Chapter - VI
Shorter Works - II
In *Benito Cereno* (1856) Melville examines the consequences of Evil in action. In other words he is chiefly concerned with examining the effects of Evil both on the perpetrators and their victims. As is usual with Melville the narrative is superficially simple. It deals with the experiences of Amasa Delano, captain of the American ship 'The Bachelor's Delight', on board the Spanish ship 'San Dominick' anchored in the harbour of a small island off the southern extremity of Chili. Actually Don Benito, the Spanish captain is under the command of his negro slaves who have revolted against him. But the behaviour of the negroes and the white sailors and their relationship to their captain makes the whole action of the tale a mystery which becomes clear only when Amasa Delano sees Babo's dagger aimed at Benito Cereno as he is about to escape out of his ship. In view of the fact that the negro slaves had mutinied against Don Benito and kept him and the white sailors prisoners and as Amasa Delano was deluded into believing that it was Benito's inefficiency that had reduced the Spanish ship into its present state, one has to examine *Benito Cereno* from three angles. First, what does the evil on the part of the negroes signify? Is it merely the evil of slavery or does it reflect the basic evil
propensity in human nature? Next, what does Don Benito stand for? Does he confront and combat the evil that he encounters in the right way? And lastly, why does Amasa Delano fail to perceive the immense force of evil hidden behind the apparently placid atmosphere of the 'San Domingo'?

Various views have been set forth with regard to Babo, the leader of the negro slaves. According to Richard Harter Fogle,

Babo is the symbol of the slaves, one kind of blackness. With a wider reference he is everything untamed and demoniac— the principle of unknown terror. ... Babo is not quite the motiveless malignity of Iago, ... he is not quite Claggart, the master-at-arms of Billy Budd, who is a pure evil according to nature. For he has been oppressed by social order, ... in this aspect he is the vengeance of nature, evoked by the inequities of all orders. When they transgress too far against nature, the vengeance beats them down.¹

Yvor Winters² and Rosalie Feltenstein³ both believe that the morality of slavery is not an issue in Benito Cereno.

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¹ Richard Harter Fogle, Melville's Shorter Tales, ch.10, pp.137-38.
³ Rosalie Feltenstein; "Melville's 'Benito Cereno'", American Literature, XIX (November, 1947), pp. 245-55.
What Melville is concerned with is not the causes but the operations of evil. Stanley Williams\(^4\) believes that Babo is pure evil and delights in "monstrous iniquity". Sidney Kaplan\(^5\) goes out to prove that Melville has reverted from his earlier position of glorifying the blacks and has in Benito Cereno arrived almost as near as some of his countrymen in his view that the negro should remain in bondage and so he feels it can scarcely be said that Melville is in the humanitarian van. Guy Cardwell\(^6\) feels that Benito Cereno has reference to the burning issue of slavery. According to Max Putzel,\(^7\) Melville explores the problem of force as an evil rather than the problem of absolute evil. He feels that Babo stands for masked fury which when released goes to barbaric lengths outside the law. Eleanor Simpson\(^8\) is

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4 Stanley T. Williams, "Follow Your Leader: Melville’s 'Benito Cereno'", Virginia Quarterly, XXIII (Winter, 1947), pp.65-76.


8 Eleanor Simpson, "Melville and the Negro: From 'Typee' to 'Benito Cereno'", American Literature, XLI (March, 1969), p.34.
of the opinion that Melville did not intend to project Babo and his mutinous negroes merely as heroic fighters against oppression and injustice but that it is their 'malice' or their 'evil' with which Melville is concerned.

As *Benito Cereno* was written at a time when the issue of Slavery had reached the stage of explosion, it would be too much to say that it does not project the negro as an embodiment of slavery. The fact that Melville's works reflect a keen awareness of the problems his country was facing, could be urged in defence of the argument that the problem of slavery is not totally ignored in the present work. And though Melville may not have given as flattering a picture of the blacks in *Benito Cereno* as he did in his earlier works, he has not in any way underrated them. In fact all through the sketch one finds their natural charm and easy cheerfulness, their docility and blind attachment, stressed. He has merely inverted the source of his most optimistic symbol to show his readers the other side of the picture. He seems to be pointing a 'go-slow' signal to those advocates of the abolition of slavery who saw in the negroes merely a reflection of Rousseau's 'Natural Men'. Again if as Sidney Kaplan feels, Melville does not appear to be in the humanitarian van, it is because the forces that were gradually dragging his country into the Civil War had led Melville to adopt a balanced position.
with regard to the problem of slavery. This remark can be further reinforced by what we read in his preface to *Battle-Pieces* where he defends his position.

Yet slavery alone is not the issue in *Benito Cereno*. Melville's habit of endowing a local or current event with universal significance is too well known. The savage fury of the negroes on the 'San Dominick' which is released when not held in check is an example of what the ungoverned savage instincts of man could perpetrate. Max Putzel is right when he says that *Benito Cereno* explores the problems of freedom and law which accompany man in his evolution from primitive barbarity to civilized and organized barbarity.9

All through his works we find Melville examining this facet of evil viz. the savage not only in primitive man but also in civilized man. He was an adherent of primitivism, but to a limited extent. In the portrayal of the Typees and the Negroes he has shown both the attractive and repulsive sides of the primitives. Civilized man too, Melville felt, was not free from this savagery. For, civilization may cover this savagery but cannot remove it completely. It is an ineradicable part of human nature and may reappear at any moment. Doubting the integrity of the weak and

9 Max Putzel, op.cit., p.155.
sickly Benito, Delano ponders on the question whether

under the aspect of infantile weakness, the most savage energies might be couched - those velvets of the Spaniard but the silky paw to his fangs.¹⁰

A similar idea is expressed in Israel Potter where speaking of John Paul Jones Melville says:

So at midnight, the heart of the metropolis of modern civilization was secretly trod by this jaunty barbarian in broadcloth; a sort of prophetical ghost, glimmering in anticipation upon the advent of those tragic scenes of the French Revolution which levelled the exquisite refinement of Paris with the bloodthirsty ferocity of Borneo; showing that broaches and finger-rings, not less than nose-rings and tattooing, are tokens of the primeval savageness which ever slumbers in human kind, civilized or uncivilized.¹¹

The argument, that much more than merely slavery is involved in Benito Cereno, can be sustained when we read the last conversation between Delano and Don Benito. The words 'the Negro' which the Spanish captain utters as the cause of his suffering and ruin, signify not merely the negroes as a race but the basic 'blackness' or 'darkness' of the world both human and natural. The scene in which Babo's head looks silently but victoriously at the monastery where Don

¹⁰ Benito Cereno, (ed. John P. Runden), p.21. All references hereafter to the text, will be to this edition.

¹¹ Israel Potter, (New York: Sagamore Press Inc., 1957), ch.11, p.88. All references hereafter to the text, will be to this edition.
Benito is buried, is symbolic of the enduring power of evil.

Don Benito is at the receiving end of the evil perpetrated by Babo and his followers. He is a representative of the decayed society of Spain. He also symbolizes the uselessness of authority without power. Such an authority is finally overthrown by people who have no other weapon but sheer brute force. At a deeper level Benito Cereno provides an illuminating study of what evil can do to a person and to what extent it can ruin and destroy him. The savagery that Babo has inflicted on Don Benito and the other white sailors has affected Cereno so much that he decides to retire to a monastery. He is not in a position to face the world again. R.H. Fogle in *Melville's Shorter Tales* speaks of the retirement of Cereno as 'monk-like'. In Melville, the word 'monk' like the word 'bachelor', has a special meaning. Unlike a bachelor, a monk sees evil all too closely and is therefore forced to retire from it. So unnerved has Cereno become by what he has undergone that he refuses to face Babo even after his capture. But Melville has not in any way pronounced a judgment on Don Benito's behaviour. He has merely left the readers to decide for themselves whether allowing evil to overpower one's self is the ideal way of facing it. Melville has shown Cereno's error in leaving the slaves free on the ship. He did that because he believed the slaves to be tractable. Don Benito should have realized that he was
not dealing with ordinary sailors but with slaves who could unite and break their bondage by force. Reasonable caution was necessary in dealing with them. Granting Cereno's helplessness in facing the savage fury of the negroes, his behaviour after their arrest is equally questionable. For the course of retirement from the ills of the world is not the only one left open to a person. The last conversation between Delano and Cereno will once again elucidate what Melville felt about the latter's reaction. Trying to convince Cereno of the futility of brooding over the past events, Amasa Delano says,

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

"Because they have no memory," he dejectedly replied; "because they are not human."

"But these mild trades that now fan your cheek, do they not come with a human-like healing to you? Warm friends, steadfast friends are the trades."

"With their steadfastness they but waft me to my tomb, Senor," was the foreboding response.

"You are saved," cried Captain Delano, more and more astonished and pained; "you are saved. What has cast such a shadow upon you?"

"The Negro." 12

This conversation is reminiscent of the talk Bartleby's

12 Benito Cereno, p. 74.
employer has with Bartleby. The employer, visiting Bartleby at the 'Tombs' tries to cheer him up by saying:

...this should not be so vile a place. Nothing reproachful attaches to you by being here. And see, it is not so sad a place as one might think. Look, there is the sky, and here is the grass. 13

Bartleby's reply, "I know where I am", and his subsequent silence are very much like Benito's final answer followed by his silence. Both Bartleby and Cereno show to what extent they have been ruined by evil. They see absolutely no hope in the life around them. The reference to Nature and her bounties in both the cases points out the importance Melville had come to attach to her healing and regenerative power. Hence the cycle of birth, growth, death and rebirth in the natural world, finds a recurrent expression in Melville's works after Pierre.

Where the confrontation of evil is concerned Amasa Delano is a complete contrast to Don Benito. Right in the beginning of the narrative Melville clearly tells us what kind of a person Delano is.

