Chapter VII

Poetry
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The first volume of Melville's poems entitled Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War was published in 1866, nine years after his last full-length novel, The Confidence-Man. Both these works project the American national crisis. The bitterness and scepticism with which Melville examined his country's progress in The Confidence-Man has already been discussed. Battle-Pieces was inspired by the Civil War which rocked his country for four years. Literary failure, bad health and a precarious financial position continued to dog Melville as persistently as they had done during the period in which he wrote Pierre and The Confidence-Man. Biographers speak of Melville's retreat into an increased introversion after the poor reception of his latest book. The series of lectures which he delivered thereafter neither improved his finances nor satisfied the audiences he addressed. Another noteworthy event during this period was his journey to the Holy Land and the Mediterranean financed by his father-in-law, Judge Shaw with a view to bringing Melville out of his studious habits. This too, as will be shown later did not help much to solve the problems Melville was fighting against. Finally, in 1866 Melville was successful in getting employment as an inspector of Customs at the Port of New York where
he remained up to 1885. This relieved him of the prime necessity of writing to support his family. Both the Civil War and Melville's procuring a job are considered crucial in bringing Melville out of his brooding silence. Newton Arvin and Leon Howard agree about the positive effect of the War on Melville. Arvin says:

Battle-Pieces makes it clear that the War had aroused Melville, for the time at least, from the mood of disbelief and apathy into which he had fallen in the 'fifties, and given him an invigorating sense of participation in the emotions of his countrymen generally.¹

Howard says:

...in his general escape from his self-centeredness he was becoming more perceptive and humane in his consciousness of other people.²

As far back as when he wrote White-Jacket Melville had denounced war in unequivocal terms. He had called it utterly foolish, unchristian, barbarous, brutal, and savoring of the Peejee Islands, cannibalism, saltpetre, and the devil.³

His response to the Civil War however was not as spontaneous in its denunciation. Between White-Jacket (1850)

¹ Newton Arvin, Herman Melville, ch.8, p.269.
² Leon Howard, Herman Melville, ch.11, p. 275.
³ White-Jacket, ch.74, p.315.
and Battle-Pieces (1866) sixteen years had elapsed and in between were written the 'tales of the fifties where one sees the beginning of a change in Melville's attitude to his problems. Battle-Pieces is one more example of the sanity and wisdom that characterize Melville's later works. The whole collection of Battle-Pieces and the prose Supplement attached to it show that Melville had given up the romantic mode of thought which tilts towards the visionary and the idealistic and that he was moving towards a balanced way of thinking in which facts are viewed in their totality. Thus, as one would expect, Melville is not carried away merely by the heroism that war gives an opportunity to display. For, whoever the parties to the War and whatever cause they champion, war brings an equal opportunity to both the sides to show their valour. If war brings glory to the victorious nation, it does so only after it has brought great misery to its people. If a victorious soldier returns home trailing clouds of glory, he also brings with him the horror he has witnessed on the front. However much men dislike war they have been invariably led into all kinds of wars. One notices these paradoxes and contradictions of War throughout Battle-Pieces. They reflect indirectly what Robert Penn Warren calls 'the fundamental ironical dualities of existence' which preoccupied Melville continually viz.
will against necessity, action against ideas, youth against age, the changelessness of man's heart against the concept of moral progress, the bad doer against the good deed, the bad result against the good act, ignorance against fate etc.  

Yet Melville refrains from taking any extreme stand. A spirit of caution and restraint pervades these poems. The foreboding with which he visualized his country's political events stands in marked contrast to the fatuous optimism of most of his countrymen. The exultation over the victories and the admiration for the soldiers are muted and cautious. And what emerges as the final impression of the poems is the pity and terror that mark a War.

The most persistent idea in the poems is that the parties to the War are scapegoats of chance or blind fate. Melville's speculative mind saw the futility of war as well as its fatal inevitability. In *Lee in the Capitol* he says:

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Common's the crime in every civil strife;
But this I feel, that North and South were driven
By fate to arms. For OUR unshriven,
What thousands, truest souls, were tried—
As never may any be again—
All those who stemmed Secession's pride,
But at last were swept by the urgent tide
Into the chasm. I know their pain.  
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5 *Lee in the Capitol*, in *Battle-Pieces*, ed. Hennig Cohen (New York, 1963), p.190, lines 155-162. All references hereafter to the text, will be to this edition.
The words of Ungar, an important character in *Clarel* have more relevance here for their tone of fatality:

... That evil day,
Black in the New World's calendar-
The dolorous winter ere the war;
True bridge of Sighs - so yet 'twill be
Esteemed in riper history -
Sad arch between contrasted eras;
The span of fate; that evil day
When the cadets from rival zones,

The attitude of the young soldiers is marked by spontaneity and inexperience. Youth feels immortal, like the Gods sublime, says Melville in *Ball's Bluff*. A young man can hardly remain aloof from the stirring war. But Melville also notes the pity and irony of the young men marching to their doom:

In Bacchic glee they file toward Fate,
Moloch's uninitiate;
Expectancy, and glad surmise
Of battle's unknown mysteries.
All they feel is this: 'tis glory,
A rapture sharp, though transitory,
Yet lasting in belaureled story.
So they gayly go to fight,
Chatting left and laughing right.

But some who this blithe mood present,
As on in lightsome files they fare,
Shall die experienced ere three days are spent-
Perish, enlightened by the vollied glare,

6. *Clarel*, ed: Walter Bezanson (New York:Hendricks House, Inc.1960), Canto IV, Section v, lines 75-82. [All references hereafter to *Clarel*, will be to this edition ].

7. (Battle-Pieces), *The March into Virginia*, p.44, lines 22-34.
The emotional experience and knowledge that these young soldiers undergo are also reflected in some of these poems. War not merely causes physical wounds but maims the moral sense of a soldier and makes him sterile. The 'still rigidity' and 'Indian aloofness' of the Colonel in The College Colonel are proof of this remark.

