Chapter III

Works before Moby-Dick
Herman Melville's first work, *Typee*, published in 1846, was received by the American readers in general as a simple, straightforward and humorous account of the author's experiences in the Polynesian Islands. Even the reviews that appeared in the literary journals of the time including the one by no less a person than Nathaniel Hawthorne, expressed the same opinion. *Typee* was considered to be a free and effective picture of barbarian life in an unadulterated state that is rarely found today. The spate of criticism that greeted Melville's works after 1920 is divided as regards the real meaning of the book. On one extreme is a writer like Charles Anderson, who has tried to prove that *Typee* is nothing more than

a faithful delineation of island life and scenery in precivilization Nukahiva, with the exception of numerous embellishments and some minor errors...  

What lies at the core of the book, he feels, after stripping it of its Rousseauistic over-praise of savage virtues, is a fairly comprehensive understanding of ancient Marquesan native culture. At the other extreme is a writer like James Miller who has ex-


pressed the view that *Typee* signifies the symbolic search for
and the failure to find an uncontaminated place, a Garden of
Eden, away from contaminated civilization.

Read independently of the bulk of Melville's writing,
*Typee* appears to the reader as a charming picture of a pri-
mitive Utopia interspersed with piquant criticism of the
burdensome artificialities of civilization. Examined as an
integral part of Melville's works, it reveals him as an
imaginative writer who is struck with the contradictions
and ambiguities that form a part of the lot of mankind and
which baffle the mind of a thinker. Hence one agrees with
remarks like:

*Typee* is not overtly a philosophical book. ... the actions that occur, the symbols Melville
employs, and the emotional undercurrents of
*Typee* are the matrix out of which more phi-
losophical utterances emerge in later books.  

OR

...here at the beginning of Melville's literary
career, the stuff of his experience seems to
hover on the verge of the symbolic expansion it
was to undergo in *Mardi* and *Moby-Dick*.  

Two contradictions have caught the attention of


4 Charles Feidelson, *Symbolism and American Liter-
ature* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press,
1953), ch.5, p.165.
Melville during his sojourn in the South Seas. They are:
the apparently beneficial influence of the American and
European missionaries, concealing the actual exploitation
and cruelties perpetrated on the natives, and the superio-

rity of the Savage over his civilized counterpart. When
Melville landed in Boston in 1844, after his voyage in the
South Seas, he saw the American provincial society in a
state of transformation. During the years between Melville's
birth and his maturity, the North Atlantic States saw the old
provincial, land-oriented culture being replaced by a new
society based on trade and imperialistic enterprise and
military expeditions. Optimism was the keynote of all the
facets of American life. America was the chosen country on
which God had thrown the burden of civilizing and evange-
lizing the heathens of the world. With this obsession in
mind both merchants and missionaries set out with their
merchandise and their gospel to the distant Pacific Islands.

Typee partly aims at showing how far these commercial
and religious enterprisers succeeded in carrying out their
mission. What was intended to be missionary work actually
ended in perpetrating enormities on the inoffensive natives
of the South Seas. These enormities were seldom proclaimed
at home. Even when they were revealed, they were merely
censured as wrong. Actually, as Melville says,

"the enormities perpetrated in the South Seas
upon the inoffensive islanders well nigh
pass belief. ... there is, ... many a petty trader that has navigated the Pacific whose course from island to island might be traced by a series of cold-blooded robberies, kidnappings, and murders, the iniquity of which might be considered almost sufficient to sink her guilty timbers to the bottom of the sea.

This is in connection with the merchants. About the missionaries too, Melville is equally bitter.

Among the islands of Polynesia, no sooner are the images overturned, the temples demolished, and the idolaters converted into nominal Christians, than disease, vice, and premature death make their appearance. The depopulated land is then recruited from the rapacious hordes of enlightened individuals who settle themselves within its borders, and clamorously announce the progress of the Truth.

But people at home are prepared to overlook all this for more important is the fact that a community of disinterested merchants and devoted self-exiled heralds of the Cross are located on the very spot that was once defiled by the presence of idolatry. Melville's bitter assessment of the achievement of these enterprisers is that they have civilized the natives into draught horses and evangelized them into beasts of burden.

---

5. *Typee*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1950), ch.4, p.31. All references hereafter to the text, will be to this edition.

6. Ibid., Ch. 26, p.245.
The second contradiction Melville examines in *Typee* is that, in his day-to-day living, a savage 'to whom the amenities of a civilized world are denied is much superior to the white man. A few points of contrast that Melville makes are worth noting. The greatest source of blessing, next to the 'healthful physical existence' of the Typees, lay in the absence of 'Money', the root of all evil. As such Melville says,

There were no foreclosure of mortgages, no protested notes, no bills payable, no debts of honour in Typee; no unreasonable tailors and shoemakers, perversely bent on being paid; no duns of any description;...; no poor relations,...; no destitute widows with their children starving on the cold charities of the world; no beggars; no debtors' prisons; no proud and hard-hearted nabobs in Typee;... 7

The evils that the amenities of civilization bring in their train are absent in these remote Islands.

In a primitive state of society, the enjoyments of life, though few and simple, are spread over a great extent, and are unalloyed; but Civilization, for every advantage she imparts, holds a hundred evils in reserve - the heart burnings, the jealousies, the social rivalries, the family dissensions, and the thousand self-inflicted discomforts of refined life, which make up in units the swelling aggregate of human misery, are unknown among these unsophisticated people. 8

---

7 Ibid., ch.17, pp.156-57.
8 Ibid., p.154.
If civilized man had the advantage of his mills and machines and factories and railroads, he could not enjoy the rich greenery with which any South Sea Island is invariably surrounded. The peace and quiet and the leisure which an inhabitant of the Typee Valley enjoyed was lost in the rush, the din and the tension of a typically industrialized town or city. The economic abundance which is nature's gift to the Typees can be had by civilized men only by hard labour, killing competition and frustration. Religious and sexual taboos which are the hallmark of a white man's life, denying him the natural expression and fulfilment of his basic appetites and desires are conspicuously absent in this Happy Valley. Belonging to a period when an average American experienced very keenly a sense of insecurity in all the fields of life, Melville must have been surprised at the completely secure and carefree life of the Savage. The fraternal feeling which pervaded the island struck Melville as a virtue to be carried to the snobbish and hypocritical America of the nineteenth century. Most of all he was struck by the absence of any kind of coercion or external law, the absurdities of the 'taboo' aside.

If truth and justice, and the better principles of our nature, cannot exist unless enforced by the statute-book, how are we to account for the social condition of the Typees?\(^9\)

\(^9\) Ibid., ch.27, p.254.
asks Melville. It is because, he feels,

they deal more kindly with each other, and
are more humane, than many who study essays
on virtue and benevolence, and who repeat
every night that beautiful prayer breathed
first by the lips of the divine and gentle
Jesus.10

Even the cannibalism of the Typees appears mild when compara-
red with the barbarity of modern civilized warfare. For,
the fiend-like skill the white civilized man displays in
the invention of all manner of death-dealing engines, the
vindicativeness with which he carries on his wars, and the
misery and desolation that follow in their train are enough
to distinguish him as the most ferocious animal on the face
of the earth. Melville cannot believe that the frightful
tales he has heard about the ferocity of the savages are
ture. And he frankly declares that after passing a few
weeks in the Valley of the Marquesas, he formed a higher
estimate of human nature than he had ever before enter-
tained.

Yet paradoxically Melville—Tommo is anxious to escape
from this paradise on earth. And it is in the protagonist's
urge to escape that the central meaning of this apparently
frivolous work lies. Tommo wanted to escape because he

10 Ibid.
realized that below the manifold virtues which the Typees possessed lurked shortcomings which no intelligent civilised man could ignore. The Typees were undoubtedly gentle, humane, simple, genial, cheerful, unspoilt and unaffected and many things more but they lacked the most fundamental quality that a modern man strives for - that is a mind or a soul. The indolent life of the Typees, happy and carefree as it is lacks intellectual and spiritual consciousness. D.H. Lawrence says aptly:

Whatever else the South Sea Islander is, he is centuries and centuries behind us in the life-struggle, the consciousness-struggle, the struggle of the soul into fullness.\[11\]

Between the civilized and the savage there is an unbridgeable gulf. However bitter the experiences of civilization has been and however false and cruel our mode of life, we have been struggling and moving forward. Hence we can be in sympathy with the savage and imbibe some of his virtues but we cannot turn the current of our life backward to their stage. Melville could not, much as he admired the savages, so he fled. This acceptance of reality on Melville's part disproves the contention that Melville was an idealist or a romanticist.

Again the system of cannibalism and tattooing which Melville had occasion to witness while he was on the island and to which he himself was likely to be subjected, suggested to him that the primitive goodness of a savage existed on an instinctive level and that from this level could also spring primitive hostility. This marks the protagonist's first glimpse into evil. Beneath the placid surface of the charming and the spontaneous could be hidden the repulsive and the horrible. What was revolting was not only the small value the Typees placed on human life but also their total unconcern with regard to its destruction. Merlin Bowen remarks thus in this connection:

...the final revelation of cannibalism at the heart of Fayaway's unfallen world comes to Tommo with the shock of a familiar door opening suddenly upon darkness.  

In short, even in this Garden of Eden, where the penalty of the Fall pressed lightly, there lurked the serpent of evil. Melville thus differs from the primitivists of his time who exalted the Noble Savage, disregarding his propensity for evil. And unconscious as he might have been, he projects the double vision - the existence of Good along with Evil - right from his first work.

