Chapter V
Shorter Works - I
The works following Pierre, i.e. all the works starting from 1853 with two short stories entitled Cock-a-Doodle-Do and Bartleby and ending with Billy Budd in 1891, show a remarkable change in Melville's approach to Evil. The anger, rebellion and defiance with which his protagonists encountered evil in all his earlier works is replaced by an approach that is marked by submission, acceptance or resignation. Melville's characters in these works, show that they have suffered a lot either at the hands of a cruel world or an equally cruel universe. But unlike Ahab or Pierre they do not strike back in retaliation meaning to destroy the indestructible evil. They face the fact of evil with what Bernstein so aptly terms as 'defiant stoicism'. This is a kind of approach that lies midway between complete submission to and outright rebellion against the forces of Evil.

Another noteworthy change in these works is the character of the protagonists. All the works of Melville up to Pierre have young innocents or seekers stepping out from a world where evil has either been ignored or accepted.

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1 John Bernstein, Pacifism and Rebellion in the Writings of Herman Melville (Princeton: 1964), ch. 8, p. 165.
complacently, into a world where every event or experience reveals that evil pervades both the human and natural worlds and that it has to be confronted with a balanced heart and mind. In the later works of Melville this transition of the hero from innocence to experience is absent. A notable exception is Billy Budd. Barring Marianna in The Piazza the characters of all these works have either crossed their early youth or are elderly people. They are mature and experienced men and women who have undergone a lot of suffering and the works show the various ways in which they have arrived at an adjustment to life. Melville's description of Merrymusk in Cock-a-Doodle-Do symbolizes what he associates old age with.

I concluded within myself that this man had experienced hard times; that he had had many sore rubs in the world; that he was of a solemn disposition; that he was of the mind of Solomon; that he lived calmly, decorously, temperately; and though a very poor man, was, nevertheless, a highly respectable one.²

So often does old age get connected with suffering and mental anguish, as also a sense of uselessness in these

² Cock-a-Doodle-Do, "Selected Writings of Herman Melville" (New York: The Modern Library edition, 1952), pp.136-37. (All references hereafter to the text of Melville's shorter tales, will be to this edition).
works, that one is prompted to examine the events of Melville's life during this period, which might have affected him and led to his preoccupation with this theme. In a single work like I and My Chimney the word 'old' is repeated as many as sixty-eight times.

As far back as when he was writing Moby-Dick, he had written to 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 any time between then and now, that I have not unfolded within myself. But I feel that I am now come to the inmost leaf of the bulb, and that shortly the flower must fall to the mould. 3

These words reflect very clearly Melville's consciousness of aging very fast although he was still in the prime of youth. He had exhausted himself completely both physically and mentally while writing Moby-Dick. And he gave himself no time to recuperate before he wrote his next controversial book Pierre. Both Moby-Dick and Pierre were received either coldly or with indifference by American readers. Melville was also finding it increasingly difficult to support a large family. Lewis Mumford describes Melville's state of mind during these years very aptly when he says:

3 Eleanor Melville Metcalf, Herman Melville: Cycle and Epicycle, ch.8, p.110.
Baffled by his dilemmas, rebuffed by his contemporaries, harassed by financial anxiety, curbed by ill health, kept from the solace of reading by poor eyesight, made doubly desperate by the cold mysteries he had explored—what was there to sustain Herman Melville and bring him back to health?*

These conditions were enough to carry any person to the verge of insanity. Critics and biographers of Melville have argued a lot over the fact of his insanity during these years. But if the later works of Melville are any proof they project a man who had learnt to tide over his difficulties with patience and courage. Throughout this period Melville continued to write steadily and without betraying the least touch of abnormality.

The imagery of these works has also undergone a remarkable change. Spread throughout these works one finds images of decay, sterility, ruin, desolation, barrenness and death as against the exuberant and vibrant images of the natural world, found in his earlier works. People who inhabit the world of Melville's later works are either withdrawn, defeated, poverty-stricken, lonely, or inhabiting ruined houses. This is in striking contrast to the characters of the earlier works, most of whom are young, full of health.

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and vitality. To use R.W.B. Lewis' words, Melville found human dignity in the little dark corners of life; not among the powerful and successful, but among the oppressed, the afflicted, the defeated; among the victims of God or of nature or of man or, simply of "things". In the character of Captain Ahab, Melville had offered a titanic image of magnificent defeat; but in the tales of the fifties, the focus was rather on the touching and forlorn.

The focus in these works has also shifted from the sea to the land. In his earlier works excepting Pierre of course, the search for the mystery and inscrutability of the universe was undertaken on the sea which to Melville had become the symbol of Truth. Even in Benito Cereno, The Confidence-Man and Billy Budd where the action takes place on water, the canvass has narrowed down for one misses the vastness of the Pacific which was so predominant in the earlier works. These apparently simple works are important for the light they throw on the cultural crisis of the American nation. As is usual with Melville his meaning remains hidden beneath misleading symbols. He seems to be examining the promise of his nation's inception and its tragic fall from the moral standards on which it was initially founded. His main concern seems to be with the dangers of advanced technology, cutthroat commercialism and dehumanizing industrialism and

mechanization. Another important issue that figures predominantly is Slavery and the moral problems it raised specially with reference to the democratic principles upheld by the nation. *The Tartarus of Maids*, *The Bell-Tower*, *Benito Cereno* and *The Confidence-Man* are specially devoted to the study of these issues. And in the midst of all these ills of society, Melville examines the inhuman standard to which man is reduced. For the amenities of civilization had brought in their train problems which had reduced him to a mere slave or an automaton. Thus Melville's attention has shifted from man fighting against a hostile adversary outside the realm of humanity to man caught in the midst of hostile adversaries in his own world. Melville also seems to be hinting that the hostile forces of the human world are more thwarting than those of the natural world. They sap man's energies and reduce him to a state of immoral subjugation. Marvin Fisher expresses the same idea when discussing the implications of Melville's *Bell-Tower* he says that Melville