It is not that a leg is lost,
It is not that an arm is maimed,
It is not that the fever has racked -
Self he has long disclaimed.

But all through the Seven Days' Fight,
Ah heaven! - What TRUTH to him.8

Another insight that war has brought to Melville is that a combatant may act for Truth or Right but his idea of Truth may be very different from the enemy's. Each party feels that it is fighting for Truth and thus sacrifices everything for its cause. In On the Slain Collegians Melville raises the same point:

What could they else - North or South?
Each went forth with blessings given
By priests and mothers in the name of Heaven;
And honour in both was chief.
Warred one for Right, and one for Wrong?
So be it; ... 9

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8. Ibid., The College Colonel, p.113, lines 22-31.
9. Ibid., On the Slain Collegians, pp.143-144, lines 41-46.
Melville knew very well, the futility of passing any partisan judgment on the War as a whole and significantly his greatest tribute is reserved for the Southerner Stonewall, although his allegiance was to the North. Melville also notes the tragedy of a soldier returning home in triumph with the feeling that some of his companions had to die so that he might live:

There is glory for the brave
Who lead, and nobly save,
But no knowledge in the grave
where the nameless followers sleep.10

The terms 'friend' and 'foe' become ambiguous once the soldiers are wounded or dead. For, war raises artificial barriers among human beings. There are innumerable examples of soldiers of opposite sides extending their hands of friendship in time of common suffering. Hence the senselessness of the strife. Both A Meditation and Shiloh express these ideas.

The soldiers, mounting on their works,
With mutual curious glance have run
From face to face along the fronting show,
And kinsman spied, or friend - even in a foe.11

The church so lone, the log-built one,
That echoed to many a parting groan
And natural prayer

10 Ibid., Sheridan at Cedar Creek, p.112, lines 37-40.
11 Ibid., A Meditation, p.193, lines 3-6.
Of dying foemen mingled there - 
Foemen at morn, but friends at eve - 
Fame or country least they care; 
(What like a bullet can undeceive!)12

In the paradoxes of the conflict Melville saw not 
only an image of his own inner conflicts but a projection 
of the struggle of his countrymen. It was as Hennig Cohen 
says,

...an interruption of the orderly progress 
of his own country, a battle in the endless 
struggle between powers of light and darkness.13

The War was speeding the doom Melville had prophesied for 
his country in Mardi. In Misgivings he muses:

...I muse upon my country's ills - 
The tempest bursting from the waste of Time 
On the world's fairest hope linked with man's 
foulest crime.14

And in The Conflict of Convictions there is a hint of 
Melville's suspicion that the victory of the Civil War 
might betray the cause for which the North was fighting.

Power unanointed may come - 
Dominion (unsought by the free).

12 Ibid., Shiloh, p.70, lines 10-16.
14 (Battle-Pieces), Misgivings, p.37, lines 5-7.
And the Iron Dome,
Stronger for stress and strain,
Fling her huge shadow athwart the main;
But the Founders' dream shall flee...15

The Civil War was not just a struggle between two opposite principles or parties but a metaphor of conflict in general. It proved how such a conflict disrupts order and peace. Besides this, due to the biblical imagery employed to portray the conflict, the tone of these war poems sounds exalted. Hennig Cohen has aptly shown how Battle-Pieces has Miltonic materials in it. The principal Miltonic motifs are the War in heaven and the Fall of man. Melville associates Lucifer, Moloch, Belial, Mammon and Dagon with the South and Michael and Raphael, with the North. Once again The Conflict of Convictions can be taken as an example.

On starry heights
A bugle wails the long recall;
Derision stirs the deep abyss,
Heaven's ominous silence over all.
Return, return, O eager Hope,
And face man's latter fall.
Events, they make the dreamers quail;
Satan's old age is strong and hale,
A disciplined captain, gray in skill,
And Raphael-a white enthusiast still;
Dashed aims, at which Christ's martyrs pale,
Shall Mammon's slaves fulfill?16

16: Ibid., The Conflict of Convictions, p. 37, lines 1-12.
Both at the beginning and end of Battle-Pieces Melville expresses his concern about the fall of America or the 'Second Eden' of mankind. The Melville of White-Jacket would have been repelled by the evil and ugliness of the Civil War but now he is armed to face them with equanimity. For,

No utter surprise can come to him
Who reaches Shakespeare's core;
That which we seek and shun is there -
Man's final lore. 17

In Commemorative of A Naval Victory he suggests the idea that Reality is an inextricable mixture of good and evil. War cannot be an exception to this rule.

...seldom the laurel wreath is seen
Unmixed with pensive pansies dark;
There's a light and a shadow on every man
Who at last attains his lifted mark -
Nursing through night the ethereal spark,
Elate he never can be;
He feels that spirits which glad had hailed
his worth,
Sleep in oblivion. - The shark
Glides white through the phosphorus sea. 18

But more than these poems it is the prose Supplement or the political tract that Melville attached to the volume, that reveals the caution and restraint of his

17 Ibid., The Coming Storm, p.131, lines 13-16.
18 Ibid., Commemorative of a Naval Victory, p.160, lines 19-27.
later works. That he exhorts the victorious North to show 'moderation' and 'candour'; 'prudence' and 'magnanimity' towards the defeated South is obvious because that forms the subject matter of the whole discourse. A policy based on 'Christianity' and 'Machiavelli' is Melville's solution to the problem of Reconstruction. Sentences like: 'The glory of the War falls short of its pathos' or 'Patriotism is not baseness, neither is it inhumanity' or 'zeal is not of necessity religion neither is it always of the same essence with poetry or patriotism', scattered all over the Supplement show once again Melville's reasoned and restrained approach. More thought-provoking are the statements he makes in connection with Slavery and the inexorability of Evil. With regard to the first he argues that the people of the South though they sought to perpetuate the curse of slavery and even to extend it, were not authors of it but were the fated inheritors. Hence rather than heap blame on one section of the nation he feels the whole nation should share the consequences. Melville recognizes slavery as an atheistical evil but he cautions,

in our natural solicitude to confirm the benefit of liberty to the blacks, let us forbear from measures of dubious constitutional rightfulness toward our white countrymen - measures of a nature to provoke,
among other of the last evils, exterminating hatred of race toward race.\textsuperscript{19}