---

Melville's attitude is sufficiently clear for one to conclude that the reason for his wanting to go back to civilization was not only the danger of being eaten up by the savages but also having his intellectual and spiritual life permanently arrested in an atmosphere of pure instincts. A reversion to a life of pure senses was not what civilized man needed to escape from his miseries. That would lead to stagnation, decay and death. Civilized man needed to balance his cares and conflicts with the peace and harmony of primitive life. This did not necessarily require a visit to the primitive lands. One could establish one's own 'Tahiti' in one's own being to which one could revert and from which one could emerge with one's spirit refreshed and ready to face one's world. Melville's appreciation of the values of the primitives clashed with his yearning for the values of the civilized world. In this sense Typee marks the beginning of the struggle between the head and the heart, between the conscious and the unconscious, which recurs throughout Melville's works. Evil is a fact of life of both the primitive and the civilized worlds. Evil exists but so do the means of removing it. Critical as he is of the Christian missionaries in their efforts for civilizing the heathens, the means he advocates for civilizing them are Christian.
Let the savages be civilized, but civilize them with benefits, and not with evils; and let heathenism be destroyed, but not by destroying the heathen.\footnote{Typee, ch. 26, p. 245.}
Melville's second work *Omoo* (1847) shows a greater preoccupation with opposites. It begins where *Typee* ends. *Omoo* picks up the thread of the adventures of Melville in the South Seas from the time of his escape from the Typees. It is written in two parts. The first deals with Melville's voyage from the Typee Valley to the island of Tahiti. The second part shows Melville as a beachcomber, roving in the Society Islands, in company with his new-found friend, Long Ghost, till he left him to board once again the 'Leviathan' bound for Honolulu.

Read in retrospect, the first part of the book, strikes the reader as Melville's attempt to treat for the first time, a theme which he will subsequently exhaust in *White-Jacket* viz. life on a ship as a microcosm of life in the world. Throughout this part of the book, Melville seems to be at pains to show why it is that sailors in the forecastle of a ship are so rough and callous. The dilapidated condition of the ship on which they are sailing in the present instance, swarmed with 'myriads of cockroaches and regiments of rats', the dungeon-like appearance of the forecastle, the abominable condition of the food stored and supplied, the heartless way in which the sick are allowed to die and then disposed of - these and other degrading conditions on the ship are enough to arouse the indignation of any human
Being and inspire him to revolt. And with an inefficient and sick captain like Captain Guy who had left the command of the unruly crew to his drunken mate John Jermin, the ship was pretty near a state of mutiny. Having lived in this detestable condition the sailors have naturally turned rough and insensible to any finer emotions. An excellent example of their crudeness is provided by their behaviour at the time of the death of one of the crew. The dead body has hardly been tossed into the sea, when without bestowing a single thought on the departed, the crew become impatient to break open his chest and distribute its contents, clothing and all, before the captain should demand it. Yet, Melville has prepared us for this. One cannot expect decent behaviour from a group of sailors whose right to receive the basic amenities of life has been denied.

Another evil on the ship which Melville briefly touches upon in Omoo and which will be given exhaustive treatment in White-Jacket is the evil of flogging. Comparing the method of flogging in an American or English ship with that of a French ship, Melville says that the tough training of bearing manfully, the misfortune of being flogged produces its legitimate results. But he adds,

I do not wish to be understood as applauding the flogging system practiced in men-of-war. As long, however, as navies are needed, there
is no substitute for it. War being the greatest of evils, all its accessories necessarily partake of the same character; and this is about all that can be said in defense of flogging.¹

The second part of Omoo engages the attention of the reader considerably. Just as in Typee the underlying current beneath the wonderful description of the Typee Valley and its inhabitants, is the effort to assert the superiority of the savage life as against the civilized, in Omoo the underlying stream that runs beneath the description of Melville's adventures in the Society Islands, is the examination of the work of the European missionaries and traders. Melville is frankly critical of the missionaries because there is a wide gap between the aims propagated by them and their actual achievement. The first point that Melville examines is the usually laudatory report that the Western world receives of their activities. For example, at the time of the "Great Revival at the Sandwich Islands" about the year 1836, several thousands were said to have been admitted into the bosom of the Church in the course of a few weeks.

But this result was brought about by no sober moral convictions; as an almost instantaneous relapse into every kind of licentiousness, soon after testified. It was the legitimate effect of a morbid ¹

feeling, engendered by the sense of severe 
physical wants, preying upon minds excessi­
vely prone to superstition; and, by fanati­
tical preaching, inflamed into the belief, 
that the gods of the missionaries were 
taking vengeance upon the wickedness of 
the land.\(^2\)

Again these people are all impulse, least given to reflec­
tion and have an aversion to any kind of restraint. Hence 
the zealous and often coercive superintendence over their 
spiritual well-being has resulted merely in hypocrisy among 
them. Most of them have literally to be forced to attend 
Church by a group of religious police who by their undue 
interference in their private lives, exercise great terror 
among them. In short, conversions in the Pacific Islands 
have been brought about not by appeals to their reason but 
by pressures both physical and emotional. The Great Revival 
itself came at a time when many of the population were upon 
the verge of starvation.

Moreover, the missionaries in their zeal and fanati­
cism have actually denationalized these people. They have 
changed their mode of dress, pronouncing it indecorous 
and substituted a costume which is unfit for the climate 
in which they live. Many pleasant and seemingly innocent 
sports and pastimes are likewise interdicted and have 
become punishable offences; their native festivals have

\(^2\) Ibid., ch.45, p.174.
been suppressed although free from any moral indecency. The effect of all this has been lamentable.

Supplied with no amusements, in place of those forbidden, the Tahitians, who require more recreation than other people, have sunk into a listlessness, or indulge in sensualities, a hundred times more pernicious, than all the games ever celebrated in the Temple of Tanee. 3

Melville gives the testimony of good and unbiased men who have been upon the spot to reinforce his point. One such person he quotes is Otto Von Kotzebue, Post Captain in the Russian Imperial Service. Melville notes his remark in "A New Voyage round the World",

A religion like this, which forbids every innocent pleasure, and cramps or annihilates every mental power, is a libel on the divine founder of Christianity. It is true, that the religion of the missionaries has, with a great deal of evil, effected some good. It has restrained the vices of theft and incontinence; but it has given birth to ignorance, hypocrisy, and a hatred of all other modes of faith, which was once foreign to the open and benevolent character of the Tahitian. 4

The depopulation of the Islands after the arrival of the missionaries and foreigners is an equally glaring evil which the process of civilization has brought about. About 1777, Captain Cook estimated the population of Tahiti at about

3 Ibid., ch.47, p.183.
4 Ibid., ch.48, p.186.
two hundred thousand. But

by a regular census, taken some four or five years ago, it was found to be only nine thousand. This amazing decrease, not only shows the malignancy of the evils necessary to produce it; but, from the fact, the inference unavoidably follows, that all the wars, child murders, and other depopulating causes, alleged to have existed in former times, were nothing in comparison to them.

says Melville. He also refers to the evil effects of drunkenness and the diseases which have been brought by the foreigners to these otherwise pure islands. That the intercourse of distant nations should have brought upon these poor, untutored islanders such an unprecedented curse is a dreadful fact indeed. So Melville concludes:

"Who can remain blind to the fact, that, so far as mere temporal felicity is concerned, the Tahitians are far worse off now, than formerly; and although their circumstances, upon the whole, are bettered by the presence of the missionaries, the benefits conferred by the latter become utterly insignificant, when confronted with the vast preponderance of evil brought about by other means."

As Melville moved from one place to another, he did not fail to notice that those places that were far away from the coast, had remained free from the contaminating influence

5. Ibid., ch.49, p.191.
6. Ibid., p.192.
of civilization. In Tamai, Melville thought the people looked more healthy than the inhabitants of the Bay. The girls were more retiring and modest, fresher and more beautiful than the others. This happy little community was free from many deplorable evils to which the rest of the people were subject. Even in Partoowye, Melville noticed the same thing.

The missionaries were guilty not merely of bringing misery to these innocent people, but also of some malpractices which only a resident of the region could observe. Though all of them were supposed to spread the teachings of Christ, there was a keen rivalry between the Protestant and Catholic missionaries to the extent that when the French tried to plant a Roman Catholic Mission in the South Sea Islands, the resident English missionaries actually authorized the banishment of these priests. Little wonder that the natives considered these strangers as the "emissaries of the Pope and the devil" and therefore, not worth jeopardizing their souls for, by holding any intercourse with them. In their private lives too, these missionaries were far from ideal. They lived comfortably in handsomely furnished houses.

They looked sanctimonious enough abroad; but that went for nothing: since, at home, in their retreat, they were a club of Friar Tucks; holding priestly wassail over many
a good cup of red brandy, and rising late in
the morning.  

A few visits to the residence of Father Murphy, an Irish
priest, convinced Melville that one could easily partake
of the good food and drink in his house, if one agreed to
be converted into a catholic; which goes to prove once
again that people both natives and foreigners accepted
a particular religion or branch of religion not because
it was spiritually satisfying but because it was materially
useful.

Hence the praiseworthy reports of the work done in
these regions by the missionaries are not wholly true.
Hidden behind them are defaults big and small, which
reveal the fraud practised on a people in the name of
Christianity. James Miller observes rightly:

In all these adventures, Tommo-Omoo-
Melville discovers much about man and
his many masks....In Omoo, Melville
discovers a single scene which is able to
convey some sense of the true situation
behind the mask of missionary innocence....
The Royal Mission Chapel of Papoar, in
its speedy erection and speedier decay,
symbolizes the essential nature of the
work of the missionaries - the hasty
completion and the swift disappearance
of their superficial achievement.

7 Ibid., ch. 37, p. 142.
8 James Miller, A Reader's Guide to Herman Melville,
   ch. 2, pp. 24-25.
Omoo offers two important character sketches. One is Lem Hardy, a 'renegado from Christendom and humanity', and the other is Bembo, the New Zealand harpooner. Lem Hardy, an Englishman has voluntarily subjected himself to the practice of tattooing. When they first see him, Melville and his companions gaze upon his embellished face with revulsion and horror. He inspires Melville to exclaim:

What an impress! Far worse than Cain's - his was perhaps a wrinkle, or a freckle, which some of our modern cosmetics might have effaced; but the blue shark was a mark indelible, which all the waters of Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, could never wash out.9

Melville's reaction to Hardy shows once again, how much he abhorred the idea of a civilized man reverting fully to the savage way of life. Hardy's portrait is striking in another respect too. Along with Toby in Typee, he is the earliest of Melville's 'foundlings' or 'orphans' so numerously scattered over his works. All these are deserted by their kith and kin and left to wander over the world. Toby was one of that class of rovers you sometimes meet at sea, who never reveal their origin, never allude to home, and go rambling over the world as if pursued by some mysterious fate they cannot possibly elude.10

9 Omoo, ch.7, p.27.
10 Typee, ch.5, p.38.
And thrown upon the world a foundling, Lem's

paternal origin was as much a mystery
to him as the genealogy of Odin.\textsuperscript{11}

Bembo provides a study in embryo of an irreclaimable savage.
Although remarkably quiet there was something in his eye
which showed that he was far from being harmless.