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

13 Bartleby, pp. 43-44.
view of what humanity is capable, such a trait implies, along with a benevolent heart, more than ordinary quickness and accuracy of intellectual perception, may be left to the wise to determine.\textsuperscript{14}

Practical and optimistic, Delano sees the world as basically good and trustworthy. There is unanimous agreement among scholars that Delano's grasp of life is limited, obtuse, ethically immature and spiritually superficial. But Richard Chase goes to the extent of saying that Delano is able to save Benito Cereno from the negroes precisely because of his spiritual superficiality - his somewhat mindless faith that everything will be all right, his optimistic belief in vitality and goodness, and quotes Melville's own words to prove his point.

\textellipsis\text{... the temper of my mind that morning was more than commonly pleasant, while the sight of so much suffering - more apparent than real - added to my good nature, compassion, and charity, happily interweaving the three. Had it been otherwise, doubtless, as you hint, some of my interferences might have ended unhappily enough. Besides, those feelings I spoke of, enabled me to get the better of momentary distrust, at times when acuteness might have cost me my life, without saving another's.}\textsuperscript{15}

Yet Melville does not seem to be upholding Delano's approach to life as ideal. He seems to be highlighting the American trait of trusting others without the necessary caution and

\textsuperscript{14} Benito Cereno, pp.1-2.

showing how dangerous it can be.

Again Delano saves Don Benito physically only. He fails to provide spiritual succour to him. This is evident from the last piece of conversation between the two, already quoted. Cereno’s ordeal has been too shattering. It not only ruins him but kills him. Delano cannot appreciate Cereno’s suffering for he is unacquainted with the deeper levels of human experience. And so he lives on. Delano’s approach may have been the wiser of the two. But an undistrustful temperament is not always an asset in a world where evil has a tendency to slide undreamed of into human harbours or hearts. The ideal Melville seems to be aiming at is a compromise between Don Benito and Amasa Delano. A sufficient amount of spiritual depth to grasp the enigmatic and contradictory realities of life coupled with sufficient energy and will-power to confront them is necessary. No doubt Delano has been subject to the mysterious terror of the ‘San Dominick’ but he has never been aware that all that he has been watching on the ship is an innocent mask thrown on malignant evil. Speaking of the inability of Delano to grasp the real condition of the Spanish ship Don Benito says,

...To such degree may malign machinations and deceptions impose. So far may even the best man err, in judging the conduct of one with the recesses of whose condition he is not acquainted... .16

16 Benito Cereno, p. 74.
Even when Delano becomes aware of the real situation, he is not affected by it in the manner that Don Benito is. He is ready to overlook it as a chance incident. In fact he is surprised and pained at Don Benito's refusal to forget the past and start life afresh. Thus Melville seems to be warning his countrymen that a blind trust in the 'Prince of Heaven's safe conduct through all ambuscades' is dangerous.

In The Encantadas (1856), a group of ten sketches, Melville examines evil as it affects the natural and the human worlds. He seems to be emphasising his belief that the world was created evil and that it has remained basically evil since it came into being. Newberry in his study, 'The Encantadas': Melville's Inferno, divides the ten sketches into three divisions according to the nature of evil reflected in each. Thus the first division i.e. sections I to IV, reflects evil in its primal or cardinal form, existing from times immemorial. Sections V and VI express the idea that this evil can be mitigated or meliorated in certain conditions by human effort. Sections VII to X refer to evil as it affects man's relationship with his fellowmen. The epigraphs at the head of the sketches, most of them from Spenser's Faerie Queene, augment their gloom and dreariness.

17 I. Newberry, "'The Encantadas': Melville's Inferno", American Literature, XXXVIII (March, 1966), pp. 49-68.
The Encantadas brings to mind R.W.B. Lewis' remark that

the tales of the fifties contain some of the most
extreme and disturbing images of isolation that
modern literature has recorded;... 18

All through the ten sketches the lonely or solitary aspect
of the natural and human worlds is emphasized. They highlight Melville's constant preoccupation with the theme of isolation. His early works show the consequences of self-inflicted isolation his protagonists face. What these sketches stress is that suffering is equally great if the isolation is inflicted by a human or natural agency. Again these sketches prove the truth of the remark made earlier that the works of the fifties abound in imagery of desolation, barrenness and decay. Almost every page abounds in imagery that creates horror in one's mind. Because of the imagery employed the picture that emerges is one of unmitigated gloom. The few bright touches that are scattered here and there fail to provide relief to one's sense of horror. The first sketch entitled 'The Isles at large' is engulfed in total darkness. The opening of the sketch is arresting:

Take five-and-twenty heaps of cinders dumped here
and there in an outside city lot; imagine some of
them magnified into mountains, and the vacant lot

18 R.W.B. Lewis, Introduction to Herman Melville
the sea; and you will have a fit idea of the general aspect of the Encantadas, or Enchanted Isles. A group rather of extinct volcanoes than of isles; looking much as the world at large might, after a penal conflagration.19

The island seems to be labouring under a curse which is eternal and the narrator feels that such lands could exist only in a fallen world. Speaking of their solitariness and desolation, Melville says,

...the special curse, ... of the Encantadas, that which exalts them in desolation above Idumea and the Pole, is, that to them change never comes; neither the change of seasons nor of sorrows. Cut by the Equator, they know not autumn, and they know not spring; while already reduced to the lees of fire, ruin itself can work little more upon them.20

Another feature of these isles is their emphatic uninhabitableness. The Encantadas refuse to harbour even the outcasts of the beasts. Man and wolf alike disown them. Little but reptile life is found there. There is no voice, no low, no howl heard and the chief sound of life is a hiss. The vegetation of the isles is equally cursed. For, on most of the isles where vegetation is found at all, it is more ungrateful than the blankness of Aracama. The picture of the tortoises whom Melville describes in great detail in the

20 Ibid., p.50.
second sketch; is equally grim.

...apart from their strictly physical features, there is something strangely self-condemned in the appearance of these creatures. Lasting sorrow and penal hopelessness are in no animal form so suppliantly expressed as in theirs; while the thought of their wonderful longevity does not fail to enhance the impression.21

The first sketch is thus a picture of unrelieved darkness and gloom and is an example of Melville's fascination with the absolute or extreme in anything.

The beginning of the second sketch gives the impression that the spell of gloom will be broken. But although Melville points to the bright breast-plate of the tortoises and exhorts his readers not to be carried away by the impression that the tortoises are all black, their overall description is such as to enhance one's sense of appalling horror. For, the tortoises seemed to have newly crawled forth from beneath the foundations of the world.

The great feeling inspired by these creatures was that of age: - dateless, indefinite endurance. ... That these tortoises are the victims of a penal, or malignant, or perhaps a downright diabolical enchanter, seems in nothing more likely than in that strange infatuation of hopeless toil which so often possesses them... (they) ram themselves heroically against rocks; and long abide there, nudging, wriggling, wedging, in order to

21 Ibid., p.53.
displace them, and so hold on their inflexible path. Their crowning curse is their drudging impulse to straightforwardness in a belittled world.22

Speaking about the endurance of the tortoises and their struggle in this desolate land Newberry remarks,

...the "antediluvian" tortoises with their cuts and bruises and their armour bespeak a primal struggle which dates back to times immemorial and which presupposes the existence of dualistic moral forces.23

All these sketches give the impression that Melville was preoccupied with an evil cosmic force that does not destroy quickly but wastes or corrodes slowly. This is in keeping with the mood of the works of the fifties where Melville's focus is centred on the effects of prolonged suffering.

Sketches III and IV further emphasize the cursed appearance of the place. The 'Rock Rodondo' sketch abounds in descriptions of birds. This sea tower is the resort of aquatic birds for hundreds of leagues around. The birds enumerated are out-of-the-way, to be found only at the ends of the earth,

...fitly haunting the shores of the clinkered Encantadas, whereon tormented Job himself might have well sat down and scraped himself with potsherds.24

22 Ibid., pp.57-58.
23 J. Newberry, op.cit., p.56.
24 The Encantadas, p.63.
Each bird has something ominous about it. Melville evokes a sense of ghostliness by speaking of the bewitching quiescence of the place, the whiteness of the birds and their demoniac din.

Sketch IV emphasizes the vastness around the Rock Rodondo; 'a boundless watery Kentucky'. The vastness becomes terrifying because it is devoid of habitation. Remote from human life these places abound in "lofty, inhospitable, uninhabitable rocks" and "tortuous capes and headlands, shoals and reefs" with an often, calm but capricious wind blowing, and deceptive vapours "causing calamities too sad to detail". The population of Albemarle is made up of animals that inspire horror. 'Man' is conspicuously absent among the creatures listed. Speaking about Abington Isle Melville says,

I doubt whether two human beings ever touched upon that spot. So far as yon Abington Isle is concerned, Adam and his billions of posterity remain uncreated.25

Melville's belief in the deceptiveness of all experience finds expression once again through the imagery of The Encantadas. All through these sketches we find references like "ocular deceptions" and "mirages", "malicious calms and currents", "capricious wind", "deceptive vapours" etc. In the very

25 Ibid., p.72.
first sketch Melville gives an idea of the unreliableness of the isles and everything pertaining to them. And this apparent fleetingness and unreality of the locality of the isles was most probably one reason why the Spaniards called them the Encantada or Enchanted Group.

