Shorter poems of Herman Melville

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THE SHORTER POEMS OF HERMAN MELVILLE

by

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Critical Studies of Melville's Poetry

Herman Melville has no reputation as a poet. He is not known as a bad poet, or a mediocre poet, or a lesser poet; he is simply unknown as a poet, even among students of literature. Critical studies of his poetry are few, especially in view of the bulk of material devoted to the novels and the shorter fiction. With this dearth of information as a background, it is startling to the uninitiated to stumble upon the poems, to read "The Portent" or perhaps "The Conflict of Convictions" for the first time, and to realize that here is the Melville one has come painfully to know; beginning with the high school introduction to Moby-Dick as the masterpiece of the man who wrote nothing else worth reading, the subsequent discoveries of Bartleby and Billy Budd, and finally the poems.

Turning to the scanty critical studies, one finds much favorable comment on Melville's poetry. The predominant feeling seems to be, however, that in spite of whatever merits the particular critic sees in the poetry, the foundation is somehow faulty; the poetry is not "good" poetry and its merits are often viewed almost with surprise. Willard Thorp, writing an introduction in 1938 to Melville, Representative Selections, typifies this general reaction. Thorp speculates as to whether the poetry may eventually win a place for
itself in literature, as has been done by Moby-Dick and Pierre, and
says of its merits:

To those who admire Landor and Hardy and Kousman
Melville will be congenial. The strength, sobriety,
and almost embarrassing sincerity of his verse should
be as invigorating as the sea air to any American who
has been reared patriotically on the pale prettiness
of the "Vision of Sir Launfal" and the Eagle-Scout mor-
ality of "Excelsior." A few of his poems, among them
to Glarel, must be included with the best we have to
contribute to the world's store of memorable verse.¹

There is certainly a tone of qualification in Thorp's praise; the
suggestion of "embarrassing sincerity" in comparison with "Excelsior"
gives a certain sense of limitation, and while a "few of his poems
must be included with the best," what of the others? Yet
Thorp's comments are basically favorable, and in the course of his
introduction he refutes any belief that Melville was haphazard in
composing his verses. He points out that Melville worked continually
over his poems, constantly revising and reworking. This revising,
however, according to Thorp, was the revision of ideas rather than
of form. Thorp feels that Melville was apt to neglect verse forms,
seldom straying from the ballad stanza, four-stress couplet, or
rime-coues. Because Melville seemed satisfied with an approximate
metre and rhyme, "Only a few of the poems...achieve the artistic
unity of rhythmical exactness, propriety of image and melodic beauty

¹ Willard Thorp, Introduction to Herman Melville, Representative
which the best poetry possesses. One stumbles on imperfections in these artistic elements in nearly every poem. . . . "2 Then too, Thorp feels that Melville's choice of historical subjects, as typifies the Battle-Pieces in particular, and the highly personal nature of some of the poems stands in the way of modern appreciation.

Thorp, then, while suggesting that there is real merit in the poetry of Melville—indeed, he implies that the epilogue to Mardi reveals the whole struggle of Melville's life to reach an affirmation of faith—and believing that an understanding of the poetry is essential in grasping the drift of thought of Melville's last years, while seeing the philosophic value of the poetry, still questions its value per se.

In an essay written for the Kenyon Review in 1946, Robert Penn Warren concurs with Thorp's view that Melville's "artistic unity" in the shorter poems is often distorted or violated, but feels that additional qualifications must be made.

It is ordinarily said that he [Melville] did not master the craft of verse. . . . a poet of shreds and patches. . . . I do not wish to deny the statement that he did not master his craft, but I do feel that it needs some special interpretation.3

2 Thorp, p. xxv.

Warren states that Melville was aware that there is a relationship between style and fundamental interpretations. While Melville was capable of writing conventional poetry, he was dissatisfied with the results and looked for a fresh approach.

It is as though we have here a statement of the poet's conviction that the verse which belonged to the world of respectability could not accommodate the rendering of the experience undergone. . . perhaps the violences, the distortions, the wrenchings in the versification. . . are. . . not so much the result of mere ineptitude as the result of a conscious effort to develop a nervous, dramatic, masculine style.4

Robert Penn Warren seems unwilling to grant much latitude to the "violences, distortions, wrenchings." His comment "not so much the result of mere ineptitude" suggests that ineptitude still plays an important part in the problems of Melville's poetry, and he begins his essay with the assumption that Melville did not master his craft. In spite of these qualifications, of Warren's really beginning with Thorp's premise that something is wrong with the form of Melville's verse, Warren does give serious consideration to the poetry as poetry, and argues for a greater relationship of form to idea than Thorp would suggest. Warren also lays great stress on the occasional boldness of comparisons found in the poems, citing "The Portent" or "In

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a Church of Padua."

That there is something special about the language of the poems, as Warren points out, is noted in an article by G. W. Stoner in 1944. Coming in the context of a predominantly negative essay (Stoner's article is entitled "Enigma of a Very Good, Very Bad Writer" and he claims that of Melville's works, only Moby-Dick is of value) he says, "His poetry reveals only a minor poet, but one whose words, though unpractised, have still a cutting edge," and cites "The Maldivian Shark." Stoner does not make clear what he means by "unpractised;" this comment merely joins the ranks of Thorp's "imperfections" and Robert Penn Warren's "shreds and patches."

Howard Vincent, in his introduction to the Collected Poems of Herman Melville, says:

The maturation of Melville the poet is clearly shown in the contrast between Moby's high-spirited gush and the poetry composed by the serious-minded Melville in 1859. By then Herman Melville was an artist who had grown to the conviction that the poet should be not only a Yosuy but also a Babbalanja, that the spontaneous overflow of Yosuy should be tempered by Babbalanja's critical penetration—or that emotion and ideas might well mix.  

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Vincent, like Tharp, is primarily interested in the poetry as a guide to Herman Melville the artist, seeking through it the trends of thought which occupied Melville for the last thirty-five years of his life. Vincent sees the poetry as the result of Melville's disillusionment with fiction and the reception given it by the public, and his resolution to withdraw from commercial writing and find a personal creative pleasure in the writing of verse. He points out that Melville put little stock in his own verse, speaking of himself as a pestaster in a letter to his brother Thomas Melville; and says of the Battle-Pieces, "The book was not a failure, but neither was it a financial or literary success." This very qualified view by the editor of the Collected Poems implies limited enthusiasm on his part. Indeed, his stressing of Melville's own lighthearted comments on his own verse suggests that it not be taken so seriously as Tharp or Warren might consider it. While he mentions "maturation" between the early poems which appeared in the novel Mardi and which were attributed to a youthful romantic type called Foamy, and those of the Battle-Pieces, first-published of the volumes of shorter poems; and the implicit approval which emerges in his closing comment—"It is hoped that the evaluation of Melville as a poet will follow the publication and wider distribution of his poetry to the public"—

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7 Vincent, p. xi.

8 Ibid., p. xii.
Vincent in the end really shirks any critical evaluation of his own, and makes no mention of the problem of form which earlier concerned both Thorp and Robert Penn Warren.

While Thorp is primarily interested in the philosophical content of the poems in relation to Melville's other works; and Robert Penn Warren stresses the problem of relationship of form to idea; Newton Arvin, writing in 1949, stresses the importance of Melville's position as a poet in the tradition of American poetry. Melville wrote his poetry, says Arvin, in the midst of a slump in American poetry. While Poe, Emerson, and Whitman were supported by a whole stream of literary tradition, Melville, like Sidney Lanier and Emily Dickinson, was unsupported and had to make his own way.

"...whenever this happens, a writer loses something irreplaceable, but that nevertheless, if the root of the matter is in him, if the essential expressive faculty is there, his work will derive a kind of painful and difficult beauty from his very disabilities,9"

While Arvin sees Sidney Lanier moving in the direction pointed out by Poe and Whitman—"an enhanced musicality, a more incantatory diction, an approach to the indications of symbolism"—Melville, along with Emily Dickinson, took Emerson's "hinted path"—"colloquial-

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10 Ibid.
ism, the prosaic, the anti-poetic, the ironical—and anticipated twentieth-century poetry. Melville was interested in the Actual, says Arvin, believing neither in romantic desperation nor in romantic confidence.

...to render the many-sidedness of reality without transcendental distortions, Melville worked out, no doubt painfully, a poetic manner that, with all its miscarriages, had the elements of a genuine newness...that flowered from time to time in a magnificent line or poem.12

Here Arvin, by explaining the literary tradition—or lack of tradition—in which Melville found himself, and in stressing Melville’s attempting to come to terms with the Actual, is attempting to come to terms with the problem which bothered Thorp; the lack of "artistic unity," or Robert Penn Warren’s "violences, distortions, wrenchings." Where Warren suggests that some of Melville’s problems with forms can be explained by seeing them as an attempt to fit verse to idea, Arvin goes further and claims that the distortions of verse are an attempt to get at reality without the distortions of transcendentalism.