A dark, moody savage, everybody but the mate
more or less distrusted or feared him. Nor
were these feelings unreciprocated..... Hard
stories were told about him; something, in
particular, concerning an hereditary propensity
to kill men and eat them.\textsuperscript{12}

In Benito Cereno Melville will project a more profound
and polished study of savagery through the Negroes.

\textsuperscript{11} \textit{Omoo}, ch.7, p.28.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., ch.19, p.71.
Whereas in *Typee* and *Omoo* one can pinpoint a single centre from which Melville attacks the various frauds and shams which characterized the Western world, in *Mardi* it is difficult to do so because the book does not have a single theme. Like its predecessors, the first part of *Mardi* starts as a factual narrative of Melville's experiences in the South Seas. The second part branches off into a number of fields of discussion - political, religious, social and philosophical - not unified into an artistic whole.

*Mardi*, which Melville began writing in 1847 was published in 1849. The year 1848 was turbulent not only in Melville's own country but in the whole Western world. An acutely sensitive writer, with an imagination like Melville's, was bound to be affected by the events he saw occurring everywhere. These were the English handling of the Chartist movement, the contemporary famine in Ireland, the implications of the French Revolution, both with regard to Europe and the American people and the American imperialism in Mexico and the Caribbean. At home, he was struck by his country's foreign policy and was disillusioned with his country's politicians. His country was being torn by factional strife in anticipation of the political conventions of the late spring and early summer and the presidential election in
the fall. The slavery question was causing the Democratic party to split apart into antislavery and proslavery factions. All this is reflected in the political chapters in the book, which Melville was prompted to add to his original manuscript which was said to contain only an allegorical voyage through the world, as symbolized by the archipelago of Mardi. Newton Arvin says:

partly under the sway of writers like these, (Carlyle, Thoreau and Tolstoy) no doubt, but much more under the bombardment of his own harshly instructive experience — "bowed to the brunt of things" as he says "before my prime" — Melville had conceived an attitude toward the civilization of his age that mingled in quite special and personal fusion the ingredients of skepticism, humorous contempt, and the anger of an outraged sense of right.¹

Milton Stern in The Fine Hammered Steel of Herman Melville puts it this way,

The willingness to conduct his search by means of a perception born of experience in a changing culture is what made Melville the great writer he is. This willingness, as much or more than any rejection of Calvinism, as much or more than any personal, family bitternesses, as much or more than his love of rhetoric...is what enabled Melville to reach conclusions so much more universal than anything produced by most of his contemporaries...²

¹ Newton Arvin, Herman Melville, pp.96-97.
Each of the seventeen islands, out of the total of eighteen, that the voyagers visit, in search of the lost Yillah, has a bearing on the current events, the eighteenth being Hautia's island and quite independent of such bearing. But those in which Melville appears most sweepingly critical are the political and religious chapters. In the political chapters Melville emerges as a proud American contemplating his country's affairs with sceptical reservations.

In good round truth, and as if an impartialist from Arcturus spoke it, Vivenza was a noble land... She was promising as the morning. Or Vivenza might be likened to St. John feeding on locusts and wild honey and with prophetic voice crying to the nations from the wilderness. Or, childlike, standing among the old robed kings and emperors of the archipelago, Vivenza seemed a young Messiah to whose discourse the bearded rabbis bowed.

But in the very next paragraph, Melville with a frankness which characterizes all his opinions speaks out,

Nevertheless, Vivenza was a braggadocio in Mardi, the only brave one ever known. As an army of spurred and crested roosters, her people chanticleered at the resplendent rising of their sun. For shame, Vivenza! Whence thy undoubted valour? Did ye not bring it with ye from the bold old shores of Dominora, where there is a fullness of it left? What isle but Dominora could

---

3: Mardi, (New York: The New American Library, 1964), ch. 146, p. 391. / All references hereafter to the text, will be to this edition /.
have supplied thee with that stiff spine of thine? That heart of boldest beat? Oh, Vivenza! know that true grandeur is too big for a boast, and nations as well as men may be too clever to be great.4

With regard to the blind confidence of his countrymen in democracy as the best means of government, Melville was equally critical. He was against any kind of arbitrary political power as well as inequality. He was not against the deep moralities of democracy itself but against the illusions that had got entangled with the notion of democracy, in his countrymen's minds. Melville's works show an ambivalence on his part where his views about democracy are concerned. Although he was basically a champion of the liberty, equality and fraternity of men, he was doubtful if man was morally strong enough to uphold the principles of democracy in his day-to-day life. In this connection Parrington's remark appears relevant.

Like all the transcendentalists Melville was a democrat, but his democracy sprang rather from his sympathies than from his philosophy. It was a democracy learned rather from Ecclesiastes than from Emerson; it sprang from his pessimism rather than from any transcendental faith in the divinity of man.5

4: Ibid.
Works like *White-Jacket* and *Moby-Dick* contain some of Melville's most optimistic statements about democracy. While *Clarel* projects Melville at his most pessimistic. In *Mardi* Melville says,

Civilization has not ever been the brother of equality. Freedom was born among the wild aeries in the mountains, and barbarous tribes have sheltered under her wings when the enlightened people of the plain have nestled under different pinions. He further adds,... your republic has been fruitful of blessings, yet in themselves monarchies are not utterly evil,... And better, on all hands, that peace should rule with a scepter than that the tribunes of the people should brandish their broadswords. Better be the subject of a king upright and just than a freeman in Franko, with the executioner's ax at every corner. It is not the prime end and chief blessing to be politically free. And freedom is only good as a means, is no end in itself.

Perhaps the havoc and misery that the French Revolution caused, prompted Melville to remind his people that freedom is more social than political. And its real felicity is not to be shared. That is of a man's own individual getting and holding. It is not who rules the state, but who rules me.... Now, though far and wide, to keep equal pace with the times, great reforms, of a verity, be needed; nowhere are bloody revolutions required.... And though all evils may be assuaged, all evils cannot

---

be done away. For evil is the chronic malady of the universe, and checked in one place, breaks forth in another. What Melville wants to stress is that no political system, monarchy or republic and no social condition, slavery or freedom will eradicate the evil in the human world. The last two sentences of the above quotation are remarkable in so far as they express Melville's acceptance of Evil as an implacable fact of life. Although Melville's approach to Evil in his earlier works is characterized by anger and defiance, statements like these keep recurring all through the works of this period.

The greatest contradiction that Melville sees in this land of freedom is expressed in chapter 157. The voyagers see an inscription which says: "In-this-re-publi-can-land-all-men-are-born-free-and-equal". But below this they find inscribed in minute letters: "Except-the-tribe-of-Hamo". The institution of slavery in the land of the free is the final paradox that Melville finds existing between appearance and reality in the democratic land of Vivenza. The island the voyagers visit in the extreme south of Vivenza projects the institution of slavery as practised in Melville's days. Taji and his companions see a number of serfs being forced to work under the armed supervision of their masters. To the questions of Babbalanja,

7 Ibid., p.437.
"Are these men?". "Have they souls?",
the slave-owner Nulli replies:

"No, their ancestors may have had, but their souls have been bred out of their descend­
ants, as the instinct of scent is killed in pointers."

Looking into the eyes of one of them Media says,

"Surely this being has flesh that is warm; he has Oro in his eye; and a heart in him that beats. I swear he is a man."

Babbalanja asks a very penetrating question to one of the slaves,

"Dost ever feel in thee a sense of right and wrong?. Art ever glad or sad? They tell us thou art not a man; speak, then, for thyself; say whether thou beliest thy Maker."

"Speak not of my Maker to me", says the slave.

"Under the lash I believe my masters and account myself a brute, but in my dreams bethink myself an angel. But I am bond, and my little ones - their mother's milk is gall."

How acutely the Americans were divided in their approach to the problem of slavery can be seen in Nulli's reaction to the sympathy shown to the slaves by the voyagers.

"Incendiaries!" cried he. "Come ye, firebrands, to light the flame of revolt?"
Know ye not that there are many serfs who, incited to obtain their liberty, might wreak some dreadful vengeance?... Are they not fed, clothed, and cared for?... Who else may till unwholesome fields but these? And as these beings are, so shall they remain; 'tis right and righteous! Maramma champions it! I swear it! The first blow struck for them dissolves the union of Vivenza's vales. The Northern tribes well know it; and know me".

But what starts with a passionate zeal for the down-trodden ends in a resigned acceptance of things by all of them. For they all know that slavery has almost become a necessary evil. Babbalanja voices Melville's opinion when he says,

For the righteous to suppress an evil is sometimes harder than for others to uphold it. Humanity cries out against this vast enormity; not one man knows a prudent remedy. Blame not, then, the north, and wisely judge the south. Ere as a nation they became responsible, this thing was planted in their midst.... These southern tribes have grown up with this thing... And though of all the south Nulli must stand almost alone in his insensate creed, yet to all wrongdoers custom backs the sense of wrong.

But Melville honestly accepts that

sin it is, no less, a blot foul as the crater pool of hell... The future is all hieroglyphics. Who may read? But methinks the great laggard Time must now march up space and somehow befriend these thralls. 10

---

9 Ibid., pp. 440-41.
10 Ibid., pp. 442-43.
The issue of Slavery figures once again in Melville's *Benito Cereno* and *Battle-Pieces*. Although Melville always remained an ardent champion of the rights of the Negroes, he appears cautious as far as the method of the abolition of Slavery is concerned.