Sketch V is not very remarkable except for the entrance of a human element in the otherwise no-man land. The experience of the 'Essex' vis-a-vis the 'enigmatic' craft further emphasizes the enchantments of the neighbourhood. With the description of the Barrington Isle in sketch VI we reach the habitable parts of the Encantadas. Yet the picture of the isle one collects is one of ruin, decay and destruction - old spars, sails, casks, rusty daggers, broken wine jars and fruitless trees are found scattered all over the isle. Melville gives expression to his sense of the dualities of human nature by associating the Buccaneers with the carved sofa-like seats of stones found there. He is sure that whatever else one associates the Baccaneers with, the making of these seats cannot be imputed to any other motive than one of pure peacefulness and kindly fellowship with nature. In defence of the wicked Buccaneers Melville says,

That the Buccaneers perpetrated the greatest outrages is very true—that some of them were mere cut-throats is not to be denied; but we know that here and there among their host was
a Dampier, a Wafer, and a Cowley, and likewise other men, whose worst reproach was their desperate fortunes — whom persecution, or adversity, or secret and unavengable wrongs, had driven from Christian society to seek the melancholy solitude or the guilty adventures of the sea. 26

He further stresses his point thus,

—Could it be possible that they robbed and murdered one day, reveled the next, and rested themselves by turning meditative philosophers, rural poets, and seat-builders on the third? Not very improbable, after all. For consider the vacillations of a man. ... 27

Since all men are subject to vacillations, why should the Buccaneers be exempted? The peace and tranquillity that they were capable of enjoying show that they were not unmitigated monsters.

The subject of discussion in the seventh sketch is the Dog-King from Cuba. Charles’ Isle has been given as a gift to this Dog-King by the ruler of Peru. It is inhabitable like Barrington Isle. But as the narrator says, the history of the King of Charles’s Island is an illustration of the difficulty of colonizing barren islands with unprincipled pilgrims. No kind of social or political order can flourish on the Encantadas because they are blasted by primal curse. Moreover as the subjects of the Dog-King were

26 Ibid., p. 78.
27 Ibid., p. 79.
recruited from deserters and runaways, his effort to build up a settlement ended in his overthrow, supported as he was by his ferocious dogs. The near-barren island could arouse no other feelings except the warlike and the cannibalistic. The only law that could prevail there, was: 'Might is right'. In such an atmosphere of ruthless force, the democracy into which the insurgents had confederated themselves... was no democracy at all, but a permanent Riotocracy, which gloried in having no law but lawlessness.

The story of the Chola widow of the Norfolk Isle in the next sketch stands out as the brightest spot in this otherwise dark world, not because it highlights any bright part of the environment but because it projects a quality which one associates with the best in Melville's characters. The sketch seems to have given Melville ample opportunity for expressing his pet theme of a vanquished soul fighting courageously but hopelessly against a cruel adversary. Melville himself says:

Humanity, thou strong thing, I worship thee, not in the laureled victor, but in this vanquished one.

Runilla with her husband and brother is dropped on the

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28 Ibid., p.84.
29 Ibid., p.94.
Norfolk island by a whaler whose captain promises to pick them up after four months. They intend to collect tortoise-oil during that period. They have hardly made a beginning when the husband and brother die in an accident, every detail of which she watches with anguish and helplessness. Single-handed she buries her husband's body which floats to the beach. Then onwards she waits patiently and suffers valiantly the ravages of nature and the beastliness of the visiting sailors; till she is sighted by the narrator's ship and rescued. The theme of 'patient suffering' as has already been mentioned, finds recurrent expression in the tales of the fifties. In the present sketch, it finds its most eloquent expression. What is more remarkable is the fact that Melville has chosen a woman to represent a virtue he cherished most. To understand the full implications of the story, reference must here be made to Melville's visit to Nantucket with his father-in-law, Samuel Shaw in July 1852. It was hoped Melville would be able to meet some of the New Bedford and Nantucket whaling characters who in turn would divert Melville's mind from metaphysical works like Moby-Dick.

One evening, there, Melville had heard from a lawyer friend, among the many fables about the women of the island, one about a Quaker woman (Agatha Robertson) of Falmouth who patiently and bravely suffered the injustices of her bigamous sailor husband. Melville sent the document of this story to
Hawthorne urging him to develop the facts as suggested by him in his letter of August 13, 1852. But Hawthorne does not seem to have responded favourably. From that day onward as Leon Howard says in his biography the Agatha theme of non-aggressive but unshakable patience continued to haunt his mind till finally through the character of Hunilla he managed to get it into print. The narrator's words about Hunilla's quiet courage are noteworthy:

I looked into her eyes, but saw no tear. There was something which seemed strangely haughty in her air, and yet it was the air of woe. A Spanish and an Indian grief, which would not visibly lament. Pride's height in vain abased to proneness on the rack; nature's pride subduing nature's torture. 30

Hunilla exemplifies Melville's belief in the hidden strength of man, more especially simple common man, devoid of any royal or saintly trappings, in facing the formidable forces of the universe. Hunilla's tale gains universal significance because of the reference to the cross in the last paragraph.

The last seen of lone Hunilla she was passing into Payta town, riding upon a small gray ass; and before her on the ass's shoulders, she eyed the jointed workings of the beast's armorial cross. 31

Mankind will continue to suffer at the hands of a 'feline Fate'. But man can overcome his sufferings through his faith in his own inner resources.

30 Ibid., p.100.
31 Ibid., p.101.
Sketch IX 'Hood's Isle and the Hermit Oberlus' once again abounds in descriptions of a place that is utterly blasted. It is a land of lava, clinkers and uncultivable soil, haggard solitude and impenetrable recesses. What is more remarkable about this sketch is the account of the depravity of Oberlus himself. Melville not only emphasizes his propensity to evil but couples it with an equally evil or depraved appearance. Perhaps, Oberlus is the only wicked character in Melville's works who is as wicked-looking as his wicked deeds. The evil Jackson and Claggart have their own redeeming features. The Typees, in spite of their cannibalism and the Negroes in spite of their savagery are described in flattering words. But Oberlus is as depraved as his surroundings. Evil for the first time stands in a one-to-one relationship. The description of the hermit is worth noting.

His appearance, from all accounts, was that of the victim of some malignant sorceress; he seemed to have drunk of Circe's cup; beast-like; rags insufficient to hide his nakedness; his befreckled skin blistered by continual exposure to the sun; nose flat; countenance contorted, heavy, earthy; hair and beard unshorn, profuse, and of fiery red. He struck strangers much as if he were a volcanic creature thrown up by the same convulsion which exploded into sight the isle. ... So warped and crooked was his strange nature, that the very handle of his hoe seemed gradually to have shrunk and twisted in his grasp, being a wretched bent stick, elbows more like a savage's war-sickle than a civilized hoe-handle. ... When planting, his whole aspect and all his gestures
were so malevolently and uselessly sinister and secret, that he seemed rather in act of dropping poison into wells than potatoes into soil.32

He avoided contact with the incoming sailors and was a conceited misanthrope. He would long dodge advancing strangers round the clinkered corners of his hut, and refuse to see the human face. His only companions were the crawling tortoises and he seemed more than degraded to their level. With Oberlus' degradation Melville couples an 'intelligent will'. Further, his depravity was innate in so far as he acted out of mere delight in tyranny and cruelty, by virtue of a quality in him, which he had inherited from Sycorax his mother. The evil deeds of the unfortunate Creole of the Charles' Isle could be overlooked but Oberlus deserved no shade of palliation. He turned his subjects into beasts like himself. Fogle is correct when he remarks:

Oberlus is the fullest human embodiment of the Encantadas. ...Oberlus is the Encantadas at their darkest and worst.33

The final sketch speaks about the runaways, castaways and solitaries who out of desperation have taken refuge in these islands. They have forsaken society because of its

32 ibid., pp. 103-104.
33 R.H. Fogle, Melville's Shorter Tales, ch. 9, p. 110.
injustices. Melville's chief argument seems to be that flight from tyranny does not of itself insure a safe asylum, far less a happy home.34

To make the picture of the Encantadas complete, Melville speaks of them as a convenient burial ground for those who die on them or on vessels cruising in their vicinity. Death puts the final stamp of desolation on this group of isles. Ronald Mason calls these sketches Melville's "desert phase" in which the

potency of sea-symbolism deserted him and gave place to the cracked parched imageries of waste and desolation that were with him in strong force until Clarel helped him exorcise them.35

Israel Potter (1856) has not received as much attention as the other Shorter works of Melville. Readers and critics have found in it little of the ambiguity or depth usually associated with his works. This is a straightforward tale of a revolutionary who takes part in the Bunker Hill battle and is taken prisoner by a British ship. Israel escapes to London and spends most of his life there as an exile, either fighting as a soldier or facing adversity of all kinds. In his old age he manages to secure a passage home where he

34 The Encantadas, p.114.
finds all his old associations wiped out. He dies in his own country, unable to get a pension, with his scars as his only medals. The only silver lining in Israel's long dark life is his brief sojourn in Paris where he is sent by the 'friends of America' on a secret errand and where he meets two of the most eminent American personalities namely Benjamin Franklin and John Paul Jones.

Two distinct themes are woven around Israel's tale - individual suffering and national crisis. As in most of the tales of the fifties, the theme of an individual facing the vicissitudes of life with stoicism and determination once again finds expression in Israel Potter. The second broader theme is that of American political life. As an imaginative writer Melville had always shown his concern over the forces which were affecting his nation in the process of its growth. In the present work we find in its elementary form, that pessimism regarding the future of his nation, which Melville will state more elaborately in The Confidence-Man and in Clarel.

Israel Potter has none of the heroic trappings of the characters of Melville's earlier works. The life of Potter seems to have attracted Melville because of his lately acquired belief that an ordinary individual's approach to the vicissitudes of life was wiser though less heroic.
The plight of an ordinary man without any advantages of education or birth fronting the facts of life with a stubborn patience and determination caught Melville's imagination. For he had learnt that the way of tragic heroism as evinced by Taji, Ahab and Pierre, though noble, was the way of self-destruction. If man had to survive in this world what he needed to remember was that

being of this race, felicity could never be his lot.36

It is the acceptance of this philosophy that helps Israel to face the ills of life with resignation. Like Melville's heroes in his earlier works Israel too has enough pride, patriotism, egotism and courage both physical and moral. His encounters with the many important persons he meets bring into focus all these virtues. One virtue he has not wisely cultivated is 'defiance'. In its place one finds a stoic resistance. Israel's persistence in fighting the adversities of life described in chapter 26 symbolizes the approach Melville cherished as more admirable.