> seems to see domination and subjugation as a lamentable fact of human existence; and any of the forces which subject man to a condition of marked inferiority — whether naval discipline, economic pressures, ideas of class and caste, theological insistence on human depravity — thereby coerce his will and render him a slave.6

Fisher's remark agrees with the one made earlier that Melville's focus, in these works of the fifties was on the oppressed and the afflicted.

Of these works Bartleby, Renito Ceneno, The Confidence-Man and Billy Budd have invited the maximum controversy. The other tales have afforded fairly similar meanings to different writers. Bartleby, Melville's first published story is a fascinating study of a man's gradual withdrawal from life. Bartleby is a neat, respectable and sedate scrivener employed by a complacent and successful Wall Street lawyer. At first he does a good deal of writing, working day and night and rarely pausing to eat or rest.

It is a very dull, wearisome and lethargic affair, says the lawyer himself, referring to Bartleby's work.

But he wrote on silently, palely, mechanically. 7

His desk is placed by a small side window which affords a lateral view of certain backyards and bricks but which commands no view at all. Within three feet of the window is a wall, and the light comes down from far above. On one side he is enclosed by a high green folding screen and this makes his physical isolation complete. On the third day of

7 Bartleby, p.12.
his employment Bartleby surprises his employer by refusing to assist in comparing a document with the other employees of the office. Bartleby has no explanation to offer for this refusal save the statement: "I would prefer not to". All arguing, reasoning and coaxing by the employer elicit the same answer. But what is remarkable is that Bartleby's refusal to work does not have the least touch of passion, anger or impertinence. His passive but stubborn resistance is all the more aggravating to the employer. There is something about Bartleby's independence and resolution that not only disarms the employer but touches and disconcerts him. One Sunday morning the employer discovers that Bartleby refuses to quit his premises not only during his working hours but also afterwards. For the first time the employer realizes the hopelessness and forlornness of Bartleby's condition. The thought comes sweeping across him:

What miserable friendlessness and loneliness are here revealed! His poverty is great; but his solitude, how horrible! 8

Since all the efforts of the employer to remove Bartleby from his office fail, he himself shifts his office to another building. Bartleby refuses to budge even after

8 Ibid., p:22.
the arrival of the new occupant; so the latter has the scrivener forcefully removed from the premises. He is taken to the 'Tombs' as a vagrant. Even there Bartleby does nothing but stand mutely fronting the dead wall of the 'Tombs' until one day he is found lying dead at the base of one of the prison walls. One more fact that adds to the poignancy of Bartleby's employer's pity is his discovery that a person so given to a pallid hopelessness as Bartleby was employed in the past in no other place but a Dead Letter Office where letters

on errands of life, ...speed to death.9

Simple as the story appears on the surface it affords many meanings. At one level, as many critics have pointed out, it is a parable of the frustrated relations between the artists' world and the world of practice. It relates the plight of a writer whose works have failed to communicate and who therefore has to face the mechanical drudgery of being a copyist. This so frustrates him as to lead to his total withdrawal from all human relationships. These critics therefore, find reflected in Bartleby something of Melville's own plight as a writer. The practical nineteenth-century American readers did not appreciate the kind of works

9 Ibid., p.47.
Melville was most urged to write. And Melville preferred not to be reduced to the plight of a mere copyist. Egbert Oliver in *A Second look at 'Bartleby'* has shown that

...the germ of the character Bartleby came not from Melville's searchings of his own relationship to society or from any bitterness in his hardening heart but from an external contemporary source, namely, Thoreau's withdrawal from society.\(^{10}\)

Thus he feels that through Bartleby Melville means to show what consequences a withdrawal like Thoreau's would lead to. Bruce Franklin in *The Wake of the Gods* says that Maurice's *Indian Antiquities* probably served as a direct source for Melville's fiction. He feels that many of Maurice's details of the systematic withdrawal from the world, practised by the Saniassi,

...have a surprising - and grotesquely humorous - correspondence to the systematic withdrawal from the world practiced by Bartleby.\(^{11}\)

Whatever analogy one accepts, one common fact emerges from all Bartleby criticism that Melville means to show to

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what extent isolation and withdrawal can be carried and the consequences that follow. The implication of the story is that however much one tries to, one cannot cut oneself off from one's social obligations and even if one persists as stubbornly and resolutely as Bartleby does, the result would only be negation and death. In his obsession with a single idea - saying 'no' to all human relationships - Bartleby resembles Ahab. And though the means adopted by both are entirely different both end in death and destruction. Yet as Richard Fogle says, Bartleby's plight is

more immediately social than it is theological or metaphysical. 12

For Bartleby's pathetic situation arises because of the nature of the society in which he lives. It is a typical commercial and mechanical society wherein man's emotional and creative urges get deadened and he becomes a mere automaton. To this extent Ronald Mason is right in observing that