To what extent Melville was conscious of the sham and hypocrisy practised by the upholders of institutionalized religion can be seen from the chapters dealing with Maramma and its pontiff and practising priests. And if one had to come to any conclusions about Melville's religious feelings one could well accept Babbalanja's views, in the chapters on Maramma as Melville's own. At one point in their discussion of Alma, who according to Mohi, the historian, had come to redeem the Mardians from their heathenish thrall, Babbalanja observes:

"The prophet came to dissipate errors, you say; but superadded to many that have survived the past, ten thousand others have originated in various constructions of the principles of Alma himself. . . . The prophet came to make us Mardians more virtuous and happy; but along with all previous good, the same wars, crimes, and miseries which existed in Alma's day under various modifications are yet extant. . . . The prophet came to guarantee our eternal felicity; but according to what is held in Maramma, that felicity rests on so hard a proviso that to a thinking mind but very few of our sinful race may secure it."

Babbalanja's incredibility gets strengthened because the state of affairs in Mardi seems at war with an unreserved faith in Alma's doctrines as promulgated in Maramma. Much of his criticism in these chapters, mainly through the discourse between Pani and the youth, is directed against Roman Catholicism or for that matter any kind of institutionalized religion, which expected its followers to follow blindly what their high pontiff and priests preached in the name of Christ. The sin of indulgence in all kinds of luxury at the cost of the misery and poverty of their followers, misinterpreting the words of Christ to suit their own purposes, excommunicating anyone who dared to show any individuality in matters of religion and the wide gap that existed between preaching and practising, are some of the many evils Melville spotlights in these chapters. In contrast to Maramma, there is Serenia, Mardi's maskless society—a society free from any kind of pomp or priests or temples. Here the real ruler is, unlike the high Pontiff in Maramma, "Mystic Love", and the law is "true brotherhood". Whereas in Maramma, people assert only the inherent evil nature of man, in Serenia, people accept man's imperfect nature, but they do not maintain that he is incapable of goodness.

But think not we believe in man's perfection. Yet, against all good, he is not absolutely set. In his heart, there is a germ. That we seek to foster. To that we cling; else, all were hopeless.12

12 Ibid., ch. 187, p.521.
The old man in the island of Serenia who speaks the above words further states, what can be taken as the central fact of Melville's belief.

"...we care not for men's words; we look for creeds in actions, which are the truthful symbols of the things within. He who hourly prays to Alma but lives not up to worldwide love and charity—that man is more an unbeliever than he who verbally rejects the master but does his bidding. Our lives are our amens."

Like the social condition found in the other islands the one in Serenia too is imperfect and will always remain so. But in this island might is not right and the miserable many do not support the happy few. The Serenians do not seek to annul reason's laws or breed equality by breeding anarchy. The needy are supplied by the abounding but not by statute but from dictates born half dormant in mankind and warmed into life by Alma. Vice and virtue form a mingled union where vice too often proves the alkali. The vicious are made to dwell apart till they are reclaimed. Each inhabitant is responsible for his own sins. The laws of Serenia are the laws of love, not of vengeance. Hence life in Serenia has more chances of fostering happiness because it is based on love and brotherhood.

\[13\] Ibid., p. 520.
As mentioned elsewhere in this discussion 'Serenia' is Melville's conception of a society where 'right reason' and 'Alma' unite. The contrast between life in the islands of Maramma and Serenia is a contrast between life as advocated by institutionalized Christianity and primitive Christianity. Melville takes up this point once again in Clarel.

The voyagers visit one island after another in rapid succession, and find everywhere a society hidden behind a mask of hypocrisy whether moral, religious, ethical, social or political. Lewis Mumford's remark in this connection is noteworthy.

A brave, vigorous spirit presides over Mardi, appraising all the evil and injustice and superstition and ugliness in the world as they masquerade under the guise of religion and patriotism and economic prudence and political necessity. In Mardi, one begins to feel Melville's range, and his depth.¹⁴

The emotional centre of the book viz. the Yillah - Taji - Hautia episode, which Melville tried to make a unifying link for the journey over the islands of the Mardian Archipelago, is a tenuous one. Yet from the point of view of Melville's thought, it requires close

¹⁴ Lewis Mumford, *Herman Melville*, ch.4, p.66.
study. Yillah is the maiden whom Taji has rescued from the deadly clutches of the priest Aleema on his way to the island of Tedaidee. Taji has hardly had a few days of bliss with her, when Yillah mysteriously disappears. He sets out in search of her throughout the world as represented by the various islands that the voyagers visit. He is tempted by another beautiful maiden, Hautia, to abandon his search for Yillah and accept her instead. Taji discovers that Yillah has fallen a victim to the enchantress Hautia who has destroyed her. In despair Taji turns his prow toward the sea of self-destruction. The Taji – Yillah – Hautia episode has been interpreted in various ways by various critics. Writers like Newton Arvin, Lewis Mumford, Leon Howard and Raymond Weaver find expressed in this episode, Melville's own feelings towards his wife, Elizabeth Shaw, before and after their marriage in 1847. Yillah is an embodiment of pure, innocent and sexless happiness. Hautia, symbolizes the sensual, the carnal, the engrossingly sexual aspect of a human being, according to Newton Arvin. He further adds,

... in any case the allegory of Yillah and Hautia is strongly suggestive of the passage from an idealized courtship to the fleshly realities of marriage. 15

15 Newton Arvin, Herman Melville, p. 96.
Raymond Weaver in Herman Melville: Mariner and Mystic states his opinion thus:

Mardi is a quest after some total and undivined possession of that holy and mysterious joy that touched Melville during the period of his courtship: a joy he had felt in the crucifixion of his love for his mother; a joy that had dazzled him in his love for Elizabeth Shaw. When he wrote Mardi, he was married, and his wife was with child. And Mardi is a pilgrimage for a lost glamour.  

The mixed feelings he harboured for Elizabeth no doubt led to a very great conflict in Melville's mind. Trying to treat somebody as an embodiment of idealized love under circumstances in which it is impracticable to do so, results in tragic consequences for all concerned. This theme receives its first expression in Mardi which is once again taken up by Melville in Pierre wherein we get a picture of the disaster the idealistic Pierre meets with, in his abnormal relationship with Mrs. Glendinning, Lucy and Isabel. 

However, bearing in mind Melville's own words that Mardi is a "chartless voyage" into "the world of the mind," and the fact that he wanted to make Mardi a more philosophical book than Typee or Omoo had been, it is more appro-

---

appropriate to interpret the Yillah-Taji-Hautia episode in terms other than merely the biographical. The inclusion of four different characters like Media, the King, Babbalanja, the philosopher, Yoomy, the poet and Mohi, the historian, in the quest for Yillah, and her significance to each of them calls for a different interpretation of the episode. Taji's search for Yillah is a search for an 'ideal perfection' or 'absolute innocence'. Taji himself poses as a spotless seeker. But his act of saving Yillah from the deadly clutches of Aleema, the priest, is coloured with guilt. For Taji murders Aleema to rescue Yillah. That is to say, to obtain Yillah or the Ideal Perfection, Taji has to commit a crime. Again Taji is tormented by another kind of guilt - the guilt of the possibility of selfish motives in rescuing Yillah.

"Remorse smote me hard, and like lightning I asked myself whether the death-deed I had done was sprung of a virtuous motive, the rescuing a captive from thrall, or whether beneath that pretense I had engaged in this fatal affray for some other and selfish purpose, the companionship of a beautiful maid. But throttling the thought, I swore to be gay."  

This thought recurs repeatedly in the horrible shape of Aleema's green corpse. Taji tries to shake off the guilt

17 Mardi, ch.42, p.123.
in an attempt to maintain his spotless soul. Besides this there are the "three black-eyed damsels, deep brunettes" who come with their sensual flower messages from Queen Hautia. They symbolize the deep lure of a wholly sensuous life. This lure is hidden in Taji's motives when he captures Yillah at the very beginning. It is this element which characterizes their heavenly life at Odo. Taji's lust for Yillah transforms her into one of Hautia's captives. Yillah disappears because Taji refuses all but a total innocence. But such a total innocence, cannot be found, not even in Serenia, because the human fate is inextricably linked with evil. Thus neither can Taji attain the perfection and innocence of Yillah nor can he accept the totally physical life of the senses with Hautia. He therefore decides to search for Yillah in the boundless ocean, come what may.

In continuing his search for Yillah, Taji maintains the outward appearance to both the world and himself, of innocence yearning after unattainable good; but down within he understands his deepest motives for the corrupt and fiendish impulses they are. Taji seeks to disown the heritage of guilt that is his as a man; but in yearning to become all good, he becomes all evil, in attempting to be God, he becomes a devil.¹⁸

Taji resembles Ahab in his monomaniac search for the

F.O. Matthiessen (American Renaissance) holds the view that the two girls Yillah and Hautia seem to stand for Taji's good and evil angels and the loss of Yillah seems to symbolize the fact that good based on an initial act of evil - the killing of a pagan priest - is doomed to end in disaster. As a result, Matthiessen feels, the impression that emerges is that good and evil can be inextricably and confusingly intermingled - a state that was to be one of Melville's chief sources of ambiguity. W.E. Sedgwick in Herman Melville: The Tragedy of Mind, points out that Yillah's significance varies between different points of view. If Mardi is judged as a satire on the morals and manners of nations and institutions, then Yillah stands for 'truth' in the sense of 'a standard of righteousness' by which such nations and institutions are judged. In the more philosophical sense, she may be identified with 'truth' in the 'absolute sense' i.e. the truth about creation and human destiny. He further says that

...she belongs mostly to the subjective aspect of the book and is primarily an ideal of being - an ideal unity of being... in which all the elements of man's nature share harmoniously;
his sensuous being and his spiritual on one hand, his spiritual and his intellectual propensities on the other. 19.

He identifies the sea with man's consciousness and so Taji's pursuit of her in the sea can be identified with the pursuit of the ideal in man's consciousness which ultimately leads the seeker into the sea of destruction.