Melville also points out that

emancipation was accomplished not by deliberate legislation; only through agonized violence could so mighty a result be effected.\textsuperscript{20}

So with certain evils, he says man must be patient, for in curbing one evil, he may incur the risk of evils beyond those sought to be remedied. This remark reminds one of a similar remark Melville made in \textit{Mardi}:

\begin{quote}
evil is the chronic malady of the Universe, and checked in one place, breaks forth in another.\textsuperscript{21}
\end{quote}

\textit{Clarel} (1876) subtitled \textit{A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land} is very important as a revelation of Melville’s spiritual and psychological history. It is an equally important document of the spiritual crisis of the Western World particularly the American World of the late nineteenth century. One finds here the same currents and cross-currents of thought that are scattered all over

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{21} \textit{Mardi}, ch.161, p.437.
Melville's works. His reading list and the notes and comments he inserted in the books he read specially after the publication of *Battle-Pieces* show his continued preoccupation with the darker side of life. But over the years his approach has undergone a change. A decade between the *Battle-Pieces* and *Clarel* seems to have brought Melville still nearer to the 'dualistic approach' or the position of 'stoic resignation'. Melville may not have added much to the faith-doubt literature of the late Victorians but *Clarel* strikes a new path in that it portrays the effect of the spiritual crisis on a number of representative figures wedded to different creeds and dogmas. And though like many of his contemporaries Melville does not arrive at any religious belief he comes close to accepting the fact that it is faith alone, be it religious faith or a mere animal faith, that helps man to survive in the midst of the conflicts and contradictions of life.

*Clarel* is a young divinity student who has come to the Holy Land to rejuvenate his dying faith. In Jerusalem he meets and falls in love with a Jewish girl, Ruth, whose father has adopted both the religion and country of the Jews. Ruth's father, Nathan, is killed by Arab marauders. Because Jewish custom forbids Ruth
to communicate with strangers, Clarel cannot see her during her mourning period. Hence he joins a band of pilgrims and travellers for a pilgrimage across the Holy Land. These pilgrims do not in any way accelerate the action of Clarel but they provide Melville with an opportunity to air his views on religion, philosophy, science, politics and society in general. On his return to Jerusalem Clarel finds both Ruth and her mother dead. He is as lonely as he was at the start of his pilgrimage. Although he has met a number of people of different faiths and creeds, not one of them has been able to solve his doubts and queries. The last we see of Clarel is his passing through the Via Crucis to the town.

Clarel gains greater significance if one keeps in mind the circumstances in which Melville made the trip to the Holy Land. An examination of the Journal he kept then will also throw light on Melville's mental state at that time. Since the publication of Pierre in 1852, Melville suffered bouts of psychic exhaustion brought about by bad health, literary failure and religious uncertainty. Letters exchanged among the members of his family show their concern for his disturbed mental state. His father-in-law therefore volunteered to finance Melville's trip to the Holy Land and the Mediterranean, where it was
hoped he would find both physical and mental recuperation. Hawthorne's notes describing his meeting with Melville in Southport, Liverpool, where the latter stopped en-route to the Mediterranean reflects Melville's spiritual condition. Hawthorne records,

Melville informed me that he had 'pretty much made up his mind to be annihilated'; but still he does not seem to rest in that anticipation; and, I think, will never rest until he gets hold of a definite belief. It is strange how he persists... in wandering to-and-fro over these deserts, as dismal and monotonous as the sand hills amid which we were sitting. He can neither believe, nor be comfortable in his unbelief; and he is too honest and courageous not to try to do one or the other.22

Melville's own Journal projects a spirit tormented by religious doubts and metaphysical speculation. An examination of a few lines will elucidate the point. Remarks about the pyramids of Egypt though not connected with Clarel are noteworthy for their metaphysical slant.

I shudder at (the) idea of ancient Egyptians. It was in these pyramids that was conceived the idea of Jehovah. Terrible mixture of the cunning and awful. Moses learned in all the lore of the Egyptians.23

22 Eleanor Melville Metcalf, Herman Melville: Cycle & Epicyle, ch.11, p.161.

Incidentally it may be mentioned that Melville was quite fascinated by the distinction that the Gnostics made between the stern and harsh God of the Old Testament and the New Testament God of love. At least during this period of his life he must have harboured the feeling that the Old Testament God exerts a greater influence on the life of a human being. The magnitude of the pyramids inspired him with feelings of terror and awe. He found them vast, indefinite and incomprehensible. So, he was prompted to conclude that they were built for no holy purpose. He was also struck by the existence of two aspects of nature, side by side. To quote his words he found the line of desert & verdure, plain as line between good & evil. An instant collision of alien elements. A long billow of desert forever hovers as in act of breaking, upon the verdure of Egypt. Grass near the pyramids, but will not touch them — as if in fear or awe of them.24

Because of its speculative overtones, the remark strikes one as typically Melvillean.