Bartleby's death damns society not himself. 13

But this is only one side of the picture. The lawyer's


gradual understanding of the pathos and forlornness of Bartleby's plight, and the realization of his helplessness in helping Bartleby overcome it show very clearly that the society which the Wall Street lawyer represents is not totally blind to Bartleby's condition. The lawyer's feelings on one occasion support the point very well. They show a more than ordinary insight into the cause of Bartleby's malady and the reason why it could not be cured. Thus he says:

My first emotions had been those of pure melancholy and sincere pity; but just in proportion as the forlornness of Bartleby grew and grew to my imagination, did that same melancholy merge into fear, that pity into repulsion. So true it is, and so terrible, too, that up to a certain point the thought or sight of misery enlists our best affections; but, in certain special cases, beyond that point it does not. They err who would assert that invariably this is owing to the inherent selfishness of the human heart. It rather proceeds from a certain hopelessness of remedying excessive and organic ill. To a sensitive being, pity is not seldom pain. And when at last it is perceived that such pity cannot lead to effectual succor, common sense bids the soul to be rid of it. What I saw that morning persuaded me that the scrivener was the victim of innate and incurable disorder. I might give alms to his body; but his body did not pain him; it was his soul that suffered, and his soul I could not reach.¹⁴

What is wrong with Bartleby is that he refuses to accept the fact that he lives in a society that is 'immitigably interdependent' and that both he and the lawyer are 'sons

¹⁴ Bartleby, pp.24-25.
of Adam'. To an age which understands fully the implications of the term 'schizophrenia', the story is more relevant. A society that produces schizophrenic individuals is to be condemned. But equally condemnable are those individuals who get cut off from all human relationships by becoming too independent, self-reliant and self-centred. In view of Bartleby's compulsion for shutting himself behind the four walls of his office, one can also pronounce him as a case of 'agoraphobia'. One could take 'fear of open places' to imply the fear of the wide world and its frightening demands which he wants to escape by his withdrawal.

The short tale *Cock-a-Doodle-Do* tells of an old, poverty-stricken farmer and his family whose efforts to face the trials of their lives are sustained by the buoyant and triumphant trumpet-blast sounded by a cock. Till Merrymusk the farmer, and his family die, the cock, by his crowing seems to create an atmosphere of hope and cheerfulness. The narrator is trying to prove that in the midst of one's trials and tribulations one can remain cheerful and retain one's faith in the ultimate goodness of things. The narrator is also trying to convince us of the magical effect of the crowing by showing how often it has been able to dispel his own dark moods. But by the time the tale ends one begins to doubt the genuineness of the narrator's optimism. Egbert
Oliver is of the opinion that *Cock-a-Doodle-Do* is a satire on the buoyant transcendental principles which Melville heard echoing and re-echoing in the New England hills...¹⁵

He feels that *Cock-a-Doodle-Do* and *Bartleby* are companion pieces for just as *Bartleby* shows that complete withdrawal of a person from his worldly obligations and associations leads to negation and death, *Cock-a-Doodle-Do* shows how the outward-turning transcendent reaches of that doctrine which would put itself in tune with the infinite, even to the fateful disregard of the individual's physical need,¹⁶ leads to the negation of the grave. Melville is not only satirizing the 'transcendental hocus pocus' as Egbert Oliver calls it but perhaps all those people who even while living in the midst of despair refuse to recognise it or are apt to ignore it. In the crowing cock, whose crow seems to be saying: 'Glory be to God in the highest!' and 'Never say die', Melville is trying to satirize those people who from their pulpits preach and instil in the credulous, the blind faith that the goodness of God alone is capable of dispelling the misery and evil with which mankind is surrounded. The conversation between the narrator and


¹⁶ Ibid.
Merrymusk when the former visits the latter's shanty shows what the narrator actually feels about the crowing of the cock.

"How is it, that your sick family like this crowing?" said I.

"The cock is a glorious cock, with a glorious voice, but not exactly the sort of thing for a sick chamber, one would suppose. Do they really like it?"

"Don't you like it? Don't it do you good? Ain't it inspiring? don't it impart pluck? give stuff against despair?"

"All true,"..."But then,"

said I, still with some misgivings,

"so loud, so wonderfully clamorous a crow, methinks might be amiss to invalids, and retard their convalescence."

Merrymusk's reply to this is:

"Crow your best now, Trumpet!"

After having seen the sick wife and children the narrator remarks:

"It must be a doleful life, then, for all concerned. This lonely solitude - this shanty - hard work - hard times."

Merrumusk characteristically replies:

"Haven't I Trumpet? He's the cheerer. He crows through all; crows at the darkest; Glory to God in the highest! Continually he crows it."
The narrator continuing the narration says:

I returned home in a deep mood. I was not wholly at rest concerning the soundness of Merrymusk's views of things, though full of admiration for him.¹⁷

Thus Leon Howard's view that

Melville interpreted the humble patience which fascinated him as an expression of pride, and, as such, it struck a strong responsive chord in his own being,¹⁸

is only partly true. For, however much Melville may have admired the qualities of pride and patience he could not have advocated the extreme negative patience of the Merrymusks. Even the inscription on the family gravestone:

Oh death, where is thy sting?
Oh grave, where is thy victory?¹⁹

sounds ironic. It emphasizes more the despair and hopelessness in which the family lived and died than the biblical hope of the immortality of the human spirit for which it stands.

