stettin (now in East Germany), Berlin and Sigmaringen, and in 1944 entered a private school for classical education in Munich. In 1945 she transferred to a similar school in Stuttgart, and in 1946 she went to Switzerland to continue her education at a private school for girls near Zürich. She received her Abitur in 1952 and subsequently attended the School of Journalism at the University of Heidelberg. In December of 1953 she came to the United States to study English at Northwestern University, but, after being married in 1954, she discontinued her academic career in order to devote herself to her family.

In 1969 she entered The University of Tennessee, Knoxville (having established residence in Knoxville after her divorce). In 1973 she graduated with highest honors, with a major in German and a minor in English. She then transferred to the Department of English, where she held a teaching assistantship and for two years a part-time instructorship. In 1973 she was awarded an NDEA fellowship and subsequently two Alumni Fellowships. She also received the Hodges Award for Excellence in Teaching Freshman English. In June of 1985 she was granted the Ph.D. in English from The University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

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