...somehow he continued to subsist, as though tough old oaks of the cliffs, which, though hacked at by hail-stones of tempests, and even

wantonly maimed by the passing woodman, still, however cramped by rival trees and fettered by rocks, succeed, against all odds, in keeping the vital nerve of the tap-root alive. And even towards the end, in his dismallest December, our veteran could still at intervals feel a momentary warmth in his topmost boughs.37

No doubt Israel becomes despondent sometimes as when he is employed in the brick-kilns of London. His constant preoccupation with the making of bricks prompts him to philosophize:

What signifies who we be, or where we are, or what we do? ...Kings as clowns are codgers - who ain't a nobody? ...All is vanity and clay.38

But he does not carry the implication of this statement to its logical conclusion. In other words he does not negate life but continues to struggle.

The narrative also provides Melville with an opportunity to examine the evils of poverty. It is significant that his most angry pictures of pauperism have London and its streets as their background. In Redburn as also in the diptych Poor Man's Pudding and Rich Man's Crumbs Melville gave harrowing pictures of British poverty. In Israel Potter in the chapters 'In the City of Dis' and 'Israel in Egypt' we see it in its

37 Ibid., ch.26, p.236.
38 Ibid., ch.24, p.224.
most revolting form. Apart from the squalor and dirt and the inhuman conditions of living that these chapters highlight, it is the imagery of the mass of humanity overcrowding the city that claims one's attention. Melville uses two very apt images to describe the mass of humanity with which Israel gets merged.

...Israel found himself wedged in among the greatest everyday crowd which grimy London presents to the curious stranger: that hereditary crowd-gulf-stream of humanity which, for continuous centuries, has never ceased pouring, like an endless shoal of herring, over London Bridge.\(^{39}\)

Elsewhere in the same chapter Melville observes,

...as that tide in the water swept all craft on, so a like tide seemed hurrying all men all horses; all vehicles on the land. As ant-hills, the bridge arches crawled with processions of carts, coaches, drays, every sort of wheeled, rumbling thing, the noses of the horses behind touching the backs of the vehicles in advance,... At times the mass, receiving some mysterious impulse far in the rear, away among the coiled thoroughfares out of sight, would start forward with a spasmodic surge. It seemed as if some squadron of centaurs, on the thither side of Phlegethon, with charge on charge, was driving tormented humanity, with all its chattels, across.\(^{40}\)

While Melville realized the importance of a man as a

\(^{39}\) Ibid., ch.25, p.225. 
\(^{40}\) Ibid., p. 227.
member of his community, he abhorred the idea of his getting merged and lost in a mass of humanity, pushed along by an invisible force, not being able to chart his destiny. Yet Melville could visualize the plight of a poverty-stricken tormented individual who was forced to get lost in a crowd:

prompted by the same instinct which impels the hunted fox to the wilderness; for solitudes befriend the endangered wild beast, but crowds are the security, because the true desert, of persecuted man.41

Speaking of Melville's abhorrence for a city Arnold Rampersad says,

Melville abhorred the city in one of the contradictions of his democratic philosophy; he might have been a "ruthless democrat", but he turned aside in terror from the spectacle of man gathered in multitudes in one great camp. Cities stole the souls of men, made them individually and collectively less than human, deprived them of dignity.42

Melville himself speaks of this conflict in his mind, in a letter to Hawthorne:

It seems an inconsistency to assert unconditional democracy in all things, and yet confess a dislike to all mankind—in the mass.43

41 Ibid., ch.22, p.217.
43 Eleanor Melville Metcalf, Herman Melville: Cycle and Epicycle, ch.8, p.108.
Israel finds his experiences more harrowing because, since he had left his home-town for better prospects, he had hoped to find a city in the form of an 'Urban Eden' where all his dreams would come true. The plight of Israel Potter symbolizes the plight of all those American youths who left their home-towns to migrate to the West, the 'New Jerusalem on earth' where they hoped to find prosperity and plenty. Broadly speaking London could stand for any of the big cities of the nineteenth-century which as imagined by many, was not a 'Celestial city' but a 'City of Dis'.

In the portrayal of Benjamin Franklin, John Paul Jones and Ethan Allen, Melville found an opportunity to examine in the words of Prof. Leary

the level to which civilization in the United States had reached, what it was in danger of becoming, and to what with intelligent craft and strength, it might develop.44

Franklin whom Potter meets in Paris is an American type. He is a man of many pursuits.

Printer, postmaster, almanac maker; essayist, chemist, orator, tinker, statesman, humorist, philosopher, parlor man, political economist, professor of housewifery, ambassador, projector,

maxim-monger, herb-doctor, wit;—Jack of all trades, master of each and mastered by none—
the type and genius of his land. Franklin was everything but a poet.45

To an imaginative writer like Melville, Franklin's manifold virtues prevented him from rising above the materialistic values of nineteenth-century America. As Rampersad says,

...his virtues are all honed by the machinery of industrial development;...to be individualistic in the manner of Franklin is not to see the worth of the individual in relation to the macrocosmic forces which dominate the universe and against which the lone soul must brace itself, fortified by its sense of participation and spiritual dignity, but rather to pit individual against individual in an acquisitory struggle.46

Melville was fully aware of the dangers of Franklin's popularity among his countrymen. For he represented their least laudatory virtues. Franklin extolled honesty, chastity and temperance and all the virtues necessary for the smooth running of practical life. But his guide-book of life had little place for the higher values of philosophy, poetry and the arts which could lift his countrymen from the morass of the commonplace. With all his virtues of prudence, self-reliance and worldly wisdom, Franklin represented the embodiment of capitalistic success. Melville had the foresight to see how these very virtues could be distorted and misused

45 Israel Potter, ch.8, p.66.
46 Arnold Rampersad, op. cit., ch.5, p.98.
to establish a materialistic society. Through *The Confidence-Man* Melville also showed the degradation which such a society could lead men into. The sufferings of Israel Potter show how 'grotesquely hollow' the virtues of Franklin would become in a society full of 'confidence-men'.

John Paul Jones gets a more favourable treatment from Melville. And of all the three characters mentioned earlier it is he who makes the greatest impression on Israel. The latter absorbs from Jones the ferocity of a warrior's energy and an unqualified hatred of his enemy. Jones is a cross between the gentleman and the wolf. He has a bit of the poet as well as the outlaw in him.

Jones represents Melville's first depiction of the popular romantic stereotype of the cavalier-frontiersman, the Virginian gone west, moving gracefully between drawing room and forest primeval,\(^\text{47}\) says Allan Lebowitz in his study of Melville's heroes. Israel sees both aspects of him but he is more impressed by his barbarism and savagery which inspire him to deeds of bravery during the war between England and America. But Melville seems to have his own reservations regarding Jones' dynamism and heroism. For at times these virtues seem to

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spring from a love of personal glory. The battle between the 'Bon Homme Richard', which Paul Jones leads, and the English 'Serapis', prompts Melville to make one of the most thought-provoking remarks he has made in connection with his country's destiny.

There would seem to be something singularly indicative in this engagement. It may involve at once a type, a parallel, and a prophecy. Sharing the same blood with England, and yet her proved foe in two wars - not wholly inclined at bottom to forget an old grudge - intrepid, unprincipled, reckless, predatory, with boundless ambition, civilized in externals but a savage at heart, America is, or may yet be, the Paul Jones of nations.48

His broad humanitarianism prompted Melville to denounce his country's role in the war, however just he felt the cause of his nation was. He foresaw the same national destruction in the Civil War which rocked his country a couple of years after he wrote Israel Potter and to which he gave so honest an expression in his Battle-Pieces. Melville's views on the battle between England and America has universal significance. He says,

In view of this battle one may ask - what separates the enlightened man from the savage? Is civilization a thing distinct, or is it an advanced stage of barbarism?49

48 Israel Potter, ch.19, p.170.
49 Ibid., p.186.
Israel encounters Ethan Allen almost at the end of his war adventures. An American prisoner of war, Melville calls him a 'Samson among the Phillistines', the 'Christian captive of the pagans'. His whole marred aspect was like that of some wild beast. But Israel finds his wildness and primitiveness different from Jones'. It stems not from an ego-centric love of vanity but from a sense of identification with the natural innocence of the American West. As Melville says,

His spirit was essentially Western; and herein is his peculiar Americanism; for the Western spirit is, or will yet be (for no other is, or can be), the true American one.\(^50\)

More than this Allen was a cosmopolite,

...a curious combination of a Hercules, a Joe Miller, a Bayard, and a Tom Hyer; had a person like the Belgian giants; mountain music in him like a Swiss; a heart plump as Coeur de Lion's. Though born in New England, he exhibited no trace of her character. He was frank, bluff, companionable as a Pagan, convivial, a Roman, hearty as a harvest.\(^51\)

Facing his captivity like a caged wild beast, Allen is nevertheless proud, principled, courageous and patriotic. In his spirit Melville saw his country's hope and refuge.

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\(^{50}\) Ibid., ch.22, p.212.

\(^{51}\) Ibid.
But instead Melville found his country becoming either the 'Paul Jones of nations' or the 'Benjamin Franklin of nations'. Israel watches Allen's defiance with feelings of awe and terror. Like Allen he too is a captive in enemy land. But being a nonentity he realizes that the approach of the thundering Allen cannot be his. He is destined to face his captivity in a quiet and unobtrusive way.