¹⁷ Cock-a-Doodle-Do, pp.142,143, 144.
¹⁹ Cock-a-Doodle-Do, p.146.
The Two Temples is one of the three diptychs which Melville wrote to project contrasting pictures. It contains Temple First and Temple Second. The first piece contains the narrator’s experience in a fashionable New York church. The second deals with his experience in a London theatre. Through them the narrator contrasts the welcome he gets at each place. He is turned out of the church because the rich and proud congregation does not entertain poor folks and "beggars cannot be choosers". By contrast, on another occasion the narrator is surprised, when owing to his poor appearance he is given a free ticket to a theatre by a benevolent working-man. The experience he has in the second temple leaves him more edified because the play takes the shape of a sacred ritual. The religious service in the theatre is mere play-acting. But so sincere and ennobling is it that the whole house sounds its response deafeningly.

Right from the undoubted heart, I have no duplicate in my memory of this. In earnestness of response, this second temple stands unmatched, says the narrator. Thus the true church ceremony has become false and artificial, the mere play-acting has acquired the semblance of truth and sincerity. The narrator is thus prompted to ask what exactly is the real and what the

20 Temple Second, p. 165.
illusory. Could mere mimicry have transformed a performance into a sacred ritual, the narrator asks. And conversely isn't a sacred ritual mere acting? Frivolous and slight as they are these sketches contain an attack on the church as an institution where religious ceremony becomes a mere form and where place is reserved only for those who arrive in flashing carriages.

A passage in Temple Second is worth noting both in connection with Melville's consciousness of the theme of poverty and the different meanings the word 'charity' could be given. The narrator's hesitation in accepting the theatre ticket he is offered inspires him to reflect:

Why these unvanquishable scruples? All your life, naught but charity sustains you, and all others in the world.

He continues in a sarcastic tone,

Maternal charity nursed you as a babe; paternal charity fed you as a child; friendly charity got you your profession; and to the charity of every man you meet this night in London, are you indebted for your unattempted life. Any knife, any hand of all the millions of knives and hands in London, has you this night at its mercy. You, and all mortals, live but by sufferance of your charitable kind; charitable by omission, not performance. - Stush for your self-up-braidings, and pitiful, poor, shabby pride, you friendless man without a purse.21

21 Ibid., pp. 161-62.
A man has not only to be thankful for the various kinds of charities bestowed on him. He has also to be thankful for being allowed to remain alive in this world. The insecurity of life in the city of London perhaps prompted Melville to make this observation. The remark sounds more true today, not only to Londoners but to people all over the world for life has become as insecure in small towns as in big cities.

The next two contrasting sketches are *Poor Man's Pudding* and *Rich Man's Crumbs*. They compare American and British poverty. The first sketch speaks about the complacency with which a certain poet Blandmour regards poverty. Walking with the narrator, once, along a snow-covered road he observes that

Nature, is in all things beneficent; and not only so, but considerate in her charities, as any discreet human philanthropist might be.  

Then he recounts how through kind Nature the poor out of their very poverty extract comfort. The narrator then recounts his visit to the house of the Coulters, an American farmer-couple, to show to what extent the picture of poverty painted by Blandmour is hidden in blind optimism. The narrator concludes that it is only when one lives in a poor man's house that one realizes what it is to be poor. But what most

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22 *Poor Man's Pudding*, p. 167.
strikes the narrator is the dignity and pride with which
the Coulters face their poverty.

In Rich Man's Crumbs the narrator describes his
experience at the 'Grand Guildhall' in London which is
thrown open to the poor on the day next to the one on which
the Lord Mayor has hosted a banquet to the kings and princes
of various countries. The narrator is shocked at the savagery
with which the beggars fought for the remains of the previous
day's food. He is no less surprised at the self-complacency
and the contempt of the rich for the poor. The purpose of
the two sketches is to contrast American with English poverty.
The Americans never lose their delicacy, dignity and pride
when faced with penury. While the American poor eat their
poor pudding with quiet resignation, the English poor fight
and riot like animals and savages or like the 'Lost in the
Pit'. Poverty, says the narrator, is

a misery and infamy which is, ever has been, and
ever will be, precisely the same in India, England,
and America.23

But this should not blind the Americans to the fact that

those... peculiar political principles, while
they enhance the true dignity of a prosperous
American, do but minister to the added wretchedness
of the unfortunate; first, by prohibiting their
acceptance of what little random relief charity

23 Poor Man's Pudding, p.176.
may offer; and, second, by furnishing them with the keenest appreciation of the smarting distinction between their ideal of universal equality and their grindstone experience of the practical misery and infamy of poverty...

Poverty is different in America because its political and economic systems are different from what they are in the other countries. The diptych Poor Man's Pudding and Rich Man's Crumbs is what Richard Harter Fogle calls a social document addressed to Melville's fellow Americans of the 1850's.

A thought-provoking question Melville poses in Poor Man's Pudding is whether the American trait of fierce individualism does not make the victims of poverty suffer greater mental agony. Perhaps Melville's own plight gave him this insight.

In The Paradise of Bachelors and The Tartarus of Maids, Melville once again presents two contrasting pictures. The Temple of London is a place of refuge for the bachelors because they want to escape the rush and din of the city. These bachelors live secluded in a city of their own where the cares of life cannot touch them. Melville seems to admire the life of these bachelors but the satirical tone he employs shows that actually he wants to criticize the

24 Ibid.
25 Richard Harter Fogle, Melville's Shorter Tales, ch.4, p.45.
inmates of the Temple. A passage from the piece will prove the point.