The strength of Melville’s poetry lies for Arvin in the vocabulary; he points out the anti-poetic nature of many of the words and

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11 Arvin, p. 1034.

12 Ibid., 1035.
terms used, such as those expressions common to business, industry, law, or mathematics. Arvin also stresses Melville's tendency toward linguistic creativity, turning verbs into nouns and using archaic words in unusual circumstances. Warren has suggested some of this aspect by his "occasional boldness of comparison." Arvin concludes, however, that most of Melville's poems are imperfect, and that some of them are hopelessly so.

In his book Herman Melville, published in 1950, Newton Arvin repeats the essence of his earlier article. He makes a distinction between Melville's use of primary imagery—which he calls pictorial imagery and seems to admire, calling Melville the Brady of Civil War verse—and true metaphor, which he likens to the use of metaphor by Donne and Marvell. The philosophic importance of the poems in relationship to the main body of Melville's works is for Arvin a kind of positive statement after the depths of nihilism; here Arvin echoes Thorp's "affirmation of faith" found in the Epilogue to Clarel.

Richard Chase, writing in 1949, reads in the Battle-Pieces Melville's great concern for America and its growing tendencies of directionlessness. The poems, for Chase, indicate a growing conservatism on Melville's part.

As Mr. Robert Penn Warren has pointed out, Melville's Civil War poems deal with certain kinds of disruptions, disconnections and antimonies and symbolically affirm that these can be reconciled or made whole again by the processes of human life.13

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says Chase. Chase's real objective in studying the poems, however, is to view them in relationship to the philosophical development of Melville's works as a whole; and again we have a critic, who, as does Thorp, implies that there is a greater value in viewing the poems as a key to Melville's thought, rather than for their poetic nature. After speaking of growing conservatism on Melville's part, along with his concern for political and natural upheaval, and renewed faith in Man, Chase makes no attempt to examine the poems from the point of view of form or structure.

In his article "Differences in Melville's Poetry," written in 1955, Lawrence Barrett tackles the problem of wrenchings and distortions of verse form which has troubled most of the critics. While most of the critics seem to agree that Melville's primary interest as a poet was in the ideas being expressed and not in the form of the genre in which he was working, Barrett says

His [Melville's] career is a long struggle to resolve intellect and feeling—the head and the heart...the struggle was fought primarily between his own sense of symbol, which was valid, and his effort to intellectualize his symbols, which led him into destructive ambiguities. Eventually, when the ambiguity had gone far enough, he learned that in probing into symbols he was thinking simultaneously as a poet and a philosopher, and that the two could be resolved only by a return to poetry and to form.14

14 Lawrence Barrett, "Differences in Melville's Poetry," PMLA, 70 (September, 1955), 609.
The elements of the head and the heart, of course, are dramatized in the novel Mardi through the characterisation of Yoosy, the poet, and Babbalanja, the philosopher. At this time Melville seemed to feel that the two elements are irreconcilable; and in choosing the way of the head, or of Babbalanja, turned from the writing of verse until around 1858. While the poetry of Mardi shows complete disregard for form, the later poems—contrary to Thorp's view and going farther than either Robert Penn Warren or Newton Arvin care to venture—owe a great deal to form. That many of the poems are disturbing to the reader because of wrenchings or distortions is the result, according to Barrett, of three "differences" between Melville's poetry and what we have come to expect of poetry, reared as we are on Yeats and T. S. Eliot. In order to clarify what he means by "differences"—which Warren begins to suggest in his "occasional boldness of comparisons," or Arvin with his stressing of the anti-poetic vocabulary—Barrett begins his article with a discussion of Melville's unique handling of symbols, summed up in the paragraph quoted above. He points out that most of Melville's symbols begin in the earliest of his novels, Typee, and are used in Mardi as allegory. Intellectualised, arbitrary, they

exhibited a one-to-one relationship between the symbols and the meant. But the felt symbols, chosen from experience which has been nascent in Typee, forced themselves in. . . Within the sentences themselves the flower, the sun, the sea and land, the mountain, and the diver are used again and again
to reach for meanings strongly felt but still undefined.15

These symbols continue to develop, becoming more and more complicated, until in Moby-Dick and Pierre they become highly personal, with personal meanings assigned by Melville. The first of Barrett's "differences" results from this genesis of symbols, and suggests Thorp's earlier observation that the poems tend to be too personal to win modern appreciation. Because the symbols are so highly personal, developed from metaphor and having risen from metaphor and experience, they often pass by unnoticed. As an example, Barrett cites "The Bell Tower," in which the "fountain of the sun" is used; which first appeared as a metaphor in Mardi. Other symbols are retained in the same manner, working up through the earlier novels through Moby-Dick and Pierre to their final appearance in the poems; the fire, mountain, pyramid, white and green, the shark, sea, and land.

The diving-bell, for instance, which appears a number of times in the poems, is a fusion of Melville's old symbol of the diver and his symbol of the shell. Because these symbols lack the quality of shock, the sense of the unique which living with the personal symbolism of Eliot and Yeats has taught us to expect, they will seem, until the genesis of each of them has been studied in detail, to be little more than poetic metaphor. Only with such study will we realize how rich in profound meanings they were for Melville

15 Barrett, p. 610.
and how rich it can become for those who know him well. 16

The idea of the genesis of symbols is hinted by Thorp, who says of reading Melville,

One should not attempt to read Clarel until one has grown familiar with the genesis and development of the dominant moods of Melville's life. . . . The overtones of innumerable allusions to books . . . to events in history, philosophical ideas, even works of painting and architecture, would be quite lost on one who had not met them before in Melville's biography and felt some of their symbolic significance for him. . . . Clarel possesses all the faults of a "private" poem. . . . 17

Barrett has noted the genesis of symbols from the early works to the poems, a process parallel to what Thorp notes here.

The second of the "differences" Barrett notes in Melville's poetry refutes some of the charges of poetic diction levelled by critics. This "difference" centers on the matter of metaphysics already noted in Melville's poetry by Newton Arvin. Melville, according to Barrett, created his own metaphysics by making use of ambiguities; the outcome of his attempt to reconcile feeling and intellect in his examination of the mind. Pointing out "The Margrave's Birthnight" as an expression of Melville's own incapacity to believe or to be content in disbelief, Barrett says

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Barrett, p. 612.

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Thorp, p. xxxix.
His trick was to write a metaphor the reader would want to take one way and at the same time to deny him the right to take it so. ... This device of using metaphors and images to mean something other than what the reader expects them to mean extends to individual words in the poems....

Here Barrett is getting at the roots of what Robert Penn Warren's "occasional boldness of comparison" seems to suggest, as well as G. W. Stoner's "cutting edge." Newton Arvin's comparison of Melville's use of metaphor with that of Donne and Marvell is especially suggested by Barrett's analysis of a metaphor which "the reader would want to take one way and at the same time deny him the right to take it so."

Barrett's third and final "difference" concerns the problem of Melville's treatment of poetic form. To Barrett, Melville's rejection of poetry in *Mardi* is a rejection of form; he points out that Melville shows little sense of form in any of his novels. This disregard

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18 Barrett, pp. 612-3.

19 Completely opposing this opinion is Nathalia Wright, who claims, "The objection raised by most of Melville's early biographer-critics to the form of his major novels has been found largely answerable by more exclusively textual scrutiny and by recognition of the satiric strain in his literary tradition. It is now widely agreed that such compositions as *Moby-Dick* and *Billy Budd* are complete designs, consisting of related parts. But the terms in which Melville's structure has been appraised have not commonly allowed for the operation within it of a structural theory. It has not yet been perceived that he belongs, with Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman, among the American literary discoverers of the principle of organic form... The complete organic-
for form indicates Melville's basic discounting of its value and
his own chafing against law and arbitrary order. "Further, Melville
seems to have carelessly associated all literary form with the neo-
classical unities and then, equally carelessly, to have damned the
whole bundle," comments Barrett.

Yet by the time Melville comes to write the poems, his views
seem to have changed to the point that he sees form as important.
Whatever the reasons which brought about this change might be, Barrett
feels they will probably remain obscure, but suggests, "He may have
been driven to it partly by the ultimate failure of his own form-
lessness... to resolve the dissociation of sensibility, to identify
the felt and the thought." As examples of Melville's new interest
in form, Barrett cites the poems "Greek Architecture" and "Greek
Masonry." He refutes Robert Penn Warren's point that Melville wrench-
ed verse forms in search of a bold and nervous style by maintaining

functional configuration appears in Mardi, Melville's first con-
sciously artistic creation. Taji, Yeomy, and Babbalanja endorse
the simple doctrine that art is genius inspired. Taji, who feels
within him numberless souls, continents, oceans, and celestial
systems, is the artist as cosmos. To Babbalanja the cosmos is an
organism..." Nathalia Wright, "Form as Function in Melville,"

20
Barrett, p. 614.

21
Ibid., 615.
that Melville already had such a style; and sees in "A Utilitarian
View of the Monitor's Fight" a direct disavowal of a bold and ner-
vous language.