The Confidence-Man (1857) is in many ways a very different work from those that preceded it. Both thematically and artistically it stands distinct among the works of Melville. This appears specially true when one studies the minor works of the fifties. To begin with, it is very discursive in the treatment of its subject. There is neither continuity of action nor coherence of ideas in this work. It gives the effect of unconnected pieces of conversations loosely strung together and even these are marked by confusion. The voyage down the Mississippi, though it is supposed to provide a backbone for the book, hardly gives the impression of movement. In fact it is only in the last chapter when the reader reads of the waning light going out, that he realizes that the voyage had started at sunrise. The descriptions of the great river on which the 'Tidéle' travels are in no way comparable to the descriptions of the sea in some of the other works of Melville. The scene of
action has narrowed down to encompass only the world of mankind with nature not even in the background. Consequently the study of evil is confined to man and the society in which he lives. The work, though complex, fails to give the impression of depth. In tone also it is far different from the other works. Melville seems to have lost hold of his previous conciliatory approach to his problems. Once more as when he was writing *Pierre* his faith in mankind seems to have received a jolt. But although *Pierre* dealt with the darker side of man's personality, Melville showed that he had faith in the basic goodness and nobility of man. The works of the fifties also testify to this fact. In *The Confidence-Man* he shows a complete lack of faith in his fellowmen. The cosmopolitan, himself a confidence-man very well expresses Melville's opinion when he says to the barber that one can conclude nothing absolute from the human form. Pitch, the Missouri bachelor means the same thing when he says that the devil appears to have understood man better even than the Being who made him. The impression this book leaves on the reader is that man is incapable of anything greater than swindling and fleecing his fellowmen. Again the anger and the passion of Pierre Glendinning, misplaced though they often were, reflected the poignancy of Melville's feelings. In *The Confidence-Man* what one finds is just a cynical disbelief in and apathy towards the problems he
is examining. Yet, in spite of this the work can be considered as one of Melville's most important, because of the grim and desolate picture of the society that he projects. The picture becomes all the more appalling because of Melville’s approach to it. There is not a single redeeming feature in this dark world of confidence-men. Richard Chase who considers this work as Melville’s second-best, provides a very illuminating study of the work as the reflection of the liberalism of the mid nineteenth-century America. Summing up his argument he says:

The confidence man, ... represents all that was wrong with the liberalism of Melville’s day: its commercialism, its superficiality, its philistinism, its spurious optimism, its glad-handed self-congratulation, its wish-fulfilling vagueness, its fondness for uplifting rhetoric, its betrayal of all tragic or exalted human and natural values, its easy belief in automatic progress. 52

The action of The Confidence-Man takes place on the ship 'Fidéle', on the river Mississippi. Melville describes the ship as

...a piebald parliament, an Anacharsis Cloots congress of all kinds of that multiform pilgrim species, man, ... A Tartar-like picturesqueness; a sort of pagan abandonment and assurance. Here reigned the dashing and all-fusing spirit of the

West, whose type is the Mississippi itself, which, uniting the streams of the most distant and opposite zones, pours them along, helter-skelter, in one cosmopolitan and confident tide. This is not merely a description of the 'Tidele' and its passengers. The collection is so diverse and varied that it fully represents the spirit of the West during Melville's days. Words like 'multiform pilgrim species, man' or 'Anacharsis Cloots congress' universalize the picture to include the world at large. It is not merely the spirit of the West, that is dashing and fusing and running helter-skelter, in one cosmopolitan and confident tide. It is also the spirit of man rushing towards a world from which all moral distinctions are extinct. Among the passengers is a confidence-man who assumes a number of different roles and costumes. Each time he appears in a particular role, he swindles a victim knowing too well the innate weaknesses of human nature. If one disregards the deaf-mute who is out to promote biblical charity, the confidence-man assumes seven other such roles. As Black Guinea, the cripple, he appeals to the passengers' desire to help the down-trodden. As the man with the weed, he asks for aid from strangers. As the man with the grey-coat and white tie he dupes the gullible.

53 The Confidence-Man. (New York: New American Library, 1964) ch.2, p.15. [All references hereafter to the text, will be to this edition.]
by extracting money for his 'Seminole Widow and Orphan Asylum'. As the president of the 'Rapids Coal Company' he encourages speculative investments in fake companies. As the herb-doctor he works on the desire of people for health and palms off his 'Omni Balsamic Reinvigorator' and 'Samaritan Pain Dissuader' to those who need them. As the 'Philosophical Intelligence Officer' he fools a misanthrope into the belief that man is essentially good and thus succeeds in extracting money in advance for the procurement of a boy-servant. Finally as the Cosmopolitan he tries to promote love and trust by playing on the sentiments of those whose belief in such values is shaken. Till he assumes the role of the Cosmopolitan i.e. till the middle of the book, the confidence-man's motive is to fleece his victims, thus playing the role of the 'Yankee peddler' or a 'Simon Suggs' whose motto was: "It is good to be shifty in a changing world". As Daniel Hoffman (Form and Fable in American Fiction) and Richard Chase (Herman Melville: A Critical Study) have shown, Melville was fully aware of these folk heroes of American literature and he used them in his works to give them a native touch. From the time the confidence-man assumes the role of the cosmopolitan, the emphasis is more on winning an argument than winning lucre. The confidence-man glides from one role into another so slickly that one hardly knows who is the cheater and who the cheated. So
much so that one even begins to suspect the integrity of the two Methodist priests. The herb-doctor who is out to swindle the sick old man himself begins to doubt his victim. Referring to the old man's cough he says,

...I hope, for the credit of humanity, you have not made it appear worse than it is, merely with a view to working upon the weak point of my pity, and so getting my medicine cheaper.54

Prompted by a constantly shifting moral or immoral situation, the confidence-man changes his appearances as quickly as he changes his tactics. Thus Melville is visualizing a world where honesty and guile become blurred and misleading.

In between the adventures of the confidence-man are to be found a number of episodes that do not form part of the action but are interpolations. They serve to highlight Melville's thesis that in a world dedicated to material prosperity such values as love, charity, loyalty, trust and compassion have no place. The story of China Aster related in chapter XL of the book is an example of the extent to which a person can stoop to ruin his friend. This episode also highlights the warning Melville expressed throughout his works about the danger of an 'optimistic view of life' or an 'unguarded trust in the benignities of the world'. A dose of suspicion both in Providence and mankind is

54 Ibid., ch.20, p.112.
necessary, for,

an ardently bright view of life to the exclusion of that counsel which comes by heeding the opposite view,\textsuperscript{55}

brings certain ruin. Two other studies of the hypocrisies of friendship are presented through the hypothetical friends, Charles and Frank (Chapter XXXIX), and through the story of Charlemont (Chapter XXXIV). All these three studies serve to show Melville's disillusionment regarding the value of friendship. In the world that he has visualized friendship in the ideal is too lofty a proposition.

By far the most arresting chapters in the book are those in which Pitch, the Missouri bachelor and the Titan encounter the confidence-man. They serve to highlight some of Melville's characteristic views on the diabolism of nature and of man. Equally absorbing is the narrative of Colonel Moredock, told to the cosmopolitan by Charles Noble. All these narratives have undertones of the American wilderness which shaped the response of many American writers. The American wilderness has been associated with the biblical wilderness as a place of trial and tribulation. The Titan and the Missourian are blasted by the evil they have experienced there and so their response to the least suspicion of

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., ch.40, p.227.
evil is savage. For example, Pitch instinctively feels that the devil is aboard and so he must be alert. His response to the herb-doctor's notions of natural goodness is furious:

I have confidence in nature? I? I say again there is nothing I am more suspicious of: I once lost ten thousand dollars by nature. Nature embezzled that amount from me; absconded with ten thousand dollars' worth of my property; a plantation on this stream, swept clean away by one of those sudden shifting of the banks in a freshet; ten thousand dollars' worth of alluvion thrown broad off upon the waters.  

To the herb-doctor's questions,

...can you, who suspect nature, deny, that this same nature, not only kindly brought you into being, but has faithfully nursed you to your present vigorous and independent condition? Is it not to nature that you are indebted for that robustness of mind which you so unhandsomely use to her scandal? ...is it not to nature that you owe the very eyes by which you criticize her?

the Missourian's answer is blunt:

No for the privilege of vision I am indebted to an oculist, who in my tenth year operated upon me in Philadelphia. Nature made me blind and would have kept me so. My oculist counter-plotted her.  

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56 Ibid., ch.21, p.114.  
57 Ibid., p.115.
Pitch's response to the Philosophical Intelligence Officer and his arguments in favour of the goodness and trustworthiness of boy-servants is equally pitiless though in the end he too succumbs to the guiles of the confidence-man. He says,

...boy or man, the human animal is, for most work-purposes, a losing animal. Can't be trusted; less trustworthy than oxen; for conscientiousness a turn-spit dog excels him. Hence these thousand new inventions — ... and the Lord-only-knows-what machines; all of which announce the era when that refractory animal, the working or serving man, shall be a buried by-gone, a superseded fossil. ... I rejoice to think that the day is at hand, when, prompted to it by law, I shall shoulder this gun and go out a boy-shooting.58

The conversation between the cosmopolitan and Pitch in chapter XXIV about the wisdom of leading a solitary life is symptomatic of the general tone of the book. It is an example of how Melville inverted his most cherished convictions and used them as targets of attacks. The cosmopolitan is trying to lure Pitch away from his misanthropy when he says:

This notion of being lone and lofty is a sad mistake. Men I hold in this respect to be like roosters; the one that betakes himself to a lone and lofty perch is the henpecked one, or the one that has the pip.59

58 Ibid., ch.22, p.123.
59 Ibid., ch.24, p.142.
He means the same thing when he says in the same chapter,

Say what you will, ...to shun society in any way, evinces a churlish nature—cold, loveless; as, to embrace it, shows one warm and friendly, in fact, sunshiny.60

Needless to say that these arguments are used by the confidence-man to dupe a misanthrope into believing that philanthropy still works in the world. The Missourian's retort to the confidence-man's arguments is characteristic of his bitter views on society:

The pick-pocket too, loves to have his fellow-creatures round him. ...no one goes into the crowd but for his end; and the end of too many is the same as the pick-pocket's—a purse.61

Pitch means to imply that men no longer come together for fellowship or friendship but to swindle each other. Melville's works show that he was an ardent champion of fellowship as the basis of smooth social living but at the time of writing The Confidence-Man he seems to have realized that fellowship could also become the means of fleecing one's fellow creatures.