The thing called pain, the bugbear styled trouble - those two legends seemed preposterous to their bachelor imaginations. How could men of liberal sense, ripe scholarship in the world, and capacious philosophical and convivial understandings - how could they suffer themselves to be imposed upon by such monkish fables? Pain! Trouble! As well talk of Catholic miracles. No such thing.26

Right from his earliest works Melville associated bachelorhood with a state of existence devoid of depth of feeling, maturity and wholeness. He believed that no man could live in seclusion and isolation and be a whole man. Life's cares and conflicts cannot be eradicated by withdrawing in one's Paradise like the bachelors of The Paradise of Bachelors but by fronting them and doing one's best to relieve the misery of one's fellowmen.

In The Tartarus of Maids, Melville contrasts bachelors with maids. The carefree life of the bachelors stands in distinct contrast to the misery of the spinsters employed to operate paper-making machines. The whole piece gives the impression that Melville has used the various parts of the paper-making machines to parody the human functions

26 The Paradise of Bachelors, p. 193.
of conception and gestation. But the tale acquires an ominous tone when one finds the sex imagery connected with the imagery of Hell. The factory machines suggest implements of infernal torture. The factory itself is situated in a place which has an infernal look. Words like 'Mad Maid's Bellows-pipe', 'Dantean Gateway', 'Black Notch', 'Devil's Dungeon' used to describe the road leading to the factory show what Melville had in mind. Even the river whose water supplies the power for the factory is termed as 'Blood River'. The workers have to live for nothing but the machines they operate; hence maidens are employed instead of married women for the former can remain in employment constantly. Machines thus have acquired more importance than human beings. To this extent The Tartarus of Maids is a social criticism of the machine-oriented society which was emerging during the middle of the nineteenth century. These 'inflexible iron animals' as Melville terms the machines, drain life out of the workers and make them nothing but blank and pallid-looking automata. They deaden all the facets of a man's personality - physical, psychological and spiritual. Just what the machines could do to the human potential is very well expressed by the narrator.

The human voice was banished from the spot. Machinery - that vaunted slave of humanity -
here stood menially served by human beings, who served mutely and cringingly as the slave serves the Sultan. The girls did not so much seem accessory wheels to the general machinery as mere cogs to the wheels.27

In this hell of a place, the proprietor of the factory, 'a dark-complexioned, well-wrapped personage', moves about unconcerned about the plight of the workers. Melville is equally critical of 'Young Cupid', the boy who shows the narrator the various departments in the factory.

The strange innocence of cruel-heartedness in this usage - hardened boy28

shocks the narrator. The machines inspire feelings of awe and physical apprehension in the narrator. In this connection he remarks:

Always, more or less, machinery of this ponderous, elaborate sort strikes, in some moods, strange dread into the human heart, as some living, panting Behemoth might. But what made the thing I saw so specially terrible to me was the metallic necessity, the unyielding fatality which governed it.29

The sketch has a universal significance for the maids or spinsters could also stand for humanity at large, driven helplessly to work in factories, inextricably and fatally bound to the machines they have to tend.

28 Ibid., p.205.
29 Ibid., p.209.
Like the theme of poverty, failure had also preoccupied Melville and in the three sketches entitled The Happy Failure, The Fiddler and Jimmy Rose he deals with three kinds of failures. The Happy Failure tells of the failure of the Great Hydraulic-Hydrostatic Apparatus for draining swamps and marshes which the uncle of the narrator has invented. At first the uncle is overwhelmed with sorrow and all but destroys the machine. But the persistent entreaties of his nephew to gather hope and courage work upon the uncle and he comes out of his failure a sad but wise man.

"Boy,"

he says to his nephew,

"there's not much left in an old world for an old man to invent. ... take my advice and never try to invent anything but-happiness."

Moreover his failure becomes the cause of bringing his dead humanity back to life. So preoccupied has he been with his invention that he has forgotten to think of anybody or anything else. His negro servant while receiving his master's gift of the wooden box in which the Apparatus was kept remarks rightly when he says,

"dat be very fust time in de ten long 'ear yoo hab mention kindly old Yorpy... Yoo is yourself again in de ten long 'ear."

30 The Happy Failure, p.231.
31 Ibid.
The uncle himself seems to realize this for he says,

...Boy, I'm glad I've failed...failure has made a good old man of me. It was horrible at first, but I'm glad I've failed.32

Example does for the nephew what experience had done for the uncle. He has learnt that the sentiments which his uncle had repressed during the ten long years of intellectual pursuit have once again come to the surface and the failure of the project itself has been responsible for it.

The Fiddler is a study of the failure of an artist. The narrator Helmstone, is a poet whose work has gone unrecognized. He is introduced by his friend Standard to Hautboy, a fiddler. The latter seems to have acquired the maturity of being genuinely happy on a happy occasion and not unduly perturbed on a sad one. At least this is what the narrator has observed about the fiddler:

Good sense and good humour in him joined hands. ... It was plain that while Hautboy saw the world pretty much as it was, yet he did not theoretically espouse its bright side nor its dark side. Rejecting all solutions, he but acknowledged facts. What was sad in the world he did not superficially gainsay; and what was glad in it he did not cynically slur;... .33

32 Ibid.
33 The Fiddler, pp.235-36.
But Hautboy's wonderful cheerfulness and good sense, argues Helmstone, may be due to the lack of sublime endowments and genius. The narrator feels that a man of genius can rarely acquire the balanced approach Hautboy has acquired. His ambitions being limited, a man without any special endowments can take his failure cheerfully. Hautboy therefore affords no valuable lesson to thwarted genius. But Helmstone soon learns that Hautboy, who now earns his living by fiddling was an extraordinary genius, who had been an object of wonder to the wisest, been caressed by the loveliest, received the open homage of thousands on thousands of the rabble.34

But he who has a hundred times been crowned with laurels, now wears a bunged beaver.