If Melville had become as much aware of form as
all this seems to indicate, it is impossible to
say that those lines of his which seem to us rough
and strained are a result of sheer carelessness.
And, if not impossible, it is dangerous to say that
they are a result of an inability to handle his
medium, for there are many passages in which he
shows sustained control. Indeed, no small number
of his best poems, though they have been little
regarded, were written easily and skillfully in
the idiom of his own age.22

Rather than carelessness, Barrett attributes Melville's wrenchings
of form to an attempt to fit form to idea, an attempt to reconcile
the disparate elements of feeling and idea, or dissociation of sen-
sibility with which he was beset. Finally, Barrett cites "The March
into Virginia" as indicative of the conflict which Melville was
attempting to resolve; the conflict between his feelings and the
formal structure in which he was working.

The remaining critical study of the poems is F. O. Matthiessen's
introduction to the Selected Poems, written in 1946. Interested in
the light which the poems can shed on the later years of Melville's
life and the development of his mind during this period, Matthiessen

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Barrett, p. 623.
notes the recurrence of symbols which have been developed through
the various prose works; and says,

Other poems serve to light up facets of Melville’s
mind as it developed in the years after his great
creative period: “Greek Architecture” indicates
his understanding of a balanced form far different
from any he had struggled to master: “Art”—whose
lines are scratched out and rewritten with many
changes in the manuscript—tells how painfully he
understood the tensions of the struggle for the
union of opposites.23

Regarding form, Matthiessen says,

Few of his poems reveal anything like the mastery
of organic rhythm to be found in his best prose. He
had become an apprentice too late to a new craft.
Although he tried his hand at a variety of metrical
forms, he seldom progressed beyond an acquired skill.
He was capable of such lyric patterns as “Shiloh” or
“Monody,” but he could often be stiff and clumsy.
Yet what he had to convey is very impressive. . . . A
reward that awaits the reader who follows these
selections, . . . , is the frequency with which his medi-
crere poems are illuminated by passages where the
poet is in supreme control.24

In other words, while Matthiessen too indicates basic deficiencies
in the structure or metrical form of Melville’s poetry, his criticism
is on the whole more favorable than any of the others, emphasizing
as he does “Yet what he had to convey is very impressive.”

23 F. O. Matthiessen, Introduction to Herman Melville, Selected
24 Ibid., pp. 6-7.
There is, then, a growing tendency among critics to refute the earlier views of Melville's poetry as totally inept on the level of form, and to suggest various significances in the wrenchings of verse; beginning with Robert Penn Warren's suggestion, the fitting of form to idea (actually anticipated by Thorp; he says, "This tendency in varying metrical patterns within single poems is curiously in line with the modern preference for organic rhythms, that is, verse in which the mood of the poem rather than a fixed traditional lyric form determines the movement."); Newton Arvin's view that Melville attempted to get at the real or actual through special handling of form follows Warren; and at last there is Lawrence Barrett's theory of the reconciliation of feeling and ideas by way of form.

A close reading of the shorter poems provides some insight on the resolution of these varying views. An examination of the major themes of the Battle-Pieces, first-published of the shorter poems, reveals a great concern for change and upheaval, whether political, social, or religious. There are the premonitions of "The Portent," the turmoil and storm metaphors of "Misgivings," the shift from romanticism to realism in "A Utilitarian View of the Monitor's Fight," and the conclusions of "The Apparition: A Retrospect." A few poems represent a sort of calm superimposed over chaos, as "Shiloh: A Requiem," or "Malvern Hill." Accompanying this whole concern for change is a general tension which permeates the entire group of poems;

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Thorp, p. xxi.
and it is this tension which is reflected in the versification and causes much of the roughness and wrenchings. Certainly some of this tension stems from problems mentioned in the various critical studies.

Illustrating how far Melville has come by the time the Battles-Pieces are written is an examination of the early novel Mardi and the poems included in it; which show the kind of verse Melville wrote when he was not in command of the skills involved. Also, the philosophical discussions in this novel show Melville's basically limited view on prose and poetry in general.
Poetic Theory in Mardi

Herman Melville's poetry may be divided into three groups. The first-published examples of his poetry, along with early poetic theory, appear in the novel Mardi, written in 1839. The second group consists of the shorter poems, many of which appear in the volumes Battle-Pieces, Timoleon, and John Marr and Other Sailors, which were published between 1866 and 1891. The final division consists of Clarel, the long narrative poem published in 1876.

A study of Melville's poetry begins with an examination of Mardi, which contains not only the first published examples of his poetry, but some indication of his early attitude toward poetry. This attitude, or theory of poetry, is shown through the character of Yoomey, the traveller-poet; through the philosophical discussions which are carried on chiefly by Babbalanja, the philosopher; and through the poems themselves, most of which are attributed to Yoomey.

Mardi begins in the adventure-story tone of Melville's two previous novels, Typee and Omoo; but rapidly switches from realism to fantasy. The narrator, Taji, deserts a whaling ship in the middle of the Pacific Ocean in an open boat; eventually, with companions Jarl and Samoa, rescues a beautiful blonde maiden from the native priest who intends to sacrifice her. Taji takes the maiden, Yillah, to the land of King Media, where they enjoy a long, idyllic honeymoon marred only by the foreboding appearance of an incognito, and by

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Yillah's premonitions of her own death by drowning.

Yillah vanishes suddenly, and the heart-broken Taji resolves to travel through the islands of the archipelago of Mardi in order to find her again. Media, king of Mardi, decides to accompany Taji as a sightseer, and brings with him the royal philosopher, Babbanjia; the royal antiquary, Mohi or Braid-Beard; and the poet laureate of Media's court, Yoomy. This combined quest and sight-seeing tour makes up the remainder of the book, and serves as a vehicle for the various philosophical ideas, literary theory, or political comments with which Melville lards the novel. The travellers discuss at length the various island which they visit, and their conversations touch on nearly every subject imaginable. It is through these conversations that much of Melville's theory of poetry is brought out.

Melville describes Yoomy, the poet laureate of Mardi, as

A youthful, long-haired, blue-eyed minstrel; all fits and starts; at times, absent of mind, and wan of cheek; but always very neat and pretty... Most given was Yoomy to amorous melodies, and rondes, and roundelayes, very witching to hear... Thus much for Yoomy as a minstrel. In other respects, it would be hard to depict him. He was so capricesious a meddler; so swayed by contrary moods; so lofty, so humble, so sad, so merry; so made up of a thousand contradictions, that we must e'en let him depict himself as our story progresses. And herein it is hoped he will succeed; since no one in Mardi comprehended him.

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This first description of Yoomy establishes him as a "poetic" type, possessing most of the stock characteristics associated with a poet, and recognizable as a poet from his physical appearance. His long hair, wan cheeks, and absent-mindedness, together with his preference for "amorous melodies, and rondes, and roundelayes," suggests a stock romantic figure. Merrell R. Davis, in his Melville's Mardi: A Chartless Voyage, suggests a similarity between Yoomy and Shelley's poet in his Defense of Poetry, and points out, "...Yoomy's possession of the 'social sympathies' heightens his resemblance to the general type which Shelley represented."27 That Yoomy is a creature guided by the feelings rather than by the mind, or reason, is made plain by Melville's emphasis on his emotionalism. This emotionalism is shown in the early description, which mentions "contrary moods" and "contradictions," and in subsequent emphasis on Yoomy's feeling. "Babbalanga...said lowly, 'Your pursuit is mine, noble Taji. Where'er you search, I follow.' So, too, Yoomy addressed me; but with still more feeling."28

Yoomy, then, begins to emerge as a representative of extreme youth with its perjorative connotations of overconfidence and naivete. Howard P. Vincent, in his introduction to the Collected Poems,


28 Mardi, I, 230.
suggests that

Yoomy [18] Melville's ironic portrait of the romantic, long-haired poet whose verses are emotion recollected without tranquillity. It is not unlikely that Yoomy is also a portrait of Melville, or one part of him...and that Yoomy's versification mockingly parodies the youthful poetry from Melville's pen.29

Vincent does not make clear whether he sees Yoomy as Melville's ironic treatment of poetry as a whole, or as the excessively romantic brand of poetry which Melville himself might possibly have been writing previous to Mardi. Obviously Yoomy is a not-too-favorable portrait of a young man governed by excessive emotion or "heart." He is also the only representative poet in the novel, excepting references made to poets of the past by himself and by Babbalanja. Therefore, carrying all the stock features of the poet, it would seem that the "irony" is being applied to poetry and poets as a whole, a genre which Melville seems to feel is chiefly characterized by "heart" or "feeling." That this is Melville's attitude is substantiated by the discussions carried on between the members of the search-tourist party.