As already mentioned, the 'Ishmael' character had special fascination for Melville and in the back-woodsman of the West, he saw the American 'Ishmael', leading a solitary

60 Ibid., p.144.
61 Ibid., p.145.
life, encountering evil in its primal form. 'The Metaphysics of Indian-hating' (Ch.XXVI), dealing with the episode of Colonel Moredock shows how far an Indian-hater can carry his hate for the Indians. Melville knew too well that the hero dedicated to extirpating evil must be an 'isolato'. The analysis of a backwoodsman's lonely life (Ch.XXVI), is perhaps the best portrayal of loneliness we have in Melville, barring Ahab's. In the two paragraphs starting with, "The backwoodsman is a lonely man" and ending with "he rides upon advance, as the Polynesian upon the comb of the surf", we have all the characteristics of an isolato dedicated to a monomania - thoughtful, strong, unsophisticated, impulsive, unprincipled, self-willed, self-reliant, sagacious, solitary, forbearing, a pathfinder always in the vanguard. The episode of Colonel John Moredock provides the centre round which the Metaphysics of Indian-hating is discussed. Moredock, of Illinois has devoted himself to an obsessive revenge towards the Indians of the frontiers because they have massacred his entire family. Yet, he is not an Indian-hater 'par excellence' who usually breaks off all his human ties because of his implacable and lonesome vengeance. Colonel Moredock represents a diluted Indian-hater who combines fierce Indian-hating with Christian virtues. To be a consistent Indian-hater requires the renunciation of one's ambition and all the pomps and glories of the world. Moredock does not
renounce society completely; so he attains a historical fame denied to the Indian-hater 'par excellence'. The study of Indian-hating becomes important from the point of view of Melville's preoccupation with Evil which has its source in savagery. Man's efforts to destroy primitive savagery will prove futile. Hence, as Melville says, the ruthlessness of a 'friendly Indian' turned enemy can be accounted for only by accepting the fact that there is

a sort of chemical preparation in the soul for malice, as chemical preparation in the body for malady.62

The 'Metaphysics of Indian-hating' has invited considerable attention from critics. John Shroeder feels that the only hope in this 'dark book' is

that the triumph of the confidence-man is opposed and objectified, though apparently not negated by an adversary of heroic proportions - that is, by Moredock.63

Roy Pearce refutes Shroeder's thesis of Moredock's character being a 'strong purge' for the disease spread by the confidence-man. He feels that it is not the right kind of purge.


The artistic function of the chapter, according to him is, to be

too violent a purge, a terrible irony. ... Melville has no more praise for Indian-hating than he has for confidence. Both are false, blind, unreasoning. The frightening thing is that he who escapes one seems by virtue of his very escape, to be driven to the other.\(^6^4\)

Hennig Cohen and Elizabeth Poster both view the study of Indian-hating as Melville's warning to his people. Cohen says,

Ishmael was a character toward whom Melville felt deep affinities, and Ishmael-Pitch, the American Westerner - thin-skinned but tough, skeptical but trusting, a solitary but a lover of mankind - is Melville's answer to impending 'annihilation'.\(^6^5\)

Elizabeth Foster feels that

Melville gives an unforgettable picture of a society without faith or charity... This is the alternative if we jettison charity - a world of solitary, dehumanized Indian-haters.\(^6^6\)


To Hershel Parker, Melville's opposition of the Indian-hater and the Indian constitutes,

a consistent allegory in which Christianity is conceived as the dedicated hatred of Evil at the cost of forsaking human ties, and in which most of the human race is represented as wandering in the backwoods of error, giving lip service to their religion but failing to embody it in their lives.67

The controversy about the meaning of these chapters is natural because both the subject and the style of its discussion do not fit into the general scheme of the book. The bitterness and the disillusionment that characterize The Confidence-Man prompts one to conclude that Melville is trying to show that the fox-like cunning of a confidence-man is as devastating as the wolf-like ferocity of the Indians and the Indian-haters. But whereas the aim of the Indian-hater is to destroy evil in the form of Indians, the confidence-man merely indulges in avarice which is a civilized form of cannibalism, in so far as it exploits men to death.

The Confidence-Man poses a few important questions which baffled Melville and which he examined recurrently in his works. However one can see the difference in his approach. The intensity that marked his questionings in his earlier

works has given place to a sense of weariness and disbelief. The questions asked are: Who can be made accountable for the evil in the world? Why is evil permitted to tamper with the well-being of mankind? Is man merely a puppet in the hands of Fate or can he steer his own destiny? And how far is the teaching of the Bible compatible with the practical life of mankind? The discussion between the cosmopolitan and the mystic centres on the first question. The problem under discussion is the metaphysical aspect of evil but the focus gets blurred and confused so much so that the reader finds it difficult to understand what actually the characters are debating about. Starting an argument about the compatibility of beauty with ill, the cosmopolitan goes so far as to say that he believes in the latent benignity of the rattle-snake whose lithe neck and burnished maze of tawny gold he beholds with wonder. The mystic then asks a series of baffling questions to the cosmopolitan. One of them is:

When charmed by the beauty of that viper ... did the wish never occur to you to feel yourself exempt from knowledge and conscience, and revel for a while in the care-free, joyous life of a perfectly instinctive, unscrupulous, and irresponsible creature?68

Another baffling remark that the mystic makes is that since nature is pitiless in creating a rattle-snake who is inimi-

68 The Confidence-Man, ch.36, p.196.
cal to other creatures, it is presumptuous for man to pity
a person who is destroyed by such a creature. The cosmopolitan
then makes an observation which confuses the mystic.

"...a proper view of the universe, that view which
is suited to breed a proper confidence, teaches,
...that since all things are justly presided over,
not very many living agents but must be some way
accountable."

"Is a rattle-snake accountable?" asks the mystic.
The cosmopolitan replies,

"If I will not affirm that it is, neither will
I deny it. But if we suppose it so, I need not
say that such accountability is neither to you,
nor me, nor the Court of Common Pleas, but to
something superior."

"But if now," he continued,

"you consider what capacity for mischief there is in
a rattle-snake ... could you well avoid admitting
that that would be no symmetrical view of the universe
which should maintain that, while to man it is for-
bidden to kill, without judicial cause, his fellow,
yet the rattle-snake has an implied permit of un-
accountability to murder any creature it takes
capricious umbrage at - man included." 69

The same question had troubled Ahab too and in trying to solve
it, he destroyed himself. But in keeping with the spirit of
The Confidence-Man, Melville allows the cosmopolitan to end his
searchings abruptly with a sense of weariness.

69 Ibid., p.197.
We get a glimpse of the Fate versus man controversy in the discussion between Charles Noble and Frank Goodman when the latter supplicates the former for a loan of money and is refused. Expressing his utter helplessness and need Goodman says:

...you talk not to a god, a being who in himself holds his own estate, but to a man who, being a man, is the sport of fate's wind and wave, and who mounts towards heaven or sinks towards hell, as the billows roll him in trough or on crest.70

Charles' reply is:

Man is no such poor devil as that comes to - no poor drifting sea-weed of the universe. Man has a soul; which, if he will, puts him beyond fortune's finger and the future's spite.71

But he contradicts himself later when he says:

...there is no bent of heart or turn of thought which any man holds by virtue of an unalterable nature or will. Even those feelings and opinions deemed most identical with eternal right and truth, it is not impossible but that, as personal persuasions, they may in reality be but the result of some chance tips of Fate's elbow in throwing her dice. ...I will hear nothing of that fine babble about development and its laws; there is no development in opinion and feeling but the developments of time and tide.72

This ambivalence with regard to the supremacy of Fate over

70 Ibid., ch.39, p.212.
71 Ibid.
72 Ibid., ch.41, pp.229-30.
Man or vice versa, is characteristic of Melville and one finds it reflected in all his works. In his early works Melville expressed some dim hopes in man's capacity to override his destiny. In his later works one finds his having come to an acceptance of an organic necessity to which mankind cannot but submit. The inconsistency of his views on Fate in this work further testifies to his indifferent attitude to the major problems that baffled him.

The efficacy of the Bible in solving man's practical difficulties specially in a materialistic world, finds special treatment in The Confidence-Man. Virtues like love, compassion, charity, honesty and trust which the Bible exalts are the very ones used by the confidence-man to trick and swindle the passengers on the 'Fidèle'. The facility and flippancy with which he uses the biblical exhortations show what the Bible is associated with. In a world of tricksters and swindlers, the Bible becomes the guide-book of practical living. The book begins on a note of scepticism. The response of the passengers to the deaf-mute's inscription of his message of charity shows how much faith they have in it. The epitaphic comments of the nineteen passengers on the mute's performance are symptomatic of the value people place on Scripture. In one voice they express their utter contempt for a person who preaches such outdated notions. The hanging of the 'NO TRUST' board by the
barber on his shop at the same time that the mute is writing down his message is symbolic. Melville's comment on it needs quoting.