But any interpretation that overlooks the significance of the other characters included in the quest, will be incomplete. For if, as Leon Howard says in his biographical study of Melville, the four characters accompanying Taji on his voyage, were added later to his original manuscript, it means that they must have had some definite significance for Melville. At least Babbalanja and Media each have quite an important role to play in the education of man. They show that a path which people like Taji take, and which both of them reject, is bound to lead to destruction. Even the quickly-disposed-of characters like Jarl and Samoa cannot be ignored. Milton Stern in The Fine Hammered Steel of Herman Melville, gives a comprehensive interpretation of these characters and it appears plausible, when one keeps in mind all that happens to Ahab because of his gradual

withdrawal from all human ties. Right from the beginning of the action i.e., from the moment Taji is off on the Arkurion, we see him as a person who is impatient to get out of it. This mild impatience is gradually shown to turn into a frenzy. He is weary of the cruise and becomes almost an 'isolato' without any congenial friends. Even Jarl whom he befriends and who is otherwise helpful to him is tolerated with mild disdain. The humdrum everyday life on the ship appears to him a waste of time. He is a visionary and pines for an exalted life. In exchange for the daily actualities of life he wants a more ideal state of existence, which is free from all responsibilities and consequences.

What is more, he is bent on finding, the heaven he is seeking all by himself. Thus Taji is on his way to becoming a monomaniac and he forgets that the world is concerned more with its own 'status quo' than his individual relationship to the ideal. And so, as Stern says his very first plunge from the 'Arcturion' is his first suicide of self and the first possible murder of that world. He deceives his companion as to the motives of his escape from the 'Arcturion' for little does Jarl know that what Taji first undertakes will end in disaster. He deceives Samoa too by pretending to be a superior being in order to gain ascendancy over him, which in its turn is a renunciation of his true historical and earthly origins.
As soon as Taji sees Yillah, he feels he has achieved what he has been looking for and so he decides to have her even if his decision leads him to kill the priest Aleema, who is on his way to sacrifice her. The killing of Aleema arouses feelings of guilt, which he brushes aside by emphasizing his good motives. Again, he begins to doubt his own motives for rescuing Yillah, which he feels are not as altruistic as he had originally supposed them to be. This is the first glimpse we have of the theme which will find repeated expression in all the works of Melville. Is Goodness capable of standing as pure Goodness or is it inevitably connected with Evil? Can one's motives, however good they are, be purely altruistic? Melville shows again and again that such a sweeping statement can never be made.

The guilt of Aleema's murder keeps pursuing him, in the form of the green corpse, throughout his voyage till his final plunge into the destructive ocean. Taji views Yillah as a being from another world. She is unearthly and does not seem to belong either to the Western world or the primitive atmosphere in which she is found. Thus she is separate from humanity. At least the mystical terms in which she is described show it. But at the same time Yillah finds something disturbingly familiar about Taji. The deceit of his supernatural origin that he tries to
practise on her, begins to show. This gives rise to the ironic fact that their mutual "ideal" origin is mortal and historical. Taji does not want such a mortal Yillah but an etherealized one. He makes a desperate attempt to prove to Yillah that he is a supernatural being with a heavenly right to keep her and that she too is such a being. Taji's conception of Yillah is a being who exists outside the sphere of time and history and relativity. He forgets his mortal origins and therefore his search for such an ideal is bound to end in disaster. His defiance and arrogance are very similar to Ahab's.

'I am the hunter that never rests! The hunter without a home! She I seek still flies before, and I will follow, though she lead me beyond the reef, through sunless seas, and into night and death. Her will I seek through all the isles and stars; and find her, whate'er betide!' 20

Taji's destruction proves that an ideal cannot live in the absolute. If it has to exist at all it must be actualized and humanized.

An examination of Hautia's role in this allegory will be useful. The story of Hautia's ancestry reveals her to be connected with the loss of the Golden Age, the fall of man. The earth before the advent of history was pure. But

20 Mardi, ch.189, p.531.
the pride of man made it untenable for purity. It was Hautia's ancestors who led the revolt against the angels or divine beings on earth and rejected them. Hautia's meaning becomes clear as soon as we remember that Taji the quester too rejects the earth as it is. Thus both Taji and Hautia represent man's pride for both refuse to accept the earth as it is. Hautia reflects the universal pattern of man's sinful pride in himself who accepts no change or advancement. At the same time she is the human arrogance which cannot tolerate the pure ideal because it represents something above and beyond her. She represents that kind of perverted naturalism which destroys all spiritual endeavour. Hautia is committed to this destruction by making the animality of the natural senses her motto in life. If Taji stands for man's 'erroneous spiritual pride', Hautia is man's 'erroneous animal or materialistic pride'. She entices and follows Taji in the guise of the three maidens who come with their flower messages. In his attempt to leave this world in pursuit of a pure being Taji is obstructed and tempted by the world's false happiness i.e. Hautia. Taji has a nagging doubt that Hautia has kidnapped Yillah. Getting desperate at not finding Yillah anywhere he even consents to visit the isle of 'Flozella a Nina' which is Hautia's domain. He dives deep into Hautia's cave hoping to find the pearl that is Yillah
but can find nothing but emptiness. Only if Taji abandons Yillah and accepts Hautia's values can he find the pearl. Taji will not accept her for it is Yillah who provides his motivations. Says Taji to Hautia,

"Show me that which I seek, and I will dive with thee straight through the world, till we come up in oceans unknown."

She replies,

"Nay, nay; but join hands, and I will take thee where thy past shall be forgotten, where thou wilt soon learn to love the living, not the dead."

Taji says finally,

"Better to me, O Hautia, all the bitterness of my buried dead than all the sweets of the life thou canst bestow, even were it eternal."

Next in importance to these three characters are Aleema the priest and his three sons. Aleema stands for that general religious practice which demands total conformity. He has in his hold, Yillah who stands for man's ideals, whom he has decided to sacrifice. It means that release of religion's grasp on man's ideals is something that Aleema cannot allow. Like Hautia, he wants to kill man's aspirations but his means are different. While Hautia wants to kill man's aspiration by tempting him with a sensual life,

21 Ibid., ch.194, pp.540-41.
Aleema wants to do so by forcing man to adhere blindly to his canons. Aleema's God Apo is a grim profile of a human face, whose shadow every afternoon crept down the verdant side of the mountain, a silent phantom stealing all over the bosom of the glen. 22

It is to this idea of God - the God of a shadow - that Aleema wants man and his ideals to be united. And just as Apo buries the greenness of the valley in gloom, so he buries the quester's thoughts or his conscious soul in darkness. And when Aleema is destroyed he persists in haunting the quester in the form of the spectres of his three sons. The Taji-Yillah-Aleema theme indicates in yet another way, the futility of the search of an ideal in the world of actualities, dominated as it is by strong influences of which dogmatic religion is one. In spite of this, if a man persists in his attempts, he gets involved in crime and guilt, as Taji does, and defeats the very purpose of his search. Taji's misfortune was to try to attain an ideal by committing a crime and not accepting its burden. In short as Taji shows, and as Ahab and Pierre will show, an idealist can find justification for his actions in the world only if he insists that his own perception is that

22 Ibid., ch. 50, pp. 139-40.
of absolute reality. All three of them show that if their kind of idealism is to be active at all, it must be motivated by a will that is murderous and blind to its consequences.

Out of the four companions of Taji, Yoomy, the poet and Mohi, the historian, do not prove active questers. Yoomy soars high with his poems and songs and tries to find the meaning of experience in beauty. Because he soars into the "magnificently awe-inspiring beauty and hopefulness of the universe", he is the most optimistic of all the voyagers, that Yillah will be found. Mohi, who stands for old age and decay and who constantly fears death, views Yillah as long life and is the least optimistic of finding her.

It is through Media and Babbalanja, with their conversion in Serenia, that Mardi projects what could be a more reasonable and acceptable alternative to Taji's murderous course. Media, the king, presumes to be a demi-god. He therefore tries to withdraw from humanity and remains aloof from it and above it. Yet although he claims divinity, he enjoys being human. He is harsh and dictatorial, is blind to his own humanity and is oblivious of the suffering and misery of his subjects. Until he reaches Serenia, he is a passive follower of circumstances. As long as events are favourable to his well-being he does
not make any attempts to change them, even if they are harmful to others. He shows no aspiration for a higher life than the one he is leading. He frowns on Babbalanja whenever he indulges in any kind of speculation.

"Why, Babbalanja", he says, "I almost pity you. You are too warm, too warm. Why fever your soul with these things? To no use you mortals wax earnest. No thanks, but curses, will you get for your earnestness. You yourself you harm most. Why not take creeds as they come? It is not so hard to be persuaded; never mind about believing."

"True, my lord", says Babbalanja, "not very hard; no act is required, only passiveness. Stand still and receive. Faith is to the thoughtless, doubts to the thinker.

Media asks,

"Then, why think at all?"  

Which sums up Media's character. Unlike Babbalanja he does not torment himself with metaphysical questions. But as the voyage continues Media is shown to grow in heart and sensitiveness, just as Taji is shown to harden. By the time he reaches Vivenza, there is a radical change in him. The man in the demi-god takes gradual predominance. Finally, in Serenia he gets fully transformed, when under the influence of the wisdom of the old man, he comes to recognize the brotherhood of humanity.

---

23 Ibid., ch.135, p.356.
“No more a demigod”, cried Media, “but a subject to our common chief. No more shall dismal cries be heard from Odo’s groves. Alma, I am thine.”

Media becomes a complete man when he renounces association with his divinity and realizes that man’s soul is not something that can be attained in another world, as orthodox religion teaches, but can become a matter of earthly felicity also. He decides to discontinue the voyage, go back to his kingdom and build a new social order based on the principles practised in Serenia. Media shows that

Melville’s healer of the wasteland is not the idealistic Christian Knight, but the informed and heartfelt social strategist. Babbalanja is Melville’s mouth-piece as far as his metaphysical soarings are concerned. Much of what he says under the inspiration of his Azzageddi may be taken to stand for Melville’s own conflicts. His biographers confirm the fact that Melville’s mental state at the time of his writing _Mardi_ was similar to Babbalanja’s. This philosopher is torn between two beliefs - that signifying order, harmony and beneficence against disorder, chaos and demonism. Babbalanja’s despair lies in the suspicion that there is

24 Ibid., ch. 187, p.525.


28 Ibid., ch.124, p.325.
no God and if there is one, He is not as benevolent as Orthodoxy propounds Him to be. At least the immense misery in the world contradicts the belief in His Goodness. The most reasonable argument that Babbalanja puts forth and which tormented Melville considerably is:

"...Oro (God) is not merely a universal on­
looker but occupies and fills all space, and no vacancy is left for any being or any thing but Oro. Hence Oro is in all things, and himself is all things - the time-old creed. But since evil abounds, and Oro is all things, then he cannot be perfectly good; wherefore, Oro's omnipresence and moral perfection seem incompatible."