If the pyramids failed to evoke a feeling of elevation, the important places he visited thereafter failed to uplift his drooping spirit. The impression that one gathers from his jottings is that only the barrenness

24 Ibid., p.567.
and aridity of the places caught his attention. Under the heading 'Palestine' he remarks:

...all barren - Brook Kedron - immense depth - black & funereal - Valley of Jehosophat, grows more diabolical as approaches Dead Sea - . Mount of Temptation - a black, arid mount - . Where Kedron opens into Plain of Jericho looks like Gate of Hell. ...Ride over mouldy plain to Dead Sea ... foam on beach & pebbles like slaver of mad dog - smarting bitter of the water, - carried the bitter in my mouth all day - bitterness of life - thought of all bitter things - Bitter it is to be poor & bitter, to be reviled, & Oh bitter are these waters of Death, thought I.  

Judea too inspired him with the same sense of desolation and barrenness and decay.

Whitish mildew pervading whole tracts of landscape - bleached - leprosy - encrustation of curses - old cheese - bones of rocks, - crunched, knawed, & mumbled - mere refuse & rubbish of creation - . . . NO MOSS AS IN OTHER RUINS - NO GRACE OF DECAY - NO IVY - THE UNLEAVENED NAKEDNESS OF DESOLATION.  

Even the Holy Sepulchre inspired feelings of revulsion. In his words it

Smells like a dead-house. ...A sort of plague-stricken splendor reigns in the painted & mildewed walls around. ...All is glitter & nothing is gold. A sickening cheat.

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26 Ibid., p.570.
27 Ibid., pp.572-73.
Melville reaches a climax in his observations when he remarks,

I have little doubt, the diabolical landscape of Judea must have suggested to the Jewish prophets, their ghastly theology. ...Is the desolation of the land the result of the fatal embrace of the Deity? Hapless are the favourites of heaven. 28

The imagery of Clarel also evokes a similar sense of sterility. For in the first two cantos, Melville makes considerable use of material from his Journal. This aspect of Clarel reminds one of The Encantadas. But the sense of evil that Melville evokes in that work is repulsive and horrible. In Clarel it becomes awe-inspiring and solemn. Melville's response to the Holy Land was not personal. It represented the response of the nineteenth century in general. Linking Melville's disillusionment with the general American cycle, Bezanson says:

In the nineteenth century, Palestine, as every traveller remarked, was a stripped and denuded land. Some attributed this to fulfillment of prophecy - others to the falling off of terrace cultivation; but whether a traveler chose divine or human explanation, the fact was inescapable. 29

Melville's Journal is a record of the impressions

28 Ibid., p.573.
of a single sensibility whose faith in religion has all but vanished. *Clarel* has a number of figures or characters projected as avowed believers or nonbelievers or those who have conveniently decided not to enter the domain of doubt. Hence it maintains, even to a limited degree, the moral chiaroscuro that Melville's *Journal* lacks. Again what comes to the foreground after a reading of *Clarel* is a number of people as representatives of a number of ideas, with the sites and scenes of the Holy Land much in the background. And this precisely is the change Melville has undergone during the nineteen years since his travels. He has become less concerned with an examination of his own faith or doubt than with the effect of either on other people. In other words he has now come to accept the universality of religious doubt and is preoccupied with examining the validity of the response of a number of people. Moreover this shows how far Melville has moved from the extreme introversion of Pierre. In his isolation, Pierre refuses to accept anybody’s help or guidance in solving his problems. Clarel though equally tormented by feelings of isolation is prepared to look around. Bezanson expresses the same idea when he remarks:

> Although questions of belief continue throughout the poem, even reaching a tone of insistence...
in the final cantos, the inner movement, as defined by Clarel's experience, is away from theology towards a kind of pragmatic humanism or speculative psychology. 30

Among the many characters in Clarel the four monomaniacs, Agath-Celio-Mortmain-Ungar, claim priority in this discussion, since monomania in one form or the other fascinated Melville throughout his life. None of these is a monomaniac in the sense that Ahab was but like him they give Melville an opportunity to review some of his own private tensions of the past and present. Celio is a deformed Italian youth in revolt against the Roman Church. He has come to Palestine in search of a new faith but finds himself all the more tormented by doubt. His defiance of Christ at the Arch of Doce Homo near Via Crucis, his flight out of the Gate of St. Stephen, the lonely night hours he spends in the tomb of St. James and his challenge to the Terra Santa monks in Bethany are arresting. Clarel meets Celio but twice, yet finds an instinctive sympathy with his lonely dissent more so after he reads the latter's journal and finds in him 'a second self'. Clarel is struck by his thesis that if Christianity is not true, Christ's death has merely enlarged the margin for despair. Clarel too appears to be grappling with the same

30 Ibid., p. ixix.
He meets Mortmain, the bitter Swede next. The first impression that Mortmain gives is that he is committed to self-annihilation. He is drowned in political, philosophical and religious despair because the edifice of Social Good he had tried to build has collapsed. Due to his bitter experiences he has reverted to a Hobbesian view of human nature:

Man's vicious; snaffle him with kings;
Or, if kings cease to curb, devise
Severer bit.31

Mortmain echoes Melville's own belief about God being the author of the evil in the world when he says:

Nearer the core than man can go
Or Science get - nearer the slime
Of nature's rudiments and lime
In chyle before the bone. Thee, thee,
In thee the filmy cell is spun -
The mould thou art of what men be;
Events are all in thee begun -
By thee, through thee! - Undo, undo,
..., and still renew
The fall forever!

To him the sins of the spirit are more wicked than those of the flesh. So he feels that it was not "carnal

31. Clarel, II - iii - 189-91. (Part II, Canto iii, lines 189-91.)
32. Ibid.,II-xxxvi - 96-105.
that was the crime of Sodom and Gomorrah but:

Things hard to prove: decorum's wile,
Malice discreet, judicious guile:
Good done with ill intent - reversed;
Best deeds designed to serve the worst;
And hate which under life's fair hue
Prowls like the shark in sunned Pacific blue.33

His unsuccessful search for the uncreated Good whose absence is the cause of Creeds and Atheists, mobs and laws has convinced him that:

The good have but a patch at best,
The wise their corner; for the rest-Malice divides with ignorance.34

But more than these ills it is something deeper - deep as nature's mine - that is tormenting him. His most persistent belief is that man is basically evil and that Christ's life proves what the role of goodness is in an evil world. The circumstances of his birth and exile link him with the Ishmael figure Melville was so preoccupied with. Mortmain becomes the mouth-piece of Melville's most pessimistic views on mankind in general and on religion, politics and society in particular.