In contrast to Yoomy's youthfulness and emotional nature, Melville presents the aged historian, Mohi, and Babbalanja, the philosopher. Mohi, the historian, reveres legends and antiques because

29 Vincent, p. viii.
of their age, while Bhabalanya combines Age with the superior qualities of philosophy—deeper understanding and penetration, or Reason. Mohi is struck by the ancient sepulchre of forgotten kings, impressed by its age and endurance, but it remains for Bhabalanya to comment on the implicit view of immortality which the sepulchre symbolizes, and to draw an analogy between man and the silkworm. "From its chrysalis state, the silkworm but becomes a moth, that very quickly expires. Its longest existence is as a worm. All vanity, vanity, hoomy, to seek in nature for positive warranty to these aspirations of ours...all posthumous renown, which is the only renown, is valueless."30 Man, then, who is but a worm in life, can stake no hopes in fame after death, since death is either a state of complete oblivion, or "...a birth into brightness..." When Mardi must seem to them the most trivial of reminiscences."31 This black paradox will be handled later by Melville in such works as Bartleby and "The Bell Tower." There is a foreshadowing of Bartleby in this presentation of the writer and his recognition or lack of recognition; the scrivener, doomed to a lifetime of copying, is able to escape such an existence only by asserting no will. Bartleby's final drifting

30 Mardi, I, 244-5.

31 Ibid., 244.
into oblivion, and the hint given of his final resting place—
"With kings and counselors"32—parallels Babbalanja's view of death as either oblivion or a birth into brightness.

Melville seems to see a certain value in Yoozy's emotionalism, especially in his sensitivity for the human condition. When the boy who refuses to follow the blind priest is carried away, it is Yoozy who cries, "My soul bursts! . . . My lord, my lord, let us save the boy."33 As in the departure from Mardi, where Melville emphasises Yoozy's intense feeling for Taji on his loss of Yillah, Yoozy's feeling, while excessive and inferior to Babbalanja's reason, leads him in the right direction. This is dramatized by his eagerness to join in the search for Yillah, who is variously interpreted as "joy [rescued] from the religion which would sacrifice her,"34 as Taji's "ideal" who has become enchanted by Hautia,35 or that "good based on an initial act of evil is doomed to end in disaster."36 Des-


33 Mardi, I, 325.


35 Davis, p. 141.

pite varying points of view, however, it is evident that Yillah is a lost "good" and that Yoomy's joining in the search for her indicates his desire to find "good."

It is during the visit to the island of Maramma that a second quest begins to emerge in the plot of Mardi. A hint of a sub-quest is given at the beginning of the voyage—"In particular, Bhabalanja had often expressed the most ardent desire to visit every one of the isles, in quest of some object, mysteriously hinted"—but no real mention is made of this second quest until, on the island of Maramma, another elusive character begins to be mentioned along with Yillah: Alma, usually considered to be Christ. At length, on the island of Serenia, the travellers find a place where the doctrines of Alma are practised to the best of everyone's ability.

While listening to the prophet on Serenia, Yoomy's first attitude is "If Alma teaches love, I want no gift to learn." As well as being in keeping with the "feeling" which has been emphasised throughout the novel, this comment indicates Yoomy's great egotism. As a poet, Yoomy sees himself of value, not because of any well-examined reasons, but because he is a poet per se, and because he possesses all the stock attributes of a poet—mainly feeling—all

37 Mardi, I, 230.
38 Humphreys, p. 25.
39 Mardi, II, 365.
of which in turn are of value per se. Love is a good thing because it is love, and since Yoomy is a poet, he has a monopoly on love.

After the prophet of Alma has outlined the social virtues practiced by the Serenians, he discusses their faith. "...And when we die, this faith shall be our pillow; and when we rise, our staff; and at the end, our crown. For we are all immortal. Here, Alma joins with our own hearts, confirming nature's promptings." Through this statement, the prophet is providing a haven from the fear of death, which, a few chapters earlier, haunted all the voyagers but the demi-god and hence immortal king. Babbalanja, who speculated much earlier that death meant either the state of complete oblivion or "a birth into brightness," immediately sees his idea of brightness confirmed by the prophet's promise of a crown, and replies, "Some black cloud seems fleeing from me." He is first persuaded to the faith of the Serenians through the hope it offers of immortality, and, after assuring himself that this faith is compatible with reason, becomes a firm convert, incidentally overlooking his own early statement about nature—"All vanity, vanity, Yoomy, to seek in nature for positive warranty to these aspirations of ours"—which contradicts the prophet's assumption that Alma confirms the promptings of nature.

40 Mardi, II, 369.
41 Ibid., p. 368.
The same speech of the prophet's which converts Babbalanja
converts Yoosy.

"No, brother! Right reason, and Alma, are
the same; else Alma, not reason, would we reject.
The Master's great command is Love; and here do
all things green, and all things good, unite. Love
is in all... How can we err, thus feeling? We
hear loved Alma's pleading, prompting voice in
every breeze, in every leaf; we see his earnest
eye in every star and flower."

"Poetry!" cried Yoosy, 'and poetry is truth!
He stirs me.' 42

Beyond the fact that the prophet's speech moves from a concern for
"right reason" to "Love" with something less than convincing logic,
Yoosy's utterance caps his previous adolescent state. He has gone
the gamut from adolescent self-pity to adolescent optimism. Here
again, poetry per se carries the day for Yoosy. That he has failed
to mature as a character, to develop any more completely assimil-
ated views than he held when he quarreled with Mohi in the early part
of the voyage, is shown by the similarity of his comments. "Much
truth is not in thee, historian... we exalt; you corrode," he said
earlier, a statement which Babbalanja, the voice of reason, showed to
be pretentious and fallacious; and in Yoosy's speech to the prophet
of Alma, he demonstrates the same sentiments he did earlier, as he

42 Nardi, II, 268.

43 Ibid., I, 325.
Phenomena of the scene he chooses to depict.

and be offered no other view of a poet—to wrestle with nature—
at this point, however, was the peculiar partner the Globe of Rome—

stood poet "and England's Immortal. It Mediterraneo total amount of poet—

may be another poeturer in the direction of the stereotyped maunders-

this point, Mediterraneo's conscious, no one in hand comprehended him—

these of Fethre's, 'love,' and emotion. He is never developed beyond

to deprive, which of this abstrait as a poet and all the "poetic" qual—

seed for us as an adolescent, given to empirical spirit from enthusiasm

since no one comprehended him. "Gnome has been uhreader—

at our story processes. And heathen if he hoped he will success?

a thousand contradictions. That we must, even let him depict himself

Mediterraneo begin his description of Rome as a "... so made up of

proclaimation partly at the essence of truth with all the old imotions—

90
The Poetry of Mardi

The twenty-two poems contained in Mardi are, for the most part, attributed to Yoomy. One of Yoomy's functions during the voyage through the archipelago is to interpret the flower messages sent by the dark queen, Hautia, and his poems reflect both his concern with the flowers and his conventional romanticism, as shown here in "The Song:"44

Far off in the sea is Marlena,
A land of shades and streams,
A land of many delights.
Dark and bold, thy shores, Marlena;
But green, and timorous, thy soft knolls,
Crouching behind the woodlands... .

Soft sigh the boughs in the stilly air,
Soft lap the beach the billows there;
And in the woods or by the streams,
You needs must nod in the Land of Dreams.45

The most outstanding characteristic of this poem is its use of conventional or "typically poetic" phrases. "Stilly air" is a good example of this overuse of poetic diction. Other words make little more sense or carry little more impact, as in "A land of many delights," or "nod in the Land of Dreams."

44 Howard P. Vincent, editor of the Collected Poems, has given titles to the poems from Mardi. For purposes of reference, I am using his titles.

45 Mardi, I, 363.
The metre of "The Song" is scarcely evident. The first line has three beats, with a tendency toward dactyls; the second line has three beats of regular iambics. The fourth line has four beats of falling rhythm, and the fifth line has four beats of something approximating iambics. The sixth line goes back to the original three beats, with no regular pattern of metre.