Next to the inexorability of Evil, Babbalanja is acutely conscious of the inscrutability of the universe.

"I am intent upon the essence of things, the mystery that lieth beyond, the elements of the tear which much laughter provoketh, that which is beneath the seeming, the precious pearl within the shaggy oyster. I probe the circle's center; I seek to evolve the inscrutable."

But he is equally conscious of the inability of a human being to fathom the Unfathomable.

"...I am in darkness, and no broad blaze comes down to flood me. The rays that come to me are but faint cross lights mazing the obscurity wherein. I live...the more we learn, the more we unlearn; we accumulate not, but
substitute, and take away more than we add. We dwindle while we grow; we sally out for wisdom and retreat beyond the point whence we started; ... all is in a nut, ... but all my back teeth cannot crack it; I but crack my own jaws ... I may have come to the Penum-
ltimate, but where, ... , is the Ultimate? 28

But once Babbalanja reaches Serenia and hears the philosophy of the old man, he undergoes a change. The heavenly guide he sees in his dream teaches him that Heaven has no roof and that the only Mardian happiness one can expect is an exemption from great woes. Unlike Taji, Babbalanja accepts the limitations of natural life. He does not storm the Ultimate which is unattainable but decides to live in a manner compatible with the human world. He tells Taji with finality in his voice that he will abandon his search not because what he had sought is found, but because he now possessed all that may be had of what he sought in Mardi. He urges Taji to abandon his mad hunt for Yillah for she is a phantom impossible to be found in the world of guilt and sin. Aesthetically Babbalanja's conversion is jarring, because of its suddenness. He does not move towards the principles of Serenia gradually. However, the conversion has an important bearing on Melville's approach to the problem of Evil. It stands in contrast to Taji's approach which though more admirable is more

28 Ibid., ch. 124, p. 325.
In the final pages of Mardi, Taji is transfigured from the seemingly innocent voyager into a monomaniac, in mad pursuit of a futile goal. Babbalanja too is in search of something that is divorced from the realities of existence and some of his utterances are well worth his Azzagedi. Yet philosopher that he is, he is not as brutal and defiant as Taji is. In Taji we see Ahab prefigured. Serenia convinces all but him that the life lived by its people is the ideal one. All the voyagers, in their own way try to persuade him to renounce his inhuman quest but Taji is fixed as fate. He vows to become the unreturning wanderer and his own soul's emperor. Babbalanja's final pronouncements provide an inspiring contrast to Taji's.

Oh, Alma, Alma! ...In thee, at last, I find repose. Hope perches in my heart a dove; a thousand rays illumine; all heaven's a sun. Gone, gone, are all distracting doubts! Love and Alma now prevail...Reason no longer domineers, but still doth speak. All I have said ere this that wars with Alma's precepts, I here recant. Here I kneel and own great Oro and his sovereign son.29

Babbalanja learns what Taji, Ahab and Pierre will not learn, that a great man combines a great heart with a

29. Ibid., ch.187, p. 524.
great mind. Both are integral parts of a man's personality. It is when their respective demands lead them in opposite directions that tragic consequences follow. *Mardi* is Melville's first major work wherein the head-heart controversy finds expression.
Redburn

Both in form and substance Redburn (1849) marks the middle stage between Typee and Moby-Dick. Typee was written in praise of the sensuous, sunny side of life. It does contain hints of a knowledge of the darker side of life but this side is not seriously explored and pondered over. In Redburn one finds Melville brooding over the dark side of things. Its ostensible subject is a young boy's first voyage from New York to Liverpool. Its hidden subject is a study of the boy's initiation into evil, a study of his childhood fantasies and ideals undergoing a metamorphosis in the world of brutal realities. Redburn is remarkably different from Mardi. Artistically it is superior to Mardi but philosophically, it is a lesser work. Melville's concern with the dark side of reality is confined to the human world only. The metaphysical probings of Mardi find no place in Redburn. Yet as a study of 'man-made' evil, specially that which resulted from American commerce and the system of Capitalism, it is one of Melville's most important works.

Wellingborough Redburn leaves his home in a state of innocence and inexperience. He is full of hopes for his voyage. But hardly has he journeyed a mile before the world's wickedness and hardness stare him in his face. Redburn finds that reality is harsh and cruel everywhere. The passengers on the river boat, between his home town...
and New York treat him with disdain and scorn because of his shabby appearance. This is his first inkling of the disparity that exists between the rich and the poor and the heartless injustices that result from it. His experience on the merchant marine, the 'Highlander', on which he sails to Liverpool and back, is no better. He is jeered and sworn at, pushed around, humiliated and bullied. Even the once friendly Captain Riga shows by his subsequent rudeness that there is an impassable gulf between skipper and crew, which even a gentleman's son cannot bridge. The contrast between the genteel society of Lansingburgh in which he was brought up and the rough and vicious society which confronts him in the forecastle of the ship, is very acute. He is so green where his experience of men and work is concerned that he is shocked to come face to face with these crude men who are hardened and blackened by hardships and mean living, who feel that there is 'nothing worth living for, but everything to be hated in this wide world'. For a while Redburn has nothing but dreadful loathing for these creatures.

But soon this impression of the sailors becomes mellowed for

...finding the sailors all very pleasant and sociable, at least among themselves, and seated smoking together like old cronies... I began to think they were
a pretty good set of fellows after all... and I thought I had misconceived their true characters; for at the outset I had deemed them such a parcel of wicked hard-hearted rascals that it would be a severe affliction to associate with them.  

Not only this. Redburn actually has feelings of compassion for them.

... I now began to look on them with a sort of incipient love; but more with an eye of pity and compassion, as men of naturally gentle and kind dispositions, whom only hardships, and neglect, and ill-usage had made outcasts from good society; and not as villains who loved wickedness for the sake of it, and would persist in wickedness, even in Paradise, if they ever got there.

This study of the sailors and their vicious ways is typically Christian in the sense that though Melville, through Redburn, expresses his loathing for the evil ways of these men, he does not hate them. He has compassion enough to realize that these hard-hearted and cruel men are basically good.

It is in Jackson, the diseased dictator of the forecastle that we get the earliest glimpse of Melville trying

---

1. *Redburn* (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1957), ch.9, pp.44-45. [All references hereafter to the text will be to this edition.]

2. Ibid., ch.9, p.45.
to get to grips with the "mystery of iniquity" and the nature of Evil.

It is a study that is going to prove absorbing to him, and his thoughts on the subject, which here find their earliest expression, are going to find their grandest in Moby-Dick and their most intense and unanswerable in Billy Budd, that late story with its wicked Claggart so much like another Jackson. 3

All the accumulated evil of the ship seems to be embodied in Jackson. Yet Melville raises him almost to an impressive stature. He describes his appearance in such a way as to inspire instant horror in his readers. But when one reads about the intelligence and cunning that work in conjunction with his evil, one's feelings of horror are transformed into fascinating awe. Jackson was a great bully. He was the best seaman on board, very overbearing so that the sailors were afraid of him and would not dare contradict him. To use Melville's words:

But he had such an overawing way with him; such a deal of brass and impudence, such an unflinching face, and withal was such a hideous looking mortal, that Satan himself would have run from him. And besides all this, it was quite plain, that he was by nature a marvellously clever, cunning man, though without education; and understood human nature to a kink, and well knew whom

he had to deal with; and then, one glance of his squinting eye, was as good as a knockdown, for it was the most deep, subtle, infernal looking eye that I ever saw lodged in a human head. 4

He hated everybody and everything in the world as if the whole world was one person, and had done him some dreadful harm, that was rankling and festering in his heart. Surprisingly, he was the weakest man on ship where physical strength was concerned. Redburn knows why Jackson hated him of all the sailors on the ship.

Nothing was left of this Jackson but the foul lees and dregs of a man;... it was the consciousness of his miserable, broken-down condition, and the prospect of soon dying, like a dog in consequence of his sins, that made this poor wretch always eye me with such malevolence as he did. For I was young and handsome,... whereas he was being consumed by an incurable malady, that was eating up his vitals, and was more fit for a hospital than a ship. 5

Because Jackson hates Redburn, the whole crew turns against him and Redburn in turn feels a hatred growing up in him against the whole crew - so much so that he finds himself a sort of Ishmael in the ship and

I prayed against it that it might not master my heart completely, and so make

4 Redburn, ch.12, p.54.
5 Ibid., pp.55-56.
Jackson's alienation from his companions is a fit lesson for Redburn of the evil consequences of isolation.

This realization of the dangers of a monomania which corrodes the heart of a person is perhaps the reason why Redburn ultimately comes to sympathize with Jackson. James Miller expresses the same view when he says,

> In spite of his horror at Jackson's appearance and tyranny, Redburn detects in his own feelings a puzzling complexity.

He refers to the following words in Redburn to support his point.

> But there seemed even more woe than wickedness about the man; and his wickedness seemed to spring from his woe; and for all his hideousness, there was that in his eye at times, that was ineffably pitiable and touching; and though there were moments when I almost hated this Jackson, yet I have pitied no man as I have pitied him.

This study of 'innate depravity' shows Melville's acquaintance with the notion of original sin as taught

---

6. Ibid., p.60.

7 James Miller, A Reader's Guide to Herman Melville, ch.4, p.62.

8 Redburn, ch.22, p.100.
to him by his orthodox Presbyterian parents, Melville was drawn to Calvinism because it recognised the cardinal fact of evil. He did not subscribe to its dogma but in as much as it recognized the fact of evil, Melville found it truthful and it commanded his respect.