Once fortune poured showers of gold into his lap... To-day, from house to house he hies, teaching fiddling for a living.35

In other words Helmstone learns that the once-famous writer has been forced by circumstances to take to fiddling. Yet his failure has not soured his spirit. In the example of Hautboy's failure, Helmstone finds solace for his own disappointment at not being recognized. The last sentence in the tale,

34 Ibid., p.240.
35 Ibid.
Next day I tore all my manuscripts, bought me a fiddle, and went to take regular lessons of Hautboy.\textsuperscript{36}

has prompted Richard Fogle to observe that it is not clear what exactly Helmstone is convinced of and why he abandons poetry.

The imitation seems literal unto slavishness,\textsuperscript{37} he adds. But one who is familiar with Melville's practice of investing a physical event with symbolic truth, will be able to read in Helmstone's buying a fiddle and taking lessons from Hautboy an attempt to learn from the latter the art of facing one's failures in the right spirit.

Jimmy Rose is the study of a man who was once prosperous but now bankrupt. When prosperous, Jimmy Rose is surrounded by relatives and friends. But when prosperity no longer favours him he is deserted by them. He disappears from his native place and is not to be seen for many years. No one seems to care where he has gone. But time and tide, says the narrator soothed him down to sanity. Jimmy returns to his old associates.

Perhaps at bottom Jimmy was too thoroughly good and kind to be made from any cause a man-hater.

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{37} Richard Harter Fogle, \textit{Melville's Shorter Tales}, ch.3, p.60.
And doubtless it at last seemed irreligious to Jimmy even to shun mankind.38

Deprived of his affluence he spends the rest of his life on a bare subsistence, most of the time living on the charity of friends' tea-tables or dinner-tables. In this connection the narrator observes,

...what could be more bitter than now, in abject need, to be seen of those - nay, crawl and visit them in an humble sort, and be tolerated as an old eccentric, wandering in their parlors - who once had known him richest of the rich and gayest of the gay?39

The tone of the narration prompts one to presume that the narrator sympathizes with Jimmy's plight. The words "Poor, poor Jimmy - God guard us all - poor Jimmy Rose!" repeated like a refrain in the tale also create such a mistaken impression. But much as Melville may have sympathized with Jimmy's predicament he could not have advocated the crawling and cringing that Jimmy resorts to. The native American dignity and pride which the Coulter in Poor Man's Pudding show is more heroic and therefore more in keeping with Melville's temperament. Melville could not have had much sympathy for a social parasite who was in every other way capable of establishing himself financially.

38 Jimmy Rose, p.249.
39 Ibid.
The freedom of one's religious belief and how it can be thwarted by religious demagogues is the subject of The Lightning-Rod Man. The lightning-rod man comes to the narrator's house, during a thunderstorm, to sell his wares. Try as he does the narrator refuses to buy his goods and when he persists in his attempt to force his wares on the narrator, the latter throws him out of his house. This little incident becomes the central point round which Melville weaves the arguments of the narrator and the salesman. This man has acquired certain mistaken notions about the destructive power of lightning and he wants to thrust his views on the narrator. Thus he goes on insisting that the spot on which the narrator is standing at that particular moment is unsafe during a thunderstorm. The narrator is not convinced by the salesman's arguments. From the nature of his argument and the time he has selected for his call the narrator feels that the salesman is trying to frighten him with certain false ideas and then thrust his goods - his beliefs - on him.

From the peculiar time of your call upon me, I suppose you purposely select stormy weather for your journeys. When the thunder is roaring, you deem it an hour peculiarly favorable for producing impressions favorable to your trade. 40

40 The Lightning-Rod Man, p.217.
What surprises the narrator more than anything else is that the man is himself very much frightened of the thunderstorm. He therefore tells him:

> For one who would arm others with fearlessness, you seem unbecomingly timorous yourself.41

The narrator realizes that the salesman is one of those self-appointed preachers who feels that he alone is capable of understanding the mysterious ways of God. In words heatedly delivered he drives the impostor out.

> You pretended envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary to and from Jupiter Tonans, ... you mere man who come here to put you and your pipestem between clay and sky, do you think that because you can strike a bit of green light from the Leyden jar, that you can thoroughly avert the supernal bolt? ... Who has empowered you, you Tetzel, to peddle round your indulgences from divine ordinations? The hairs of our heads are numbered, and the days of our lives. In thunder as in sunshine, I stand at ease in the hands of my God. False negotiator, away! See, the scroll of the storm is rolled back; the house is unharmed; and in the blue heavens I read in the rainbow, that the Deity will not, of purpose, make war on man's earth.42

The narrator thus believes in the right of a human being to interpret in his own way the mysterious ways of the Almighty. The salesman's response is characteristic of

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid., pp.220-21.
a person trying to blackmail another person.