The rhyme is eccentric; there is no use of rhyme at all through the first nine lines, and then one is presented with the doubtful couplet of "Onimoo. . .Ponoo," followed by the approximations of "Tarra. . .Vina. . .Hina," which also picks up the repeated "Marlena." The rhyme then disappears for several lines, reappearing to end the poem with two couplets. The last line of the poem is chiefly notable for its difficult articulation. "You needs must" cannot be pronounced without a pause, and "nod" breaks the line again, so that it reads, "You needs (pause in articulation) must (pause) nod," which through awkwardness cancels any poetic quality.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the poem is the image in the first six lines of the "soft knolls,/Crouching behind the woodlands." The idea of soft knolls crouching anywhere seems ludicrous, and such a note adds nothing to the verse. Yet such a use of chiaroscuro, the juxtaposition of an image against another image which is either quite out of keeping or in strong contrast, appears later in Melville's work, and to much better advantage. Note, for example, the contrast of images in this line from "The Maldive
"Shark:" "Or lurk in the port of serrated teeth."  

The main impression of "The Song" is that Melville combined all the worst features of poetastuary into one poem, presenting in this way the character of his "youthful Yoosy." That the poem is "bad" in its writer's eyes is indicated by Babbanjana's remark:

... 'Mean you, old man, that my lines... are composed with such skill, that the description begets the reality; or would you ironically suggest that the song is a sleepy thing itself?' says Yoosy to Mohi.

... 'Now, are you not a silly boy,' said Babbanjana, 'when from the ambiguity of his speech, you could so easily have derived something flattering, thus to seek to extract unpleasantness from it? Be wise, Yoosy; and hereafter, whenever a remark like that seems equivocal, be sure to wrest commendation from it, though you torture it to the quick.'

Babbanjana's speech again suggests the superiority of the philosopher over the "youthful" poet, whose verse is so sophomoric as to hardly rate consideration, and which almost puts Mohi to sleep; and whose understanding is so limited that the older men can have fun at his expense. Vincent says, "These poems [from Mardi] should not be taken so seriously as some critics have seemed to, for they are the outpourings of the effusive Yoosy, Melville's ironic portrait..."
Aside from the question of the ironic treatment, already discussed, Vincent's comment seems correct. One cannot imagine Melville's taking seriously such a concoction as "The Song." Yet even in such a poem, interesting aspects appear, such as the peculiar image of "soft knells," Grouching."

"The Song" is one of the earliest verses attributed to Yoomy. If Yoomy is supposed to develop, it would seem logical that such development should be noticeable in his verse. One of Yoomy's last poems or songs in Mardi is "The Isles Hold Thee Not, Thou Departed," sung just before a paddler drowns and sets off the mood of black despair which settles over most of the voyagers and holds them until the landing on Serenia.

The isles hold thee not, thou departed!
From thy bower, now issues no lay:
In vain we recall perished warblings:
Spring birds, to far climes, wing their way!49

The metre has shifted from nothing in particular to so regular a beat as to nearly jingle. "The isles hold thee not, thou departed!/
From thy bower, now issues no lay." Perhaps progressing from no real rhyme scheme or sense of rhythmic values to a jingle is development, yet until the poet is able to use the metre to support the sense of his verse, he is far from any real grasp of his craft.

The diction of "The Isles Hold Thee Not" is less characterized by the essence of bad poetisms than is "The Song." The sense,

49 Mardi, II, 355.
though, is the romantic likening of the departed loved one to "Spring birds... who wing their way." There is no sense of real feeling behind the sentimental lines, probably due in part to the jingling metre, any more than "The Song" creates any true or perceptive picture of Marlena. In Yoosy's later song, as in his earlier one, the romantic qualities, the sentimental pose, are stressed above all. An examination of Yoosy's verse, then supports the evaluation of his character derived from the discussions between the poet, the historian, and Babbanja. Any real change in Yoosy's character is limited to the swing from one emotional excess to another.

Not all the poetry of Mardi is represented as being composed by Yoosy. One of the most interesting of the poems is "The Song of the Paddlers," sung by the royal paddlers of Media's canoe, with Yoosy as leader. ("The Song of the Paddlers" is apparently supposed to be one traditional to the archipelago; "'we will give Taji the Paddle Chant of the warriors of King Bello," says Yoosy.)

(All.)

Thrice waved on high,
Our paddles fly:
Thrice round the head, thrice dropt to feet:
And then well timed,
Of one stout mind,
All fall, and back the waters heap!

(Bow-Paddler.)

Who lifts the chant?
Who sounds this vaunt? . . .

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50 Mardi, I, 348.
Dip, dip, in the brine our paddles dip,
Dip, dip, the fins of our swimming ship!
How the waters part,
As on we dart;
Our sharp prows fly,
And curl on high,
As the upright fin of the rushing shark
Rushing fast and far on his flying mark!
Like him we prey;
Like him we slay;
Swim on the foe
Our prow a blow! . . .

Heap back; heap back; the waters back!
Mile then high astern, in billows black;
Till we leave our wake,
In the slope we make;
And rush and ride,
On the torrent's tide.\(^{51}\)

The handling of the metre in "The Song of the Paddlers" far surpasses the use of metre in the two songs attributed to Yoosy. The hard drive of the iamb suggests the drive of the canoe through the water, and the two-beat lines, varied by four-beat lines, suggests the rhythm of a chantey. The dramatic value of the metre is especially demonstrated in the first stanza. The first two short lines build up the feeling of the work-chant, with its regular one-two beat; while the third line, longer, indicates some of the preparation for the united dip of the paddles. This longer line stands for the "heave-heave" of the chantey. There follow two short lines, reestablishing the basis rhythm, and then the sharp "All fall,"

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\(^{51}\) Mardi, I, 348-50.
broken by a caesura from the rest of the line, and indicating the sudden surge of the canoe under the force of the paddlers. "... and back the waters heap" is slower, again indicating the movement of the canoe through the water; the sudden surge followed by gradual slowing.

There seems little sense in the repetition of "thrice," used three times in this first stanza and then not mentioned again. Considering this "thricefold" action along with the pattern of the metre and the sense of the poem causes an uncomfortable feeling; one cannot easily follow the picture of six paddles being waved about in rhythms of threes and at the same time consider the solid one-two, one-two, of the actual metre.

Perhaps the best single image of "The Song of the Paddlers" is that of "back the waters heap;" also most akin to the later Melville. The strength of this image, the feeling of heaping water back, is shown by contrasting it with the weaker image used later: "Dip, dip, in the brine our paddles dip," which employs no unusual nor especially vivid image.

Also interesting in view of the later Melville is the image of the canoe as a shark, "Rushing fast and far on his flying mark." In "The Song of the Paddlers," the shark is represented simply as a beast of prey, swift and strong. This is an essentially shallow version of what will be developed fully in such a poem as "The Maldive Shark," in which the shark changes from a streamlined killer to a lethargic representation of Fate.
The final strong image of the poem is also suggestive of the later Melville: "Till we leave our wake, / In the slope we make;" showing through the word "slope" a stronger picture of the canoe's progress through the sea than would any number of examples of poet-ic diction, such as "the torrent's tide," which appears two lines later. The slope seems especially descriptive following "heap" as it does, emphasizing the feeling of piles and hills of water over which the canoe shoots.

"The Song of the Paddlers" is supplied by a predominance of commonplace imagery over a few strong words. Already mentioned is "the torrent's tide." Incompatible with "heap" and "slope" is the "billows' throng," which suggests a crowd of waves, jostling and vaguely personified, and has little to do with the image of hills and slopes being heaped back. Again, "How the waters part" does not substantiate the image of the waters being heaped back. The chief value of the poem, then, lies in the incorporation of metre into the sense and feeling of the words, and the appearance of a few strong images.

Another of Yoomy's verses is "Her Bower is Not of the Vine," sung about the missing Yillaah.

Her bower is not of the vine,  
But the wild, wild eglantine!  
Not climbing a wailing arch,  
But upheld by the fir-green larch.  
   Old ruins she flies:  
To new valleys she hies;—
Not to the hoar, moss-wood,
Ivied trees each a rood—
Not in Maramma she dwells,
Hollow with hermit calls.

'Tis a new, new isle!
An infant's its smile,
Soft-rocked by the sea.
Its bloom all in bud:
No tide at its flood,
In that fresh-born sea.52

This poem is apparently not intended to be taken as such a horrible example of youthful poetry as is "The Song." King Media supplies criticism as Yoosy ends his song: "Thou art most musical, sweet Yoosy. . . concerning this spring-land Vivensa.53

Unlike "The Song," "Her Bower" has a clearly discernible metre, beginning with the four lines of three beats each and then dropping to a series of two-beat lines. The rhyme scheme is also regular, being a series of rhymed couplets. There is no effort to link the metre or rhyme to the sense of the verse, except insofar as the two-beat lines, beginning at the same time as does "Old ruins she flies," suggests action along with the quicker tempo. The musical quality of "Her Bower" is simply that which suggests a song, words that might be sung to a guitar.