Dramatically, Agath the third monomaniac makes less impact on the reader than Mortmain does. For he embodies

33 Ibid., II - xxxvi - 34-39.
34 Ibid., II - iv - 90-92.
the animal-like patience and mute resignation of a person who has undergone immense suffering. Melville calls him a 'pickled old sea-Solomon'. He seems to be as old as the ancient sea. His description of the far-off blasted isles and the tortoises living on them, shows how incapable he is of comprehending the inscrutable forces of the universe. Dumb reverence for the 'Insoluble' is therefore in Melville's opinion, the only approach left open to him. His patience and resignation link him with the tortoises of the Encantadas, and the scars he has received from nature and man with the patient Hunilla. Listening to Agath's account Clarel admits to himself that it is utterly impossible for man to solve the mystery of the world:

What may man know? (Here pondered Clarel) let him rule -
Pull down, build up, creed, system, school,
And reason's endless battle wage,
Make and remake his verbiage -
But solve the world! Scarce that he'll do:
Too wild it is, too wonderful. 35

Next to Mortmain, it is Ungar whom Melville exploits the most to air his views on the problems that tormented him. Less wonder that Ungar is projected as an American unlike the other important figures who have a European origin. He is a self-exiled ex-officer of the Southern

Confederacy and has come to the East to perform military services for the Egyptians and Turks. Melville calls him 'A wandering Ishmael from the West'. He is a bitter and relentless critic of contemporary Americans who from their lofty ideals of democracy have sunk to the ideals of materialism, capitalism and ignorance. His bitterness at the Southern defeat and the rottenness of the Reconstruction spur him to fierce attacks on Western civilization. He has lost faith in democracy and calls it a 'Harlot on horseback' and an 'arch-strumpet of an impious age' out to barbarize the world. Ten years after the Civil War, Ungar proclaims what Melville had predicted in the supplement.

The years of the War tried our devotion to the Union; the time of peace may test the sincerity of our faith in democracy.\textsuperscript{36}

Melville-Ungar's anger sounds justified. For, once the nation plunged into the war, it forsook its humanitarian traditions in a brutal Reconstruction. For the first time the spirit of acquisition and exploitation became dominant in American life. The spiritual exhortations of Emerson began to be used for aggrandizement. The American democracy of the post-war period was scarcely recognisable from the one Tocqueville had so eloquently described in supplement to Battle-Pieces, p.201.
1835. Like Mortmain, Ungar is convinced of the Fall of man. More than this he is convinced of the Fall of the New World which he calls 'the debasement of the last Eden'. From what has been happening in his country in the present he predicts:

Whatever happen in the end,
Be sure 'twill yield to one and all
New confirmation of the fall
Of Adam. Sequel may ensue,
Indeed, whose germs one now may view:
Myriads playing pygmy parts-
Debased into equality:
In glut of all material arts
A civic barbarism may be:
Man disennobled - brutalized
By popular science - Atheized
Into a smatterer -

... Dead level of rank common-place:
An Anglo-Saxon China, see,
May on your vast plains shame the race
In the Dark Ages of Democracy.

Such major sensibilities of the poem as Vine and Rolfe are fascinated by Mortmain and Ungar. Clarel himself feels more attracted towards the deep thrusts of Mortmain than the superficial skimmings of Derwent. But though all of them understand his agony, his dedication to self-annihilation alienates him from them. All the important pilgrims except Derwent again, share Ungar's zeal and

anger. Rolfe recognizes his greatness. But his tirade against man and history provokes Clarel to say:

If man in truth be what you say,
And such the prospects for the clay,
And outlook of the future - cease!
What's left us but the senses' sway?
Sinner, sin out life's petty lease:
We are not worth the saving.  

This duality in the make-up of man viz. his depravity and his nobility had always disturbed Melville. Right from his earliest work Melville projects the dual nature of man. He knew that man was not perfect. Nevertheless, he believed that there was a germ of goodness which could be cultivated. In The Confidence-Man, however, Melville appears most cynical about mankind. But after that, like his approach to the other problems, his approach to mankind too underwent a change. Feelings of derision and contempt take the place of pity for the plight of man, specially in his later works beginning with the War poems.

Three more characters affect Clarel in different degrees. They are Derwent, Nehemiah and Vine. Derwent is a priest of the Anglican Church. He is a staunch believer in the benignity of God and the goodness of man. He is the most secular of all the pilgrims and is naturally

38 Ibid., IV-xxii - 64-69.
sociable. His persistent optimism prevents him from diving deep into the contradictions of life. He is addicted to whatever is new and progressive and so he cannot share the disillusionment of some of his companions. His hope for the future of mankind is unbounded. He always keeps 'on the right of the sun' and Christ, for all his suffering appears to him 'the Pontiff of optimists supreme'. Mortmain, the 'black' Swede is his fiercest opponent and when he dies Ungar takes his place and continues his tirade against him. Both these 'mad men' wage such a savage battle against Derwent that his stature is all but demolished. The other major pilgrims like him as a person though they do not fully admire his philosophy. Even Rolfe, who is such a balanced personality prefers to stand by Ungar against Derwent. The short interview Clarel has with Derwent when he bares his doubts to him and Derwent's answer to Clarel have often been pointed out by critics to prove Derwent's shallowness.