Impious wretch! I will publish your infidel notions. 43

Words like: I seized it, I snapped it; I dashed it; I trod it, at the end of the tale are reminiscent of Ahab. They remind one of the savage fury with which he had defied the corporans in Moby-Dick but whereas Ahab had the mistaken notion that he could destroy the things he did not want or no longer believed in, the narrator of The Lightning-Rod Man has the wisdom to accept that

spite of my treatment, and spite of my dissuasive talk of him to my neighbors, the Lightning-rod man still dwells in the land; still travels in storm-time, and drives a brave trade with the fears of man. 44

Fear of any kind is bad. It is worse if it has its source in ignorance. For then one is likely to be paralyzed by it, and become a victim in the hands of impostors who are ever ready to capitalize on such fears.

The Bell-Tower describes a man's fall from pride. Bannadonna, a great mechanician is engaged in building a tower which would combine a bell and a clock. As the work

43 Ibid., p. 221.
44 Ibid.
of this tower progresses the confidence and pride of the mechanician rise almost with rocket speed. So obsessed does he become with his project that he grows more and more isolated from his fellow-beings. As days pass, he remains more and more confined to his tower so that this secrecy and seclusion on his part invest his work with a mystery pertaining to the forbidden. The size of the bell is so huge that people have to caution him against the advisability of having it installed in the tower. But Bannadonna remains undeterred because of his blind confidence. He begins to disregard the feelings of his fellow workers and even goes to the extent of killing one of them. Bannadonna's pride leads him to presume that he can become the creator of life-like creatures. And in so doing he becomes blind to the natural forces of life. But it is in the creation of the robot who is to strike the hours, that he oversteps his limitations. To use the words of the text,

he still bent his efforts upon the locomotive figure for the belfry, but only as a partial type of an ulterior creature, a sort of elephantine Helot, adapted to further, in a degree scarcely to be imagined, the universal conveniences and glories of humanity; supplying nothing less than a supplement to the Six Days' Work;... All excellences of all God-made creatures, which served man, were here to receive advancement, and then to be combined in one. 45

45 The Bell-Tower, pp. 368-69.
Thus he begins to assume God-like powers.

With him, common sense was theurgy; machinery, miracle; Prometheus, the heroic name for machinist; man, the true God.\textsuperscript{46}

But a slight flaw in the mechanism of the clock proves fatal and kills Bannadonna on the very day the bell and the clock have to start functioning. Bannadonna is under the false impression that he has full control over the thing he has created. But as one of the three quotations prefixed to this tale states, like Negroes these powers (machines) own man sullenly; mindful of their higher master, while serving plot revenge. Coincidently, it is the manacled robot in the tower that strikes the fatal blow. The union of man and machines is an evil union and as Richard Fogle observes,

\begin{quote}
man and machine are essentially diverse and discordant,\ldots. And it is possible that in this (fated) union the machine will preponderate.\textsuperscript{47}
\end{quote}

Once again as he has been consistently doing throughout his works, Melville is showing a danger signal to his countrymen who were involving themselves increasingly

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., p.70.

\textsuperscript{47} Richard Harter Fogle, \textit{Melville's Shorter Tales}, ch.6, p.65.
with technology. In this connection, Charles Fenton has made a noteworthy remark.

This mid-century decade was the beneficiary of Benthamism, of the notion that there was no limit to the bounds of human progress; like Bannadonna and his Renaissance contemporaries, it felt that "the jubilant expectation of the race should, as with Noah's sons, soar into Shinar aspiration." 48

The Bell-Tower reflects the deep impression technology had left on Melville. He had an almost instinctive fear of machines, for he saw them as ominous adversaries serving mankind but biding their time to plot revenge on them. The tale acquires seriousness because Melville involves the whole community in the manufacture and installation of the bell. And therefore instead of remaining a private drama of a dehumanized scientist of the kind that one finds in Hawthorne, it becomes a tale of national significance. The mood of Bannadonna was representative of the mood of the majority of Americans.

The interest of I and my Chimney revolves round the controversy whether the chimney which is built in the centre of the narrator's house from floor to roof, should or should not be abolished. The narrator looks upon the chimney

less as a pile of masonry than as a personage. His wife and daughters regard it as merely an old-fashioned structure which needs to be removed to make place for more domestic conveniences. Being a conservative himself, the narrator has come to associate the chimney with all the permanent values of life. For the narrator it stands for all that is aged, traditional and therefore worthy of preservation. He compares it with people or things that are huge, ancient or majestic. He calls it a "Harry VIII of a Chimney" or "a grand Trianon" and feels that the architect of the chimney must have had the "pyramid of Cheops" before him.

... it stands, solitary and alone - not a council-of-ten flues, but, like his sacred majesty of Russia, a unit of an autocrat.

But the wife is impatient of all these old gigantic things which occupy so much space. They are of no use in a modern house, she feels. The narrator humorously remarks about her:

The maxim, "whatever is, is right", is not hers. Her maxim is, whatever is, is wrong; and what is more, must be altered; and what is still more, must be altered right away.

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49 I and My Chimney, p.381.
50 Ibid.
51 Ibid., p.385.
Through this conflict Melville is trying to project the tension that always takes place in a society that is in the process of change from the old to the new. The society of which Melville was a member was undergoing swift changes. The rural, land-oriented society was giving place to the urban and machine-oriented. And with his characteristic foresight Melville saw in this the unbridgeable gulf that was one day going to open up between the old and the new values.