An inscription ('No Trust') which, though in a sense not less intrusive than the contrasted ones of the stranger, did not, as it seemed, provoke any corresponding derision or surprise, much less indignation; and still less, to all appearances, did it gain for the inscriber the repute of being a simpleton.73

Again, there are a number of biblical phrases, quotations and incidents that are used throughout the book to show that in a world where the spirit of Wall-street reigns supreme the Gospel has no place. And if the reader has any doubts about Melville's belief, the last chapter of the book will dispel them. There the cosmopolitan gulls the old man with the Bible, into believing that what he has been reading as biblical truth is one thing and what it actually means is another. He conducts his arguments in so convincing a manner that he finally forces the old man to conclude that if one distrusts a human creature, one is bound to distrust his Creator. He tries to prove the duplicity of biblical teaching by citing a line from the Bible. It is interesting to note that it is once again 'friendship' that provokes Melville's angry comments. For the confidence-man says:

73 Ibid., ch.1, p.12.
"Take heed of thy friends", and explains to the old man that the word 'friend' means not "thy seeming friend, thy hypocritical friends, thy false friends, but thy friends, thy real friends".74

In other words he is out to prove that what the line quoted by him means is that not even the truest friend in the world is to be implicitly trusted. Then he bursts out derisively:

Can Rochefoucault equal that I should not wonder if his view of human nature, like Machiavelli's, was taken from this Son of Sirach. And to call it wisdom - the Wisdom of the Son of Sirach! Wisdom, indeed! ... But no, no; it ain't wisdom; it's apocrypha... . For how can that be trustworthy that teaches distrust?75

The expiry of the waning light in the cabin gives a finality to the discussion. It suggests, in a clear way the inefficacy of religion to offer hope or meaning to Man. The mocking remarks made by the men in the berth, while the confidence-man and the old man are discussing the Bible appall the readers and add to the irreverence on the part of the confidence-man. One knows that Melville never took the message of the Bible as literal truth, for all through his works one finds him challenging various biblical maxims. But nowhere else does one find him using the Bible as irreverently as he does in The Confidence-Man. Perhaps this part of the book more than

74 Ibid., ch.45, p.251. 
75 Ibid.
any other prompted Newton Arvin to call *The Confidence-Man* one of the most infidel books ever written by an American; one of the most completely nihilistic; morally and metaphysically.  

In its want of 'moral chiaroscuro' the book stands alone in the bulk of Melville's works.

*Billy Budd* completed in 1891 (the year Melville died) and printed in 1924 was the last of Melville's prose works. A few facts about its composition are worth noting for a fuller understanding of the spirit that underlies it. Melville began writing it in the fall of 1888 and completed it in the spring of 1891. This means he devoted more time to its composition than to that of *Moby-Dick*. It also means that the writing of *Billy Budd* absorbed him considerably. It should also be noted that *Billy Budd* was written during the period of Melville's retirement which began on January 1, 1886 after he had rounded out nineteen years of 'faithful service' in a government office. Between 1857 when Melville's *The Confidence-Man* was published and 1891 the year of the publication of *Billy Budd*, Melville wrote the entire collection of his poems which he either published or kept in manuscript form. A change in his approach

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to the problems that had baffled him was evident even as early as the 1850s. His poems reflect a mind that had come to terms with the baffling contraries of life.

The writing of Clarel had been a genuine turning point in his life, says Leon Howard. Life's pattern of illness, birth and death continued its movement without upsetting him unduly. Although he had cut down his social contacts considerably, he had not become averse to society. Melville's old friend J.E. Smith testifies to his acceptance of life in these words:

He bore nothing of the appearance of a man disappointed in life, but rather had an air of perfect contentment, and his conversation had much of his jovial, let-the-world-go-as-it-will spirit.

Leon Howard speaks doubtfully about Julian Hawthorne's contrary account of Melville's state of mind during this period. Even the notes and marginalia in the books Melville read during the later part of his life show to what extent he had come to terms with life. Financially also Melville was at this time at his happiest. Both Elizabeth and he had inherited money which made his family independent. And

78 J.E.A. Smith. Quoted by Leon Howard in Herman Melville, ch.12, p.315.
so Melville

was not suffering the self-centering strain of being torn between the need for dollars and the need for philosophy and feeling damned by the one and broiled in hell-fire by the other. 79

The spirit that pervades Billy Budd is one of acceptance; not the timorous acceptance of a person unable to front the facts of life but that of one who after having undergone enough has come to an heroic acceptance of the Invincible. Though once again Melville is examining unconscious innocence in confrontation with innate depravity, the Manichaean violence that marked his approach in Mardi, Moby-Dick and Pierre has given place to a calm detachment. The action of Billy Budd takes place on a British frigate during the Napoleonic wars. Two mutinies have threatened the balance of the English fleet. Billy Budd a sailor aboard the 'Rights of Man' is impressed into the 'Indomitable'. He is falsely accused by Claggart, the Master-at-arms, of plotting mutiny on the ship. Captain Vere of the 'Indomitable' doubts this story and orders Billy to defend himself in the presence of his accuser. Overcome by indignation, and unable to defend himself verbally because of his stutter, Billy strikes Claggart a fatal blow. Vere

79 Leon Howard, op. cit., ch.13, p.322.
faces a dilemma. He is sure of Billy's innocence but naval morality together with the tense atmosphere of the war forbids him to acquit Billy. So, in spite of his 'troubled conscience' Vere condemns Billy to be hanged.

Melville has raised this overtly simple story into a matter for 'psychologic theologians' to use his own words. Some of the questions he seems to be examining here are: Can unadulterated goodness, simplicity and innocence survive in this man-of-war world? What is morality? Is it only action or does it include motive and attitude also? Does this morality owe responsibility to one's self only or is it bound by duty to community and society? Does it function under Absolute or Natural laws or under a frame of Civilized or Organized laws? While studying these questions Melville focusses his attention on three characters - Billy Budd, the foretopman, Claggart, the Master-at-arms and Vere, the captain of the 'Indomitable'. Billy is a young innocent, 'unsophisticated by moral obliquities', a novice in the complexities of factitious life and without any conceit or vanity in his composition.

...with little or no sharpness of faculty or any trace of the wisdom of the serpent, nor yet quite a dove, he possessed that kind and degree of intelligence going along with the unconventional rectitude of a sound human creature, one to whom
not yet has been proffered the questionable apple of knowledge.80

He was cast in the finest physical moulds and his face showed the humane look of reposeful good nature. Hence both physically and mentally Billy exerts a hypnotic influence on all his co-sailors except Claggart. It is in the latter alone that Billy excites feelings of antipathy. This antipathy is reminiscent of Jackson's feelings for Redburn. Jackson's antipathy to Redburn has already been examined. The innocence and health of Billy Budd provoke Claggart in the same way. Yet as Melville shows, Claggart's antipathy to Billy does not constitute simple feelings of hatred. It is a curious mixture of repulsion and attraction which can be comprehended only by those well-versed in the psychology of the abnormal. Since Melville is examining the workings of 'innate depravity', the psychological and metaphysical aspects of evil get merged. Thus he succeeds in lifting the mystery of iniquity out of its Calvinistic context and projecting it in the modern psychological garb.

Melville's interest in the 'mystery of iniquity' or 'innate depravity' has already been pointed out in the dis-

80 *Billy Budd* (New York: New American Library, 1961), ch.2, p.16. [All references hereafter to the text, will be to this edition].
cussion of the works in which they find expression. In the character of Claggart Melville has examined the mystery in its most profound psychological and moral aspects. Analysing Claggart's form of depravity in Chapter VIII of the book, Melville says that though it savours of Calvinism, it does not involve "Calvin's dogmas as to total mankind". Its intent makes it applicable to individuals only. People like Claggart, Melville says, have no vulgar alloy of the brute in them but are invariably dominated by intellectuality. He further adds,

Civilization, especially if of the austerer sort, is suspicious to it. It folds itself in the mantle of respectability...it is without vices or small sins. There is a phenomenal pride in it that excludes them from anything mercenary or avaricious...the depravity here meant partakes nothing of the sordid or sensual.81

Finally Melville says,

...Toward the accomplishment of an aim which in wantonness of malignity would seem to partake of the insane, he will direct a cool judgment sagacious and sound.82

Melville has been equally precise in analysing Claggart's motive in wanting to destroy Billy Budd. His envy was deeper than Saul's for young David.

81 Ibid., ch.11, p.37.
82 Ibid.
If askance he eyed the good looks, cheery health, and frank enjoyment of young life in Billy Budd, it was because these went along with a nature that, as Claggart magnetically felt, had in its simplicity never willed malice or experienced the reactionary bite of that serpent.83

Excepting the Dansker Claggart was the only person capable of comprehending the moral phenomenon presented in Billy Budd. He was disdainful of Billy's innocence.

Yet in an esthetic way he saw the charm of it, the courageous free-and-easy temper of it, and fain would have shared it, but he despaired of it.84

Melville also notes how helpless Claggart is, where his propensity for doing evil is concerned. He says,

With no power to annul the elemental evil in him, though readily enough he could hide it; apprehending the good, but powerless to be it; a nature like Claggart's surcharged with energy as such natures almost invariably are, what recourse is left to it but to recoil upon itself, and, like the scorpion for which the Creator alone is responsible, act out to the end the part allotted it.85

Yet there is nothing abhorrent about Claggart's malady. If at all it inspires any feeling, it is a feeling of wonder and awe. The reason could be that Melville has

83 Ibid., ch.13, pp.39-40.
84 Ibid., p.40.
85 Ibid.
taken great pains to make Claggart's appearance imposing. A great part of Chapter VIII is devoted to describing Claggart's appearance and his superior capacities. The last stroke that Melville adds in Claggart's favour is to state,

...(Claggart's) glance would follow the cheerful sea-Hyperion with a settled meditative and melancholy expression. Then would Claggart look like the man of sorrows, the melancholy expression would have in it a touch of soft yearning, as if Claggart could even have loved Billy but for fate and ban. 86

Melville's analysis of Claggart's feelings of antipathy towards Billy Budd raises him from an abhorrent character to one who inspires feelings of fascination. The difference between Jackson (Redburn) and Claggart is remarkable. Both are victims of 'depravity according to nature' but Jackson manifests its hideous aspect whereas Claggart is its most sophisticated representation. He becomes as impressive as Milton's Satan. Melville may have had Satan in mind while putting 'Pale ire, envy and despair' as the title for the thirteenth chapter. Fogle rightly observes that Claggart's evil is

an object of moral and aesthetic appreciation, a

86 Ibid., ch.18, p.48.
And it is a credit to Melville's deep psychological insight that Claggart's character is capable of being appreciated even by a person who is not rooted in the traditions of Calvinism. Melville has spoken of Claggart as a case of 'innate depravity' but has given him such a civilized garb that he becomes an absorbing study for a modern mind.