52
Mardi, II, 210-11.

53
Ibid., p. 211.
The imagery of the first four lines is similar to the flower-symbolism which appears throughout Nardi, in its use of the vine and the eglantine to suggest Yillah's character. The "wild eglantine" which climbs the "fir-green larch" rather than a "moldering arch" seems a commonplace image, romantic and reminiscent of the poetry of Sir Walter Scott. The use of "green" and "fir" will be seen again in Melville's later works, with emphasis on their connotations of life and immortality. The subsequent lines continue in the same vein until "Ivied trees each a rood," which in its sudden concrete detail springs out from the rest of the imagery. Such language as "rood" is characteristic of what will appear often in Melville's later poems, in which he turns from stock poetic diction or from anything smacking of poetic language, and uses in its place the language of the surveyor, bookkeeper, or mathematician. Newton Arvin, in his article "Melville's Shorter Poems" comments, "[His strength lies] in powerfully prosaic vocabulary, terms that suggest business, industry, the law, and even mathematics,"54 and cites "The March into Virginia" and "After the Pleasure Party." The effectiveness of this use of prosaic terms is demonstrated by the strength of "rood," which fairly shoots out of the context, cluttered with stock romantic images as it is.

The lines, "Not in Maramma she dwells, /Hollow with hermit cells,"
-41-

seem ambiguous. Syntax would suggest that it is Yilah who is hollow; obviously a distorted reading, and yet a fumbling construction which gives Robert Penn Warren grounds for his view of Melville as the poet who did not learn his craft.55

The following stanza, as well as being verse, is another comment on Yoomy's character. In this stanza, Yoomy represents the island of Vivenza as a "new isle," and as "infant." Vivenza, the island which the voyagers are approaching, Melville's satiric portrait of the United States, turns out to be hardly the soft-rocked infant of Yoomy's song. While perhaps an infant among nations, it is a raucous, pretentious infant and one which follows in the erring footsteps of such older nations as Dominora (Great Britain.) Media shows that Yoomy lacks insight into Vivenza when he asks if the beauties of autumn are not greater than those of springtime. "...autumn soon merges into winter, but the spring has all the seasons before,"56 replies Yoomy. Vivenza does indeed have many of the qualities of her predecessors, but Yoomy seems unaware of any discrepancy between his statement and his image in verse of the newborn baby softly rocked.

55
Warren, p. 213.

56
The last few lines of "Her Bower" are otherwise notable only for the confusion in imagery. Not only is Vivanza an "infant... Soft-rocked by the sea," but the sea itself, that sea through which the voyagers have been searching for Yillah, suddenly becomes "fresh-born" itself.

Also representative of Yoomy's verse is "Her Sweet, Sweet Mouth," one of the poems scattered through Mardi which are supposed to develop a portrait of Yillah in absentia. This song describes her physical perfection:

Her sweet, sweet mouth;  
The peach-pearl shell:--  
Red edged its lips  
That softly swell,  
Just oped to speak... 

Her bosom! Two buds half blown, they tell;  
A little valley between perfuming;  
That roves away,  
Deserting the day,--  
The day of her eyes illumining;--  
That roves away, o'er slope and fall,  
Till a soft, soft meadow becomes the dell.57

The imagery is heavily sensual; indeed, a much more sensual impression of Yillah is given here than in any earlier description of the girl in the flesh. From an ethereal dream, she becomes real enough to have "Two buds half blown... a little valley between perfuming." Perhaps the real comment on this poem comes from Mohi's behavior. As Yoomy sings, he squirms until he nearly falls off his seat.

57

The syntax of the last stanza is difficult to unwind. Beginning with "Her bosom! Two buds half blown, they tell," one first questions the identity of "they;" whether the two buds tell, or whether an unknown "they" tell of two buds. The latter alternative is probably the correct reading, accepting "they tell" as an indication of the fabled quality of Yillah herself. Yet the ambiguity remains, for no apparent reason.

Proceeding further, "A little valley between perfuming;/That roves away" apparently means that the "little valley" is roving away. "Deserting the day, .of her eyes illumining;" indicates that the little valley is deserting the day of Yillah's eyes; in other words, moving out of sight. At this point Melville drops any points of contact between the actual and the extended metaphor of the valley, and ends his description with the caggy "O'er slope and fell,/Till a soft, soft meadow becomes the dell." This metaphor, slipped into the novel under cover of difficult syntax, is perhaps a legacy of Melville's earlier problems with censorship.

The extended metaphor in "Her Sweet, Sweet Mouth" is the most interesting facet of the poem—not counting Mohi's reaction. The first stanza depends on cloying, conventional imagery. "Her sweet, sweet mouth!/The peach-pearl shell" is only a surface comparison, with neither deeper connotations nor the quality of a conceit which the last stanza shows. The poem, therefore, seems typical of Keomy's verse in the respect that it bears the marks of conventional rom-
anticism, this time carried in highly sensual language. Something greater than Xoomy, however, emerges in the last stanza, in the development of the extended metaphor; a metaphor reminiscent of Elizabethan poetry in language and use of analogy, and gaining in effect through the knowing way in which it is presented, with Mohi squirming in the background in unconscious commentary.

Of the remaining poems from Mardi, the short "Paddler's Song" is of some interest, first because of its containing another image of the sea as a forest.

Ho! merrily ho! we paddlers sail!  
Ho! over sea-dingle, and dale!—  
Our pulses fly,  
Our hearts beat high,  
Ho! merrily, merrily, ho!58

The repetition of "merrily, merrily" serves as irony, for the song is broken off when the paddler falls overboard and is seen no more, thus beginning a depressed discussion of death which proceeds the landing on Serenia. The poem, then, is incomplete in itself and must be taken in context, whereupon it is seen to be concerned with the fleeting quality of life and of joy.

It has been shown that the concern for death and quest for salvation—some way of circumventing the inevitability of death—has been an issue in Mardi, evident in the passages concerning Serenia,

58 Mardi, II, 356.
which alone of the islands of the archipelago offers hope of salvation. One of the poems which reflect this concern with death is "Sea Burial."

We drop our dead in the sea,
The bottomless, bottomless sea;
Each bubble a hollow sigh,
As it sinks forever and aye.

We drop our dead in the sea,—
The dead reck not of aught;
We drop our dead in the sea,—
The sea ne'er gives it a thought.

Sink, sink, oh corpse, still sink,
Far down in the bottomless sea,
Where the unknown forms do prowl,
Down, down, in the bottomless sea.

'Tis night above, and night all round,
And night will it be with thee;
As thou sinkest, and sinkest for aye,
Deeper down in the bottomless sea.59

The first problem of "Sea Burial" is the metre. A three-beat line seems a difficult choice to handle in terms of funerals or funeral feeling, and in this poem, carried with a consistent rising beat and an ease of articulation, the predominant feeling of the lines is one of lightness and unconcern. When read aloud, the poem shows a quality almost rollicking, quite grisly in view of the sense of the lines, and hinting of Melville's later employment of this light,

59 Mardi, I, 352.
light rhythm and grim meaning in such poems as "The Swamp Angel."
Adding to the quick, lively feeling of "Sea Burial" are the end-
stopped lines with little use of caesura to slow the tempo.

The rhyme moves in and out. In the first stanza, we have a
pair of rhymed couplets; in the second, Melville switches to an
abab pattern. In the third line, he maintains the rhyme of sea
and sea, and uses two unrhymed lines. The fourth stanza is com-
pletely unrhymed. The rhyme scheme, then, shows little regularity,
and no thematic reason for its irregularities.

The main theme of "Sea Burial" is death; death viewed as mean-
ingless—"The sea ne'er gives it a thought"—as a venture into the
unknown—"The bottomless, bottomless sea"—and an incomprehensible
experience—"'Tis night above, and night all round,/And night will
it be with thee." While part of the failure of the poem lies in the
failure of the structure to support this theme, its language, too,
falls short, as can be shown by a comparison of "The sea ne'er gives
it a thought" and a passage from Moby-Dick:

The peeled white body of the beheaded whale flash-
es like a marble sepulchre; though changed in hue,
it has not perceptibly lost anything in bulk... For hours and hours from the almost stationary ship
that hideous sight is seen. Beneath the unclouded
and mild azure sky, upon the fair face of the pleas-
ant sea, wafted by the joyous breezes, that great
mass of death floats on and on, till lost in infinite
perspectives.60

60
The whole poem of "Sea Burial" suffers from the tendency to use generalized language; there is nowhere such an image as "peeled white body," but rather "the unknown forms do prowl," remarkable only for its suggestion of forms prowling the depths of the ocean. In the passage from Moby-Dick, there is no sense of "unknown forms," but of the specific forms of whales and sharks. Here, perhaps, lies one of the greatest differences in tone between Mardi and Melville's other novels; Mardi, deserting a realistic tone in the early pages, is indeed a work filled with the prowlings of unknown forms, of abstractions so removed from reality that they have little impact or feeling of importance. Yet such a poem as "Sea Burial" predicts things to come, as in its stressing of the detached, impersonal, uncaring side of nature; which is worked out again in "The Berg," from John Merv and Other Sailors.