Richard Fogle sees in the sketch, an allegory of Melville's own condition and circumstances at the time of writing. Considering the feeling of having grown old and useless which took hold of Melville during these years and considering the many remarks about the uselessness of things old and ancient, which the narrator's wife and daughters make, one can agree with Fogle's remark. Accordingly the chimney could be identified with Melville's writing which his readers thought 'wasteful and impractical' and which they wanted to be substituted by something more suitable to the time. The chimney could also stand as a symbol of the hidden recesses of a man's personality and therefore the narrator's struggle against his wife and daughters, could signify the struggle that a man puts up while guarding his personality tenaciously, refusing to allow alterations in it.
In *The Apple-Tree Table* Melville makes an old table the excuse for discussing the nature of the responses it evokes from the members of his family. The responses vary from rationalism on one side to blind superstition on the other. Having been confined to an old garret, rumoured to be haunted, the indigent-looking table comes to be associated with various kinds of superstitions. The two daughters and the servant are terrified of it. One of the daughters regards it as the Evil One itself. The mistress of the house, a rationalist like Democritus himself, regards it as just another piece of furniture. The narrator oscillates between rationalism and superstition. The family has hardly got used to the table when one fine day they are surprised to see bugs emerging from it. In this event the superstitious find their doubts confirmed and the rationalists an opportunity for scientific investigation. The rationalist-sceptic narrator remains uncommitted. Through this simple sketch Melville shows how difficult it is for people, who have been brought up according to the superstitions and beliefs of their own religion, to come out of them and accept the facts science makes evident. The narrator's approach best reflects Melville's own attitude towards science and religion.

For my own part, my present feelings were of a mixed sort. In a strange and not unpleasing
Cotton Mather and his 'Magnalia' referred to in the work may well stand for that part of religion which stressed evil, demonism, spirits, fear and superstition. Where religion was concerned, Melville was a sceptic but he was not an ardent supporter of science either. He ridiculed both the blind believers in religion and the overconfident enthusiasts who thought science would solve every human problem. Julia's remarks in connection with the emergence of the insects from the table are worth noting.

...say what you will, if this beauteous creature be not a spirit, it yet teaches a spiritual lesson. For if, after one hundred and fifty years' entombment, a mere insect comes forth at last into light, itself an effulgence, shall there be no glorified resurrection for the spirit of man?... I still believe in spirits, only now I believe in them with delight, when before I but thought of them with terror.

Melville perhaps wants to emphasize the harm religious bigots can bring to young minds by emphasizing the terrifying aspects of religion. He knew very well how obnoxious the old Calvinistic doctrine had become to the younger generation and many of his own contemporaries felt that the doctrine should be liberalized to make it more acceptable to the increasing

52 The Apple-Tree Table, p.430.
53 Ibid., p.435.
rationalism of his age.

The Piazza is the last of Melville's shorter tales. Like The Apple-Tree Table, The Piazza becomes an excuse for Melville for airing his views on a certain subject. This time it is illusion and reality. Melville had remained preoccupied with this subject throughout his life and gave expression to it in almost all his major works. The narrator of the tale gives his reasons for building his Piazza to the North although it is most exposed to the elements. He says he prefers to have it that way because he can front the facts of life in a better way just as the sea is a better place than the land for so doing. In other words the narrator feels that exposure to the elements results in a better understanding of Truth. What the narrator realizes after observing the view from this vantage-point is that the world is a shifting place. It changes endlessly with the various seasons. Even the mountains afford different views on different days. The smallest change in point of view will alter their relationships. As the narrator narrows down his focus, he spots a house very far away. It is so beautifully situated among the mountains that the narrator presumes it to be a house in fairy-land, occupied by a fairy queen, surrounded by fairy girls. But when he actually reaches the spot he finds it to be
a little, low-storied, grayish cottage, capped, nun-like, with a peaked roof, and occupied by a pale-cheeked, lonely girl sewing at her window. The girl's window also affords a beautiful view of the world beyond her cottage and she too like the narrator believes that the beautiful house she sees everyday must belong to a happy person.

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

The narrator's reply is noteworthy:

I, too, know nothing; and, therefore, cannot answer; but, for your sake, Marianna, well could wish that I were that happy one of the happy house you dream you see; for then you would behold him now, and as you say, this weariness might leave you.

Thus both Marianna and the narrator are victims of illusion glorified by distance. Both mistake illusion for reality.

But, every night, when the curtain falls, truth comes in with darkness.

54 The Piazza, p. 446.
55 Ibid., p. 452.
56 Ibid., pp. 452-53.
57 Ibid., p. 453.
As long as the narrator is seated on his porch or his amphitheatre, as he calls it, the scenery is magical and the illusion complete but once the curtain falls illusion gives place to reality. Elsewhere Melville has made a remark to the same effect.

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

Melville notices the same kind of inconsistency in the natural world. The white cankerous worm in the bulb of the beautiful white flower is an example of how far appearances can be deceptive and how evil, whatever its form, creeps into the most unimaginable places. The Piazza was published in 1856 just four years after Melville wrote Pierre. But one can see what a remarkable change the protagonists of the two works show in their approach to a similar problem. In refusing to come to terms with reality Pierre ultimately destroys himself. But the narrator of The Piazza has acquired the wisdom to understand that 'what seems' is not always 'what is'. He has learnt that all experience is a mixture of the good and the bad, the bright and the dark, though the two are not equally apparent. And to perceive the dark and assign to it its just part is the more difficult but wiser

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58 Bartleby, p.23.
Thus far, Melville's Shorter Works show that his focus of examination has shifted from the realm of Metaphysical Evil to the realm of the evil forces that were thwarting his country's progress. These works also show that Melville has given up the approach of a romantic visionary and is moving towards the mature approach of an experienced realist. The next chapter will further validate these arguments.