Alas, too deep you dive,

Derwent tells Clarel and continues:

But hear me yet for little space:
This shaft you sink shall strike no bloom:
The surface, ah, heaven keeps that green;
Green, sunny: nature's active scene,
For man appointed, man's true home.39

39 Ibid., III - xxi - 312-17.
Yet if these words are examined along with those that precede them, one feels that what Derwent says is not as shallow as one is likely to imagine. In fact his philosophy of life comes very near to Melville's. Derwent tells Clarel that like him he too had faced the swarm of 'buzzing doubts' in his youth. But he has realized the futility of fighting them out or brooding over them in 'selfish introverted search'. Christ, he remarks did not follow either path. Instead he shared man's sufferings. Therefore he advises Clarel:

Be not extreme. Midway is best.  
Herein 'tis never as by Nile -  
From waste to garden but a stile.  
Betwixt rejection and belief,  
Shadings there are - degrees, in brief.40

And his words, "Let me live by the heart" are in substance the very words Melville uses in the Epilogue as his advice to the despairing Clarel. Melville may not have wanted to advocate the 'blind optimism' of a Derwent but at the same time he was, as his later works show, moving away from the 'black despair' of a Mortmain and achieving a centrality which recognizes both the Good and the Evil.

Nehemiah is an evangelical and a millenarian. He roams about the Holy Land with an open Bible and distri-

40 Ibid., 283-87.
butes his tracts on the Second Coming of Christ and the New Jerusalem. He is impervious to doubt. He dies while sleep-walking to the Dead Sea, pursuing his vision of the New Jerusalem. Leon Howard calls him 'the sanctified ghost of Captain Ahab' because of his obsession for a single idea viz. the Coming of Christ but feels that Melville used Nehemiah not to dramatize his wild emotions but as a means of quieting them. Clarel admires him but there is little in Nehemiah's life that can seem relevant to his problems for he is a stranger both to doubt and to the realities of his own age.

Vine, the silent pilgrim appears to have affected Clarel to a great extent but in a negative sense. His reserve indicates depth of wisdom. And for all his silences Vine is keenly sensitive to suffering in others. Of all the pilgrims he alone sees the extent of Mortmain's agony at Nehemiah's death. The despairing Clarel tries unsuccessfully to find a chord of sympathy in Vine. In fact Vine refuses to share his thoughts and feelings with any of the pilgrims. When Clarel seeks communion with him regarding the problems that torment him, he is all but repulsed by Vine's advice to him:

41 Leon Howard, Herman Melville, ch.12, p.301.
why, on this vernal bank to-day,
Why bring oblations of thy pain
To one who hath his share? here fain
Would lap him in a chance reprieve?
Lives none can help ye; that believe,
Art thou the first soul tried by doubt?
Shalt prove the last? Go, live it out.

Vine sounds too detached, cold and self-sufficient to
Clarel, who needs, more than anything else, the emotional
support of a friend who would be ready to share his doubts.

The Jew geologist Margoth needs examination in so far
as he is a satirical portrait of a person wedded to scientific materialism. For him there is no mystery beyond the
physical senses. Olivet and Gethsemane inspire him with
no religious feelings. He wants the benefits of Science
to be brought to these places so that Gethsemane may have
a Railway Station and Olivet a Telegraph. He is an apostate
and delights in refuting the biblical prophecy. He becomes
a convenient target for Melville's attacks on materialism,
science, commercialism and atheism. Melville's approach
to Margoth can be appreciated fully if one keeps in mind
the conflict between Science and Religion that had gathered momentum during the post-war period in America. Inherited beliefs were being attacked from three fronts.
Geological discoveries were shaking the foundation of

42 Clarel, II - xxvii - 119-25.
Genesis and Revelation. Higher criticism was examining Sacred History with scientific methods and the theory of evolution was demolishing the divinity of man. In other words Science was replacing Religion in the lives of mankind. All through his works one finds Melville showing a red signal to his over-confident countrymen. In Clarel one finds some of his most sceptical remarks about the efficacy of Science in solving the mysteries of the Universe, and eradicating the miseries of mankind. In this connection a few remarks made by important pilgrims in Clarel are worth noting.

...Science but deals With Nature; Nature is not God; Never she answers our appeals; Or, if she do, but mocks the clod. 43

says the Dominican, Rolfe sounds more sceptical when he says:

Though luminous on every hand, The breadths of shallow knowledge more expand? Much as a light-ship keeper pines Mid shoals immense, where dreary shines His lamp, we toss beneath the ray of Science's beacon. This to trim Is now man's barren office. 44

Margoth's inscription under Mortmain's Slanting Cross

on the banks of the Dead Sea,

43 Ibid., II - xxv - 148-51.
44 Ibid., II - xxi - 96-102.
I, Science, I whose gain's thy loss,
I slanted thee, thou Slanting Cross.45

represents the blind confidence of a section of his countrymen who believed that Science would replace Religion in man's search for the Ultimate. But Clarel seems to have the last word on the subject. His view comes very close to Melville's pessimistic views on the role of Science in man's life. Winding his way through the Via Crucis, after Ruth's death, Clarel murmurs:

They wire the world - far under sea
They talk; but never comes to me
A message from beneath the stone.46

If the reference to the words 'beneath the stone' is not taken in the narrow sense of Ruth lying beneath the stone but in the broad, general sense of the Mysterious and the Unfathomable, then Clarel's words gain greater significance. They could mean that for all its miraculous inventions Science has still not helped man to penetrate the mysteries of the Universe.