The final general tone of "Sea Burial" is that of "not caring for aught;" for the dead "reck not," the sea "ne'er gives it a thought," and the language of the burial squad seems less concerned with the problem of death than calloused to its existence. The rhythm of the poem adds to this tone of callousness or state of detachedness, in its light carefree flow. Even the image "bottomless sea" has less effect than it does when it reappears in Melville's works. Taji's plunging into the ocean current in pursuit of his vision of Yillah in the closing chapter of Mardi itself is an example of this image being dramatized.
Of the remainder of the poems from Mardi, several are attributed to Xoomy and form part of the portrait in absentia he is painting of Yillah. These poems are, as the similar ones examined here, characterized by a combination of sensual lushness and bad poetic diction, along with a general formlessness. Other poems are supposed to be sung by various people met on the voyage. "Gold-Hunters," for example, is attributed to travellers met on Vivenza, and is a satirical comment on the California gold rush of 1849.

In golden goblets wine is beaming;  
On golden couches kings are dreaming!  
The Golden Rule dries many tears;  
The Golden Number rules the spheres.  

This poem adds to the general sense of materialism applied to Viv- enza, which leads the voyagers to believe that Yillah could not possibly be found there. Notable is the play on "Golden Rule," which parallels the religious suggestion with the idea of Mammon, rule and worship of wealth.

Other poems seem nonsensical, written as whimsey, with little meaning except the general effect they lend to the story when taken in context. An example of this is the "Mad Song:"

Stars laugh in the sky:   
Oh fugle-fi!

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61

Mardi, II, 265.
The waves dimple below:
Oh fugal -fo! 62

The poetry of Mardi as a whole, then, is beset by the problem of structure and diction. With the exception of "The Song of the Paddlers," Melville seems little concerned with structure as a supplement to theme. For the most part, his rhyme-schemes are uneven and uncertain, and his use of metre seems unfitted to the sense of the poetry. One feels that the poetry of Mardi is less a parody of youthful romantic poets than evidence of a shaky understanding of poetry and its makeup, notwithstanding such obvious parodies as "The Song." Despite shaky structure and uneven imagery, and the commonplaces which beset even "The Song of the Paddlers," words or images occur throughout the poems which predict later development, as does the dramatic use of rhythm in "The Song of the Paddlers."

62
Mardi, II, 351.
The Battle-Pieces

It has been claimed that Melville's poetry is highly topical, and a first reading of the Battle-Pieces, published in 1866, substantiates this point of view. Beginning with the warning of "The Portent," which was written on the hanging of John Brown, and ending with "A Meditation," in which Melville pleads for charity and forbearance from the North while dealing with the vanquished South, the Battle-Pieces form a running commentary on the events of the Civil War. The concern for the split in the nation, the disintegration of order in the face of war, the meaninglessness of thousands of deaths, appears throughout the collection.

There is hardly a single poem which does not seem to have stemmed from some event of the time, employing the kind of references which may have appeared in newspaper accounts. Some of these references, such as "The Portent" and its mention of John Brown, should be apparent to the casual reader. Others, such as the circumstances behind "The Swamp Angel," are more obscure. Melville's own note on "The Swamp Angel" reads

The great Parrott gun, placed in the marshes of James Island, and employed in the prolonged, though at times intermitted bombardment of Charleston, was known among our soldiers as the Swamp Angel.

St. Michael's, characterized by its vener-
able tower, was the historic and aristocratic church of the town. 63

Again, the editor of the Collected Poems notes, concerning "The House-Top:"

This powerful poem grew out of the famous New York Draft Riots, July 11-13, when the angry mobs roamed the city plundering and looting in protest against the Conscription Act, designed to increase the Union army. Unfortunately, the Act had included a clause permitting anyone to buy his freedom from the draft by a payment of $300.00, thus putting the burden of fighting the war on the poor. The assault on the Draft headquarters, corner of Third Avenue and Forty-sixth street, which touched off the three days of rioting, was led by workingmen from many New York manufactories. On the third day, order was restored by a notice that the draft law had been suspended and by the arrival of militia regiments in the city. 64

Melville's own note to "The House-Top" reads

'I dare not write the horrible and inconceivable atrocities committed'; says Froissart, in


64 Vincent, pp. 451-52.
alluding to the remarkable sedition in France during his time. The like may be hinted of some proceedings of the draft-rioters.65

One might ask, then, what the value of the Battle-Pieces is, if the poetry is so concerned with forgotten events of a war fought a hundred years ago. But to assume that the only concern in the Battle-Pieces is for such forgotten episodes and events would be like assuming that the only aim of Moby-Dick is to present a factual account of whale hunting. Over and over again Melville uses the topical situation as a starting point for his poem and moves from it to depict his own concern for greater problems, for good and evil, for the disintegration of society as a whole, and for the human situation.

There are seventy-two poems in the collection entitled Battle-Pieces. Of these poems, several are too long to examine thoroughly in a paper of this length. Several more seem excessively topical. The poems chosen to be examined here have been selected to show a cross-section of the Battle-Pieces, ranging from the sense of foreboding in "Misgivings," the shrill condemnation of "The Swamp Angel," to the calm of "Shiloh."

One of the shorter poems is "The Portent," quoted by a number of the critical studies and included in several anthologies of American poetry.

Hanging from the beam,
   Slowly swaying (such the law),
Gaunt the shadow on your green,
   Shenandoah!
The cut in on the crown
   (Lo, John Brown),
And the stabs shall heal no more.

Hidden in the cap
   Is the anguish none can draw;
So your future veils its face,
   Shenandoah!
But the streaming beard is shown
   (Wield John Brown),
The meteor of the war.66

Perhaps the first sensation the reader gets upon reading "The Portent" aloud is the slow march of the lines. The poem has the quality of a dirge, achieved through the use of vowel sounds, which are especially apparent in "The cut is on the crown," in which the mouth-filling sounds in "cut," "on," and "crown" cause a slowing of tempo through shifts in articulation. The length of the vowels increases as the line progresses, growing from "cut" to "on" and finally stretching to the sonorous "crown." Again, the quality of the vowels is exploited in the repetition of "Shenandoah," in which the long "doah" emphasizes the name, which has been given additional stress by using it as a line by itself.

Other lines which are given weight by the sounds of the vowels include "So your future veils its face," in which there are four

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long vowel sounds corresponding with the metre to produce a heavy beat. The last line of the poem, "The meteor of the war," repeats the pattern of long sounds growing longer as the line progresses; this time from "meteor" to "of" to the final drawn-out "war." It seems obvious that care has been given to the use of language as sound, building through the sounds of the words an intricate pattern to support the general theme of the poem, the "portent" of disaster.

The rhyme-scheme of "The Portent" is built around a series of corresponding vowel sounds. Thus "beam" and "green," through identical vowel sounds and similar final consonants, are used as a rhyme. More complex is the pattern of the rhyme that runs through "law," "Shenandoah," and "more." The vowel in "law" is echoed by the final diphthong of "Shenandoah," while "more" approximates the sound of the diphthong, especially picking up the first segment. The remaining two lines are given exact masculine rhymes, emphasizing the wail of "crown" and "Brown."

The second stanza is given an even slower tempo than the first, achieved in part by the use of a longer line. "Hidden in the cap/Is the anguish none can draw" is read as one continuous line, caused by the juxtaposition of "cap" and "is," a combination of sounds which allow a steady flow of articulation, with little change in the mouth needed for the shift between the first word and the one following. The other main cause of the slowed tempo is the heavy beat of sounds,
which are especially concentrated in the closing lines, as already noted.

The rhyme-scheme of the second stanza is not as compact as is that of the first stanza. "Face" and "cap" are given no rhymes at all, and the approximate rhyme of "shown" and "Brown" come in the place of the exact rhyme of "crown" and "Brown" in the first stanza. The tight pattern of "draw," "Shenandoah," and "war," however, follows the example set by the first stanza, with "draw" coming near the diphthong "doah," especially the last segment, and "war" also approximating the diphthong as a whole but particularly the first segment. All three words, "draw," "Shenandoah," and "war," are characterized by a twang in the final sound, caused by the nearness to feminine rhyme. Both "draw" and "war" tend to have an unaccented syllable following the vowel, corresponding with the diphthong of "doah;" this quality supports the general tone of the poem, suggesting a wail, as does the "crown-Brown-shown" pattern.

On the basis of "The Portent" and the intricacies of its patterns of sound, one can state that Melville's ear for the varying tones of words was acute. The handling of sounds, of the various values of the vowels, is too skillful to dismiss as accidental. Yet the poem contains many approximate rhymes.