If Jackson is the embodiment of the evil found in an individual, Liverpool embodies the evil of the human world. It is an infernal city, a symbol of human iniquity. Melville paints vividly the dark, polluted and diseased streets, the great prison-like haunts of vice and crime and the dock-wall beggars, the quacks, the crims and the peddlers who populate Liverpool. Melville shows a great insight into the degradation that poverty leads a human being to. Speaking about the Dead House in chapter 36 Melville observes, that there is no calamity overtaking man that cannot be rendered merchantable. Undertakers, sextons, tomb-makers and hearse-drivers, get their living from the dead. Yet Melville realizes that such persons were forced to indulge in these practices because they were the most wretched of starvelings. Elsewhere he also notes how starvation in Ireland could be turned to the profit of the English shipowner. Similarly a daring crimp could also dispose of a dead body by shoving it on board a ship, under the pretence of its being a live body in a drunken trance. But where human degradation is concerned, none of these surpasses
his description of the Launcelott's-Hey. What arouses Melville's indignation is less the misery of the dying woman and her starving children, lying in the cellar of a warehouse, than the heartless indifference of the people around, to the plight of the victims. His feelings of anger find expression in words like:

Ah! what are our creeds, and how do we hope to be saved? Tell me, oh Bible, that story of Lazarus again, that I may find comfort in my heart for the poor and forlorn. Surrounded as we are by the wants and woes of our fellow-men, and yet given to follow our own pleasures, regardless of their pains, are we not like people sitting up with a corpse, and making merry in the house of the dead?9

Evil does not always raise its head in this hideous form. Redburn's visit to the splendid Alladin's Palace in London and his experience there with Harry Bolton proves that evil can appear in an attractive shape too. The whole magnificent place they visit in London seemed infected, and Redburn says,

spite of the metropolitan magnificence around me, I was mysteriously alive to a dreadful feeling, which I had never before felt, except when penetrating into the lowest and most squalid haunts of sailor iniquity in Liverpool. All the mirrors and marbles around me seemed crawling over with lizards; and I thought to

9: ibid., ch. 37, p. 178.
myself, that though gilded and golden, the serpent of vice is a serpent still.\textsuperscript{10}

According to F.O. Matthiessen the theme of poverty is the most recurrent in \textit{Redburn}. According to him what is latent in tragedy is the economic factor. This remained part of Melville's vision in all his writing including \textit{Moby-Dick}. In Melville's works the theme of poverty is connected with the theme of alienation. It found its earliest expression in \textit{Redburn}. In the chapter in which he speaks about the prospects of sailors, Melville actually points out the unfairness of a capitalistic order of society.

There are classes of men in the world, who bear the same relation to society at large, that the wheels do to a coach: and are just as indispensable. But however easy and delectable the springs upon which the insiders pleasantly vibrate; however sumptuous the hammer-cloth; and glossy the door-panels; yet, for all this, the wheels must still revolve in dusty, or muddy revolutions. No contrivance, no sagacity can lift them out of the mire; for upon something the coach must be bottomed; on something the insiders must roll...Now, sailors form one of these wheels:...they are the primum mobile of all commerce; and, in short, were they to emigrate in a body to man the navies of the moon, almost everything would stop here on earth except its revolution on its axis; and the orators in the American Congress.\textsuperscript{11}

Yet, Melville's main concern was not to study the economic

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., ch.46, p.226.
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., ch.29, p.133.
system of his time but the injustices and misery which resulted from its application. The worst hit were the masses whose poverty won Melville's deepest sympathy because they were the victims of a system under which, those who worked the most earned the least. Joseph Ward in his study *Melville and Failure* makes a pertinent remark with regard to Melville's views about the capitalistic system. He says:

...Melville does not so much link the specific abuses that Redburn observes with the prevailing economic system as with the natural evil of man,...Capitalism, it would appear, is but man's nature.12

Another aspect of evil with which Melville seems to be obsessed and which can be traced through his works is the evil of isolation which as Melville's works show is the consequence of a number of reasons. We find traces of such an isolation in *Redburn*. When Wellingborough starts his voyage on the 'Highlander', he is shown to be the epitome of 'supreme' innocence. Life on the 'Highlander' is a life of isolation for Redburn. He is a gentleman's son, wears gentleman's clothes, speaks a gentleman's language. He remains critically aloof and looks at the evil among

the sailors with a sense of self-righteous goodness. But he cannot remain aloof, for long. Soon he feels he is an 'Ishmael' among the sailors and yearns to throw his soul "into the unbounded bosom of some immaculate friend". It is only when he befriends Harry Bolton that he realizes his bonds with humanity. It is then that he finds that the separation of good from evil is not as simple as he had imagined. He becomes reconciled to the inextricable entanglement of right and wrong, of good and evil. His association with Harry marks the end of his self-imposed isolation and the beginning of his awareness of the possibilities of human comradeship.  

By his choice of befriending Harry, and his acceptance of the fact of evil Redburn saves himself from the terrible fate of Ahab and Pierre, who in their extreme monomania and blind idealism destroyed themselves and all around them.

13 James Miller; A Reader's Guide to Herman Melville, ch.4, p.70.
As a man-of-war that sails through the sea, so this earth that sails through the air. We mortals are all on board a fast-sailing, never-sinking world-frigate, of which God was the shipwright; and she is but one craft in a Milky-Way fleet, of which God is the Lord High Admiral. The port we sail from is forever astern. And though far out of sight of land, for ages and ages we continue to sail with sealed orders, and our last destination remains a secret to ourselves and our officers; yet our final haven was predestinated ere we slipped from the stocks at Creation.¹

Thus begins the last chapter of White-Jacket. The passage serves a two-fold purpose. It shows in the first place that Melville, after his own experience on board the 'Neversink', deemed life on a man-of-war to be a microcosm of life on earth. Secondly, it highlights the tone of the whole book. Words like, 'God was the shipwright', 'God is the Lord High Admiral' and '...our final haven was predestinated ere we slipped from the stocks at Creation', all serve to show that where his approach to the problem of evil is concerned, Melville is still very much under the influence of his own religious upbringing. His voice is still the voice of a believer. In Mardi, too, though he dived deep and soared high like a modern sceptic, the chapters on 'Serenia' and Taji's final destruction illustrate sufficiently that even there Melville viewed the

problem from a traditional angle.

If Mardi, with all its conflicts and complexities can be termed a book of the mind, White-Jacket can be termed a book of the heart. It is a heart whose sensibility is coloured by the tenets of Christianity - chiefly the brotherhood of mankind. Braswell remarks:

"In its message of charity the book is true to Melville's highest ideals."^\textsuperscript{2}

This sense of brotherhood pervades everything that Melville speaks about, whether it is the topmost officer in the man-of-war or the most insignificant sailor in its forecastle. This is because Melville realizes that where depravity and perversity are concerned all men are one. It is this spirit which inspires him to give us a frank picture of the worst iniquity that prevails among the man-of-war's-men. Thus he says,

A man-of-war is ... full of all manners of characters - full of strange contradictions; and though boasting some fine fellows here and there, yet, upon the whole, charged to the combings of her hatchways with the spirit of Belial and all unrighteousness.^\textsuperscript{3}

---


^\textsuperscript{3} *White-Jacket*, ch. 91, p. 390.
Melville does not impute evil to a person merely because he belongs to a particular grade in a ship or society. It is human nature itself that is evil.

Title, and rank, and wealth, and education cannot unmake human nature; the same in cabin-boy and commodore, its only differences lie in the different modes of development.  

In, 'The Social State in a Man-of-war' (ch.89), Melville analyses the factors responsible for breeding evil among the man-of-war-men, specially among the lower levels. To quote his words,

The immutable ceremonies and iron etiquette of a man-of-war; the spiked barriers separating the various grades of rank; the delegated absolutism of authority on all hands; the impossibility, on the part of the common seaman, of appeal from incidental abuses, and many more things that might be enumerated, all tend to beget in most armed ships a general social condition which is the precise reverse of what any Christian could desire.

At the same time Melville feels that some of these evils are unavoidably the result of the operation of a rigid Naval Code and the inhuman Articles of War. But that which most revolts his sense of the equality of men is the custom of flogging. It reduces both the

---

4 Ibid., ch.53, p.222.
5 Ibid., ch.89, p.375.
and the oppressed to the level of a beast. One sees a human being, stripped like a slave; scourged worse than a hound. And for what? For things not essentially criminal but only made so by arbitrary laws.

According to the present laws and usages of the Navy, says Melville, a seaman, for the most trivial alleged offences, of which he may be entirely innocent, must, without a trial, undergo a penalty the traces whereof he carries to the grave; ... 6

Moreover, the code does not conform to the spirit of the political institutions of the country that ordains it. It converts into slaves some of the citizens of a nation of freemen. Again,

'a law should be "universal", and include in its possible penal operations the very judge himself who gives decisions upon it; nay, the very judge who expounds it. 7

What hurt Melville was the unjust application of the law which went against the very principle expounded by Justinian viz. "to every man should be rendered his due". The laws in the Navy did not render to every man his due, since in some cases they indirectly excluded the officers from any punishment whatever and in all cases protected

6 Ibid., ch.34, pp.141-42.
7 Ibid., ch.35, p.145.
them from the scourge, which was inflicted upon the sailor. Even the defence put forth by some that it is a fit punishment for the depraved does not convince Melville. He says,

Depravity in the oppressed is no apology for the oppressor; but rather an additional stigma to him, as being, in a large degree, the effect, and not the cause and justification of oppression. 

And lastly the argument that this practice has had the sanction of the past, established as a precedent in no less a country than England, appears absurd.

It is not merely with regard to flogging that the Past is denounced. Any custom that is prevalent today either on a man-of-war or in our own world just because it is rooted in the past, irrespective of the evil it generates, needs to be scrapped. For,

the world has arrived at a period which renders it the part of Wisdom to pay homage to the prospective precedents of the Future in preference to those of the Past. The Past is dead, and has no resurrection; but the Future is endowed with such a life, that it lives to us even in anticipation. The Past is, in many things, the foe of mankind; the Future is, in all things, our friend. The Past is the text-book of tyrants; the Future the Bible of the Free.