The last most important character, Rolfe, emerges as the figure who comes nearest to Melville's conception of an ideal man. For he represents the union of a 'genial

46 Ibid., IV - xxxiv - 51-53.
heart' and a 'brain austere'. Like Melville, he is a mariner and mystic. His religious views are tolerant and he shares his country's spiritual crisis. He doubts whether any single creed or dogma can provide a solution for the baffling problems of life. He can appreciate the bitter anguish of Mortmain and Ungar though he cannot approve of the despair to which they surrender. Similarly he refuses to be misguided by the facile assurances of a Darwent or a Nargoth. Clarel admires his courageous grappling with unwelcome truths. He is also struck by Rolfe's wavering convictions but presumes that they spring from the latter's dislike for compressing experience into artificial forms. Rolfe startles the pilgrims by some of his observations specially the one that implies that the life of a tattooed Greek or Polynesian is superior to that of a Christian. The primitive, simple principles of Christianity move him deeply but he doubts if modern life can survive on such principles. Man needs religion, he feels, chiefly because he is ignorant of the meaning of life and is terrified of the Unknown. Hence,

...long as children feel affright
In darkness, men shall fear a God;
And long as daisies yield delight
Shall see His foot prints in the sod.
...
His views on Evil come very close to Melville’s specially when he says:

Evil and good they braided play
Into one cord.48

If as biographers and critics say Rolfe is a self-portrait, he represents the genial Melville more than the Melville afflicted with doubts and morbidity. This latter side of Melville is projected through Mortmain and Ungar. Moreover Rolfe’s ranging mind is very much like Melville’s. This is clear from Rolfe’s participation in all the important discussions of the poem. And more often than not Rolfe voices Melville’s opinions.

Clarel is a biographical document in so far as it reflects the desperate need Melville felt for a specific religious faith. Most of the conflicts Clarel is shown to undergo are Melville’s own. Clarel is also a historical document of the Western world of the late nineteenth century. The various pilgrims, both European and American,

47 Ibid., I xxxi - 191-200.
48 Ibid., IV - iv - 28-29.
are like Clarel, seekers after spiritual refreshment. At one point in their discussion they engage in analysing the reasons for the loss of religious faith from the life of modern man. They look back to the Past with nostalgia. Men were not lettered then, they feel, but religion had a firm hold on those people. Religion was like the good guest, first served and last. And the church was like a bonfire round which the rank and file gathered together. Men were bound by the ties of tradition, religion, legend and poetry. Much of the evil in the Present, the pilgrims feel, springs from the loss of these values. They also feel that in his excessive desire for freedom, man has cut himself off from these ties. This has resulted in the disintegration of life first set in motion by the Reformation and then by the revolutionary ideas of Europe. They all agree that Science and rationalism have fostered a climate of doubt and scepticism. This climate of doubt has polluted the Holy Land too. As Rolfe says at one place:

... All now's revised:
Zion, like Rome, is Niebuhrized,
Yes, doubt attends. Doubt's heavy hand
Is set against us; and his brand
Still warreth for his natural lord—
King Common-Place—whose rule abhorred
Yearly extends in vulgar sway,
Absorbs Atlantis and Cathay?49

Rolfe’s remark reminds one of Melville’s note in his *Journal* of 1856-57 about Niebuhr and Strauss who because of their penetration and acumen have denuded man’s spirit of its bloom.

Because of his increasing preoccupation with the things of the mind, man has forgotten his sentiments and his vital affections which do not draw precepts from reason’s arid law. This leads the pilgrims to compare Protestantism with Catholicism. The former has lost cogency because of its severance from the original Church and its encouragement to the discoveries of Science and the degrading materialism of society. But Catholicism has survived in spite of its fixed and unyielding form because of its ability to adjust itself to new times. Rome persists stoutly because of its acceptance of man’s deepest sentiments. Rome accepts that ‘man’s heart is what it used to be’. It goes one step further. It recognizes the organic processes of life as also the dualism of good and evil. In defending Roman Catholicism Melville is indirectly stressing two important points. Man cannot progress with the aid of the mind alone. His heart plays an equally important role. Again in recognizing the discipline that the Roman Catholic Church imposes on its adherents, Melville is defending the necessity of discipline for the enforce-
ment of any faith. Protestantism has failed, Melville seems to imply, because it has allowed its adherents unlimited freedom. Once again Rolfe's remark in this connection is pertinent.

Who's gained by all the sacrifice
Of Europe's revolutions? Who?
The Protestant? the Liberal?
... - not at all:
Rome and the Atheist have gained:
These two shall fight it out - these two;
Protestantism being retained
For base of operations sly
By Atheism. 50

Protestantism upholds the importance of the individual as against the community of which he is a part. Catholicism has always favoured the subordination of an individual to the community. This may have brought certain restrictions to the individual but in the long run it has prevented the anarchy and lawlessness which result from extreme individualism. This realization on Melville's part shows once again how far he has moved from the radical Protestantism of a Taji or an Ahab or a Pierre.

With the death of Ruth and her mother, Clarel finds himself desolate and lonely once again. He has been a seeker in vain. In the last part of the poem he is seen

50 Ibid., II - xxvi - 139-47.
following a train of pilgrims, 'cross-bearers' all, as Melville calls them, moving towards the town. Clarel would have become one of the most pessimistic and despairing works Melville has written if it had ended with the last words, Clarel murmurs to himself. But the 'Epilogue' that Melville has attached to the poem tilts the scales to the other side. Moby-Dick too ends with an 'Epilogue' where Ishmael's resurrection from the whirlpool of destruction is briefly narrated. But Ahab's passionate struggle has been so predominant throughout the book that Ishmael's resurrection, significant though it is, fails to have an impact on the readers. Melville does not directly ally himself either with Ahab or Ishmael. The readers are left on their own to sift Melville's philosophy. But in the 'Epilogue' to Clarel, Melville for the first time voices his belief:

The running battle of the star and clod
Shall run forever - if there be no God.

... 
But through such strange illusions have they passed
Who in life's pilgrimage have baffled striven-
Even death may prove unreal at the last,
And stoics be astounded into heaven.51

51 Ibid., 'Epilogue'- IV - xxxv - 16-26.
But it is the last verse which contains the narrator's advice to the despairing Clarel that stands as a 'coda' not only to the 'Epilogue' but to Melville's philosophy in general.