Claggart's evil was of a kind incapable of being understood by an unadulterated innocent like Billy. He lacked the sensitive spiritual organization which feels an admonition of the proximity of the malign. Just why he should instil envy and hatred in Claggart he could not comprehend. When the old Dansker told him that Claggart was 'down upon him', he was surprised. When he was accused of inciting mutiny among his fellow sailors his righteous indignation got the better of him and unable to defend himself in any other way he struck Claggart dead. Billy did manage to destroy Claggart, the embodiment of evil but consequently he destroyed himself too for he was ordered to be hanged by Captain Vere.

Vere's decision to hang Billy Budd has both been lauded

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and condemned by innumerable critics. In fact most of the 
Billy Budd criticism has centred on the question whether 
Vere's decision was just. Equally conflicting has been the 
controversy over Melville's approval of Vere's action. Had 
Melville written Billy Budd during the period he wrote his 
earliest novels or even as late as Pierre, he would have 
approached Vere's action in a different way. Spontaneous 
as he was in his approach to problems of right and wrong, 
he would have condemned Vere's action as arbitrary. But 
Billy Budd is a product of his maturity when he must have 
learnt that a moral problem has to be judged in a larger 
perspective. So in examining Vere's motive in acting as he 
did Melville shows a kind of prudence or sobriety which one 
misses in his works up to Pierre. Vere owes his allegiance 
to the Mutiny Act and the Articles of War which are in force 
when the action of Billy Budd takes place. These laws for­
bid killing by a person whatever the provocation. Moreover, 
as already mentioned the atmosphere in the British Fleet is 
tense because of the mutinies of Nore and Spithead. The 
least excuse can spark off trouble. Quick action is there­
fore essential. Melville has explained very well why Vere 
cannot determine the matter on a primitive basis of right 
and wrong. Further as Melville says:

Quite aside from any conceivable motive actuating 
the master-at-arms, and irrespective of the pro­
vocation to the blow, a martial court must needs
in the present case confine its attention to the blow’s consequence, which consequence justly is to be deemed not otherwise than as the striker’s deed.88

Vere knows too well that in judging Billy’s deed, moral scruple will clash with military duty.

Speculatively regarded, . . . . it well might be referred to a jury of casuists. But for us here acting not as casuists or moralists, it is a case practical, and under martial law practically to be dealt with.89

He anticipates his colleagues’ arguments that one cannot adjudge a fellow creature to summary and shameful death specially when one knows that he is innocent before God. He knows that it is natural for an innocent man to retaliate as Billy does. Hence Vere says:

I too feel that, the full force of that, It is Nature. But do these buttons that we wear attest that our allegiance is to Nature? No, to the king. . . . in receiving our commissions, we in the most important regards ceased to be natural free agents. . . . We fight at command. . . . Our vowed responsibility is in this: That however pitilessly that law may operate, we nevertheless adhere to it and administer it.90

Vere’s argument brings to mind Wendell Glick’s observation:

88 Billy Budd, ch.22, pp.65-66.
89 Ibid., p.68.
90 Ibid., pp.68-69.
Turning their backs upon one of the most cherished systems of ideas in the American tradition, a system typified by such individualists as Thoreau and Emerson, Melville and Captain Vere brought in the verdict that the claims of civilized society may upon occasion constitute a higher ethic than the claims of "natural law" and personal justice. The ultimate allegiance of the individual, in other words, is not to an absolute moral code, interpreted by his conscience and enlivened by his human sympathies but to the utilitarian principle of social expediency.91

This was the paradox which Melville the thorough democrat so honestly faced. Must the superlatively innocent person then be sacrificed as a price for social expediency? Billy Budd shows that Melville's answer was in the affirmative.

Billy Budd has either been called Melville's 'Testament of Acceptance' or 'Testament of Resistance' or an 'Expression of the irony of Fate'. Critics belonging to the first camp describe Billy Budd as Melville's 'Nunc dimittis' or his 'Everlasting Yea'. (Howard Vincent, Willard Thorp, Newton Arvin, Lewis Mumford, F.O. Matthiessen, William Sedgwick, Leon Howard, John Freeman etc.). Chief in this camp is Grant Watson whose article 'Melville's Testament of Acceptance',92 resulted in a spate of articles in its support.


92 Grant Watson, "Melville's Testament of Acceptance", in Twentieth Century Interpretations of 'Billy Budd' (ed.), Howard Vincent, pp. 11-16.
Watson traces the growth of Melville's writings from *Mardi* to *Billy Budd* and shows how Melville's philosophy has moved gradually from rebellion to acceptance. On the other hand, writers like Schiffman 93 and Campbell 94 urge the hanging-scene in *Billy Budd* and Billy's final words, "God bless Captain Vere", to prove that Melville's approach in this work is ironical. They feel that in *Billy Budd* one sees the Melville of the earlier novels, still rebelling bitterly against social and cosmic evil. They are compelled to see in Billy's execution a case of Melville's nihilistic belief in a doomed universe. The symbolic references to Christ's Ascension and the Lamb of God, according to them, bring into horrid relief the doom of the Christ-like in our universe. G. Giovannini discussing the hanging scene in *Billy Budd*, has refuted the above theory by taking as the basis of his argument chapters XI and XII of *Billy Budd*, which he feels, permit retaining the conventional symbolic meaning as part of the total effect of the hanging scene. "Here as elsewhere", says he, "Melville's symbolism is double-edged; for while the religious symbolism sharply outlines the


94 H.M. Campbell, "The Hanging Scene in Melville's 'Billy Budd'", *Modern Language Notes*, LXIV (June, 1951), pp. 378-381.
brutal injustice of the hanging of Christ-like innocence
and on this level should be taken as an echo of the earlier
Melville bitterly reflecting on a universe out-of-joint, at
the same time it should be seen as confirming Vere's judg-
ment that at the Last Assizes Billy will be saved. A close
reading of the text will show that both from the narrator's
point of view and Billy's, the exclamation 'God bless Captain
Vere' is not ironical. As already shown earlier, Billy does
not have a satiric turn of mind. Therefore such a tone in
his words is out of keeping with his temperament. On the
narrator's part too, such an interpretation is not accept­
able for he has defended Vere's decision fully. Right from
the time he pronounces the punishment till Billy's execution,
Vere is shown to have undergone sufficient agony. His secret
interview with Billy is the clearest proof of this.

It is true that Billy's last words do not in any way
stand for a religious certainty on Melville's part. His
use of religious symbols at the time of Billy's execution
may be for artistic purposes only but they nevertheless
suggest that Melville has come to believe in the enduring
power of Good over Evil. The preserving of the spar on
which Billy was hanged as a piece of the Cross and the
ballad which the sailors composed and sang in Billy's

95 G. Giovannini, "The Hanging Scene in Melville's
'Billy Budd'", Modern Language Notes, LXX
remembrance further favour this argument. Evil is an in-
exorable fact of life. It may succeed in destroying Good but in the process it brings out the noblest in mankind which is always recognised and celebrated. Phil Whithim in his article ‘Billy Budd: Testament of Resistance’, asks,

...is not the 'acceptance' theory contradictory to all that Melville stood for and fought for throughout his entire life? ...Melville was a fighter, he was stubborn, he never accepted the easy way out. Would it not then be contradictory for him, after a life-time of resisting practical evil in the world at large and metaphysical evil in his novels, at the very end to discover that he had been wrong all along and that his duty had always been to lie down and accept evil as un-

avoidable?  

In arguing thus the writer overlooks the very obvious change in Melville's attitude to his problems since he wrote Pierre. Melville's works as also the notes and margi-
nalia in the works he read reflect an acceptance of the dualities and ambiguities of life to which mankind must submit heroically.

Both Billy Budd and Claggart are subject to these dualities i.e. Billy is not pure good nor is Claggart pure

evil. Billy is an embodiment of innocence. He can neither will malice nor understand it in others. But he has his own imperfection. His vocal defect is his tragic flaw. Melville refers to this in Chapter II.

...Billy was a striking instance that the arch interferer, the envious marplot of Eden, still has more or less to do with every human consignment to this planet of earth.97

James Miller observes rightly,

Billy's stammer is emblematic of his human imperfection, a symbol of the necessity for his adhering to the human condition because of his inborn incapacity to attain the divine.98

Billy's stammer would not allow him to defend his innocence and so it became the cause of his violent act. One finds a similar duality in Claggart too. While discussing his character it has been shown, that in spite of his propensity to evil, Claggart is a man of high quality 'both social and moral'. In short what is worth noting is the fact that evil is inextricably woven in the personality of an intellectually sophisticated person like Claggart or an unadulterated innocent like Billy.

Finally Vere's character raises one important point.

97 Billy Budd, ch.2, p.17.
98 James Miller, A Reader's Guide to Herman Melville, ch.11, p.221.
Has Melville revised his earlier opinion about bachelors being shallow creatures? As noted earlier Melville's portraits of bachelors have always been satirical, denying them the ability to dive deep into profound truths. Hence it is significant that Vere, a bachelor, has been assigned the importance of making such a tragic decision. Even otherwise Vere is different from the others, more noticeably in his inclination towards all things mental as against those whose motto was: 'Eat, drink and be merry'. Perhaps in portraying Vere's character Melville wants to suggest that in this complex world of ours no one can remain unaffected by evil, bachelor or otherwise.