8 Ibid., ch.34, p.142.
9 Ibid., ch.36, p.150.
Most of the rules and regulations imposed on a man-of-war have the force of precedents and what is worse, they are never challenged by the sailors because of the arbitrary laws of punishment. This sticking blindly to precedents "has sanctioned many an abuse in this world", Melville feels.

He next aims his criticism at the various activities connected with war. War is bad not merely because "it is utterly foolish, unchristian, barbarous, brutal, and savoring of the Feejee Islands, cannibalism, saltpetre, and the devil", but also because it violates the principles of equality. While the majority of the common sailors of the 'Neversink' were plainly averse to it, the officers of the quarter-deck welcomed it. Because though war would equally jeopardise the lives of both, to the common sailor it would not even bring the glory and promotion that it brings to the officers. And how will the officers gain glory and promotion but by slaughtering their fellow-men, comrades and mess-mates? Yet Melville is quick to defend the feelings of the officers too.

I urge it not against them as men - their feelings belonged to their profession. Had they not been naval officers, they had not been rejoicers in the midst of despair.10

Thus, Melville feels, in a place where one man's bane is another man's blessing, the brotherhood of mankind cannot

10 Ibid., ch.49, p.209.
prevail. And as the very object of a man-of-war is to fight battles, so long as it exists, it must ever remain a picture of all that is tyrannical and repelling in human nature.

Standing navies, as well as standing armies, serve to keep alive the spirit of war even in the meek heart of peace. In its very embers and smoulderings, they nourish that fatal fire, and half-pay officers, as the priests of Mars, yet guard the temple, though no god be there.\footnote{Ibid.}

A man-of-war being what it is, Melville finds it a paradox that a chaplain should function on it. One cannot expect the religion of peace to flourish in an oaken castle of war. His sermons were but ill calculated to benefit the crew for he was a transcendental divine who enlarged upon the follies of the ancient philosophers. He was particularly hard upon the Gnostics and Marcionites of the second century of the Christian era; but he never, in the remotest manner, attacked the every-day vices of the nineteenth century, as eminently illustrated in the man-of-war world. Concerning drunkenness, fighting, flogging and oppression - things expressly or impliedly prohibited by Christianity - he never spoke a word. In yet another way Melville finds his presence on the man-of-war ridiculous. How can a clergyman, who is entitled to receive 'two twentieths' of the
price paid to the sailors

for sinking and destroying ships full of human beings...prove efficacious in enlarging upon the criminality of Judas, who, for thirty pieces of silver, betrayed his Master?12

asks Melville. In Billy Budd Melville once again observes how the chaplain, in spite of being the minister of the Prince of Peace, indirectly subserves the purpose attested by the cannon. He actually lends the sanction of the religion of the meek to that which practically is the abrogation of everything but force.

It is not the low-grade sailors alone on whom the effect of war is bad. The most noble-hearted man also gets transformed during such an event. A man like Jack Chase who has a heart in him like a mastodon's and who has been seen weeping when a man has been flogged at the gangway becomes callous when war breaks out. Thus says Melville,

...it would seem that war almost makes blasphemers of the best of men, and brings them all down to the Feejee standard of humanity. Some man-of-war's-men have confessed to me, that as a battle has raged more and more, their hearts have hardened in infernal harmony; and, like their own guns, they have fought without a thought.13

12 Ibid., ch.38, p.157.
13 Ibid., ch.75, p.320.
A great part of the Evil that exists on a man-of-war is the result of the enforcement of a rigid Naval Code, on its inmates. But not all. For there are men who are organic and irreclaimable scoundrels who do wicked deeds as the cattle browse the herbage because wicked deeds seem the legitimate operation of their whole infernal organization. One such person is Bland, the master-at-arms. Melville's examination of the character of Bland reminds the reader of Jackson in *Redburn*. Both are reflections of the 'innate depravity of man'. Phrenologically both are without souls. But whereas Jackson's appearance itself is sufficient to reflect his evil make-up, Bland's polished exterior seems to disguise his wickedness. Melville's description of Bland is worth noting.

"this Bland... was no vulgar, dirty knave. In him...vice seemed, but only seemed, to lose half its seeming evil by losing all its apparent grossness...There was a fine polish about his whole person, and a pliant, insinuating style in his conversation, that was, socially, quite irresistible...Nothing but his mouth, that was somewhat small, Moorish-arched, and wickedly delicate, and his snaky, black eye, that at times shone like a dark-lantern in a jeweler-shop at midnight, betokened the accomplished scoundrel within. But in his conversation there was no trace of evil; nothing equivocal; he studiously shunned an indelicacy, never swore.... In short - in a merely psychological point of view, at least - he was a charming blackleg. Ashore, such a man might have been an irreproachable mercantile swindler, circulating in polite society."  

14 Ibid., ch. 44, p. 187.
Though the sailors loathed him they could not resist him for who can forever resist the very Devil himself when he comes in the guise of a gentleman, free, fine and frank? In *The Confidence-Man*, Melville shows how beguiling the charms of a sophisticated swindler can be. The study of Blend's character once again leads Melville to reflect on the arbitrariness of the 'Articles of War' in their definition of a man-of-war villain. Bland is an example of how much undetected guilt might be sheltered by the aristocratic awning of a quarter-deck and how many florid pursers could be legally protected in defrauding the ordinary sailors.

But the same attitude which guided him in his study of Jackson's character guides him here.

I, for one, regarded this master-at-arms with mixed feelings of detestation, pity, admiration, and something opposed to enmity. I could not but abominate him when I thought of his conduct; but I pitied the continual growing which, under all his deftly-donned disguises, I saw lying at the bottom of his soul.  

Both Redburn and White-Jacket realise that evil cannot be fully understood from the perch of a virtuous superiority. It is good to idealize virtue but one has to make allowances for man's shortcomings too. Man cannot live in perfect innocence. He must throw in his lot with the

15 Ibid., p.188.
guilt of mankind. A virtuous man just cannot isolate himself from Vice. If Virtue has to hold sway over Vice, it must come down from aloft, even as our blessed Redeemer came down to redeem our whole man-of-war-world; to that end, mixing with its sailors and sinners as equals. 16

says Melville in Chapter 54. Good and Evil cannot be separated into watertight compartments. Evil is but Good disguised and a knave a saint in his own way. What we deem wrong on our planet may be deemed right in another, even as some substances, without undergoing any mutations in themselves, utterly change their colour, according to the light thrown upon them. Therefore what needs to be abhorred is the monster of Sin itself not the sinner.

If Evil has to be accepted as a fact, who is to be held responsible for it? Melville is of the opinion that the worst of our evils we blindly inflict on ourselves. From the last ills no being can save another; therein each man must be his own saviour. Melville, at the time he wrote White-Jacket atleast, was not ready to hold Fate responsible. For

...all events are mixed in a fusion indistinguishable. What we call Fate is even, heart-

16 Ibid., ch. 54, p. 229.
less, and impartial; not a fiend to kindle
bigot flames, nor a philanthropist to espouse
the cause of Greece. We may fret, fume,
and fight; but the thing called Fate ever-
lastingly sustains an armed neutrality....
Yet though all this be so, nevertheless,
in our own hearts, we mold the whole world's
hereafter; and in our own hearts we fashion
our own gods. ... Ourselves are Fate: 17

But this belief in the impartiality of Fate will soon change
into a defiance of it as an embodiment of evil in Moby-Dick
and Pierre.

In Jack Chase, the noble First Captain of the Top we
have Melville's conception of an ideal man. All through his
works Melville shows a preoccupation with the virtues that
characterize an ideal man. Such a man, according to Melville,
combined a 'noble heart' with a 'lofty head'. Much of the
misery in the lives of mankind is the result either of an
'overgrown head' or a 'shrunken heart'. Melville's study of
an ideal man begins with Mardi. In that work we have the pre-
requisites of an ideal man.

Cerebrum must not overbalance cerebellum;
our brains should be round as globes, and
planted on capacious chests, inhaling mighty
morning inspirations. We have had vast deve-
lopments of parts of men, but none of manly
wholes. Before a full-developed man, Mardi
would fall down and worship. 18

17 Ibid., ch. 75, pp. 320-21.
18 Mardi, ch. 180, p. 490.
Jack Chase comes very near to Melville's conception, as his study in chapter four of *White-Jacket* suggests. Melville remarks:

No man ever had a better heart or a bolder. He was loved by the seamen and admired by the officers;... The main-top, over which he presided, was a sort of oracle of Delphi; to which, many pilgrims ascended, to have their perplexities or differences settled. There was such an abounding air of good sense and good feeling about the man,... 19

To use Richard Chase's words Jack Chase was a prototype of what Melville envisioned as the full, heroic Promethean - Oedipean personality. 20

a man who like Prometheus asserts the heroism of man against a hostile adversary but who like Oedipus also accepts man's fallibility. Melville's greater works project more complex studies of the head-heart dichotomy.

The study of Cadwallader Cuticle, the Surgeon of the Fleet comes near to Hawthorne's study of a dehumanized scientist. But more than he, it is the description of the Parisian cast in the Surgeon's department of Morbid Anatomy.

---


that catches the reader's attention. For, there, Melville seems to be hovering on the brink of metaphysics once again. In an apparently simple work dealing with naval abuses, this study appears remarkable.

...it was the head of an elderly woman, with an aspect singularly gentle and meek, but at the same time wonderfully expressive of a gnawing sorrow, never to be relieved.

The hideous head evokes feelings of 'freezing fascination' as well as 'sorrow' for

the horn seemed the mark of a curse for some mysterious sin, conceived and committed before the spirit had entered the flesh. Yet that sin seemed something imposed, and not voluntarily sought; some sin growing out of the heartless necessities of the predestination of things; some sin under which the sinner sank in sinless woe.21

Melville seems to be probing the mystery of human innocence intermixed with original guilt and the paradox of undeserved punishment.

21 White-Jacket, ch. 61, p. 249.