Then keep thy heart, though yet but ill-resigned-
Clarel, thy heart, the issues there but mind;
That like the crocus budding through the snow-
That like a swimmer rising from the deep-
That like a burning secret which doth go
Even from the bosom that would hoard and keep;

Emerge thou mayst from the last whelming sea;
And prove that death but routs life into victory. 52

This is not merely an acceptance of faith but an acknowledgment of the supremacy of the heart for it is there that the conflicts are resolved. Merely to endure and persist against heavy odds is itself an affirmation or an animal faith in the victory of life over death. Merlin Bowen is right when he says,

What more is faith at bottom than this same unreasoning assertion of life in the face of its opposite - the holding up, in Ishmael's image, of 'an idiot candle in the heart of that almighty forlornness'? 53

If because of its Christian setting and the portrayal of

52 Ibid., 27-34.
the Western or American crisis Clarel appeals more to a Western sensibility, the 'Epilogue' holds universal appeal for modern readers of all faiths both Eastern and Western. For Clarel does not end on a note of Christian faith but on a plea for the rejection of despair and an acceptance of faith in man's ability to surmount the obstructions life throws in his way. As Melville says in one of his War-poems, although

Man's a weed, man is noble, man is brave. 54

Melville published two more volumes of poems entitled John Harr and Other Sailors (1888) and Timoleon (1891). These were poems of his leisure, written after his retirement from the Custom House. They provide an important index to Melville's mental state during the last years of his life. The first volume is a collection of poems reminiscent of his early sea-faring life. The profound impression that his life at sea had left on him lasted throughout his life. In these poems the sea is still a source of destruction. Even the sea-creatures are of the ferocious kind. But the spirit that pervades this collection is not the angry timonism of Moby-Dick but the stoic resignation of his later works. The poem entitled The Berg

54 (Battle-Pieces), A Dirge for McPherson, p.113, lines 17-18.
is a case in point. Melville describes both the berg and the ship it destroys with detachment. The 'infatuate ship' marches to its destruction just as violently as Ahab does. But the indifference and brute destructive power of the 'stolid iceberg' are described with an equanimity that one misses in Moby-Dick. In short the predominant tone of these poems is what these words express:

Healed of my hurt, I laud the inhuman Sea-
Yea, bless the Angels Four that there convene;
For healed I am even by their pitiless breath
Distilled in wholesome dew named rosmarine.5

The Timoleon collection offers a deeper revelation of Melville's inner struggles. For example the poem entitled Timoleon which heads the collection, not only dramatizes a biographical fact viz. the conflict between Herman and Gansevoort in winning their mother's love, but asks the question whether ideal natures and idealism are just shadows of the imagination. Though the questions Melville asks in this poem are much the same as they were before, the manner of asking them has changed. Timoleon is not an Ahab or a Pierre thundering against God but a man mellowed down by hard experience questioning in a tone of subdued melancholy and pity. Both as a man and as an

55 pebbles, p. 206. (Collected Poems of Herman Melville, ed. by Howard P. Vincent.)
artist, the contradictoriness of life had preoccupied Melville. As a man he had had enough difficulty fusing these contradictions of life into the unity of reality. In the poem *Art* he expresses the difficulty an artist faces in uniting these contradictory elements into an artistic whole.

But form to lend, pulsed life create,
What unlike things must meet and mate:
A flame to melt - a wind to freeze;
Sad patience - joyous energies;
Humility - yet pride and scorn;
Instinct and study; love and hate;
Audacity - reverence. These must mate,
And fuse with Jacob's mystic heart,
To wrestle with the angel - Art.56

Till the last years of his life Melville continued to take an interest in the events of contemporary America. Poems like *The Age of Antonines*, *The American Aloe on Exhibition*, *The Enthusiast*, *In the Hall of Marbles* etc. show his awareness of the happenings in his country. However, the anger and bitterness of his earlier works have been replaced by a resigned pessimism. His approach can very well be summed up in his own words in a letter, written to James Billson, his English admirer, (January 1885). While discussing James Thomson's pessimism Melville remarked:

56 *Art*, p.231. (*Collected Poems of Herman Melville*).
As to his pessimism; altho' neither pessimist nor optimist myself, nevertheless I relish it in the verse if for nothing else than as a' counterpoise to the exorbitant hopefulness, juvenile and shallow, that makes such a bluster in these days - at least in some quarters.  

Neebs and 'ildings, dedicated to his wife and the other miscellaneous poems like the collection of the Rose Poems left in manuscript form provide further proof of the tranquillity that Melville achieved in the later years of his life. The disastrous images of the sea and the shark are completely replaced by images of the peace of domesticity and the simplicity of the countryside. The poem entitled Pontoosuc, the last poem of his manuscript volume, provides a fitting finale to the drama of Melville's life and works. The lake referred to is the Lake of Pontoosuc, a favourite haunt of Melville's. The spirit of the poet communicates with the spirit of the lake and finds solace in the wisdom the latter propounds through the example of Nature's cycle of birth-death-renewal.

Dies, all dies!  
The grass it dies, but in vernal rain  
Up it springs and it lives again;  
Over and over, again and again,  
It lives, it dies and it lives again.

Who sighs that all dies!
Summer and winter, and pleasure and pain
And everything everywhere in God's reign,
They end and anon they begin again.58

The spirit then whispers to the poet:

Since light and shade are equal set
And all revolves, nor more ye know;
Ah, why should tears the pale cheek fret
For aught that waneth here below.
Let go, let go!59

The union between the poet and the spirit though reported
in physical terms has philosophical significance for the
poet unites not with a person but with the Universe which
like an ordinary individual has to be won over by love and
understanding, not by power and defiance.

58 Pontoosuc. p.397. (Collected Poems of Herman Melville).