If the intricate sound patterns of "The Portent" are to be attributed to skill rather than to accident, the approximate rhymes and near-equivalent values had better be attributed to purpose rather
than inaptitude. If Melville could handle sound as he chose, deviations must be accepted as being conscious and purposeful. The key to the purpose of these deviations is the general tone of the poem as a whole; just as the calm of the first lines—"Hanging from the beam, Slowly swaying"—is denied as deceptive by the note of foreboding which seeps through to the surface, so is the general stability and order implied by regular sound patterns undermined by deviations within patterns.

The "portent" referred to in the title of the poem is, of course, John Brown the abolitionist, whose death forecasts the Civil War. The imagery of the first two lines, supported by the rhythmic sway of the metre, develops a picture of the corpse swaying from the beam, with impressions of darkness, gloom, and pain suggested through "Slowly swaying" and "Gaunt the shadow." The first use of chiaroscuro appears in the third line, where "green," one of Melville's favorite color images, appears immediately following "Gaunt the shadow."

Green as a color image goes back to Melville's first novel, Typee, in which it connotates verdancy, health, and life. Green is also emphasized in Mardi. In "Her Bower is Not of the Vine," the greenness of Yillah and the "wild egantine" is contrasted against the "old ruins" of Maramma. Yillah is continually mentioned in Mardi in connection with growing things; vines, flowers, blooms, grasses, trees. The reference in "Her Bower" to the "lavish—green fir" upholds the idea of life and immortality through both the use of "green" and
"fir." As Lawrence Barrett points out, here is an image which has developed from the earliest of Melville's works to the poems. While some understanding of this development may be helpful, it hardly seems necessary for reading "The Portent."

The "green" in "The Portent" refers to the state of Shenandoah in that it is yet untouched by strife or bloodshed; and the image of the gaunt shadow being cast across this "green" is illustrative of the change which will take place following the hanging of John Brown. From the point in the poem where the gaunt shadow falls across the green of Shenandoah, a double meaning is carried by the imagery; in other words, Melville is referring to John Brown and to Shenandoah at the same time. In "The cut is on the crown," the obvious reference to the wounds of John Brown, "stabs [that] shall heal no more," is extended from John Brown to the wounds of Shenandoah, which will never heal again. The "gaunt shadow" has made a wound across the "green" which cannot heal.

The first four lines of the second stanza present a concise analogy between the hangman's cap which covers the face of John Brown and the veil which covers the face of Shenandoah's future—the "anguish" in both cases is hidden.

Finally, the image of the streaming beard visible beneath the hangman's cap is used to symbolize the "portent" of Shenandoah's future. The beard parallels the use of "meteor" in the last line, both in its suggestion of a "stream" or long flash and its connotations of unrest, chaos, and disruption of order. The juxtaposition
of "streaming," with its sense of fluidity or of motion, with "beard," which is either dry hair, or a verb of accounting or bringing to a head, is cited by Robert Penn Warren as one of Melville's occasional bold comparisons, through which he strives for depth.

That Melville's use of bold contrasts is "occasional" is debatable. In the very short "The Portent" are several examples of chiaroscuro, beginning with "Count the shadow on the green," which condenses the whole dramatization of the same images in Mardi, through the search for Yllah and the relentless pursuit of the three skeleton-like avengers. Again, there is the terseness of "The cut is on the crown," with "crown" standing for the head, reason or authority—perhaps order, which has been "cut" past healing, with extra emphasis brought about through the use of the short, hard, deceptively simple "cut." The last stanza presents the brief conceit of the hanged man, whose streaming beard appears although his cap veils his anguish, and who in turn indicates the turmoil of the future, whose anguish, too, is veiled. Finally there is the use of "streaming beard," already discussed, with its analogy with the "meteor."

That "The Portent" is a coherent whole is demonstrated by the examination of its structure and imagery. Rhyme, metre, and alliteration all contribute to the overall quality of the dirge, which is in turn supported by the imagery. This poem, at least, is not one of the "shreds and patches," but a whole contributed to by each of its parts. The shorter poems of Mardi often seem ineptly handled,

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Warren, p. 212.
because there is sometimes no real relationship between structure and meaning, between metre, rhyme, the sound of the words, and their meanings. When, however, all these considerations are used as contributors to the entire poem, "inept" seems misused. The relationship between the various poetic elements in "The Portent" are dramatic in the manner that is forecasted by the "Song of the Paddlers" from *Mardi*, where structure is used to support meaning. Highly dramatic, too, is the use of chiaroscuro.

Another short poem included in the *Battle-Pieces* is "Misgivings."

When ocean-clouds over inland hills
Sweep storming in light autumn brown,
And horror the sudden valley fills,
And the spire falls crushing in the town,
I muse upon my country's ills—
The tempest bursting from the waste of Time.
On the world's fairest hope linked with man's foulest crime.

Nature's dark side is heeded now—
(Ah! optimist—cheer disheartened flown)—
A child may read the moody brow
Of you black mountain lone.
With shouts the torrents down the gorges go,
And storms are formed behind the storm we feel:
The hemlock shakes in the rafter, the oak in the driving keel.68

"Misgivings," more than "The Portent," shows evidence of wrenched metre. Basically, the lines vary from three to four beats. The first line has four beats: "When ocean clouds over inland hills;"

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fairly regular iambic tetrameter except for the two short beats in the middle of the line, which function almost as a caesura, breaking the regular flow of the metre as they do. The second line can be forced to scan as regular iambic tetrameter—"Sweep storming in late autumn brown"—but has a distinct natural rhythm which pulls away from the regular reading; "Sweep storming in late autumn brown," or "Sweep storming in late autumn brown" is the natural rhythm of the line, forming a parallel with the first line with its short un-accented beats in the middle. There is a tension, then, between the formal scansion of the line as iambic tetrameter, and the natural reading, which repeats the pattern of the first line. The tension is suggestive of the meaning of the lines; the storm from without which is moving inland.

The rest of the poem shows the tension between fairly regular iambic tetrameter, and a natural reading, as has been shown in the first two lines. All the way through the poem, in other words, there is the feeling of moving from an accepted pattern to irregularity or change. In the last few lines, the tendency is a movement from a short regular line to a long irregular line.

A child may read the moody brow
Of yon black mountain, lone,
With shouts the torrents down the gorges go,
And storms are formed behind the storm we feel:
The hemlock shakes in the rafter, the oak in the driving keel.

An effect of gathering momentum, of additional emphasis, is
achieved through the shift from the first line quoted above to the third. The relatively swift pace of the iambic parallels the image of the swiftly moving torrents and storms. In the line "And storms are formed behind the storm we feel," the metre is again caught between the regular scansion of iambic pentameter and the natural scansion shown above, in which the earlier pattern of short unaccented beats in the middle of the line is repeated. This tends to emphasize the line, following the three basically regular lines that it does, and prepares the reader for the sudden sonority of the dactyls in the final line.

The rhyme scheme of "Misgivings" begins with abab in the first four lines, followed by ace, which makes up the first half of the poem. There then follows dbdb, eff. The fourteen lines of the poem, ending with a rhymed couplet, put one in mind of a sonnet, but a sonnet distorted through both metre and rhyme. This distortion of the traditional form again underlines the upheaval of nature shown in the imagery.

The imagery of "Misgivings" is filled with references to the sea; a common characteristic of Melville's shorter poems. The ocean, symbol of terror and destruction, is shown as moving over the inland, bringing to it the "horror" of the storm at sea. The weather images are repeated in "ocean-clouds," "storming," "autumn brown,"

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and "sodden valley," in the first few lines. In "The spire falls crashing in the town," the image of the crumbling tower, used earlier in "The Bell Tower" from Piazza Tales, stands for ruined aspirations, as well as crumbling faith, suggested by the "spire." Religion, the suggestion of Christ, is picked up again in ". . . the world's fairest hope linked with man's foulest crime," which reflects the situation in the country at the time the poem was being written as well as the general inextricability of good and evil from one another.

Finally, the last few lines of the poem pick up the weather and nature images again. The use of "black mountain" is suggestive of the mountain which has appeared in Melville's previous work, beginning with Typee, in which the mountain was an obstacle to be crossed before entering the valley of the Typees, and reoccurring in Mardi, where the mountain may be an obstacle, a barrier, or a symbol of faith. ". . .storms are formed behind the storms we feel" is indicative of the imagery of the poem as a whole, in which the surface storm shown through the imagery becomes a metaphor for the storm of the times. The line is also representative of the general tension which emerges through the structure of the poem.

The longest line of the poem is the last line; "The hemlock shakes in the rafter, the oak in the driving keel." Both the hemlock and the oak are segments of nature functioning in man-made shelters, the house and the ship. The image of the ship tends, in
Melville's novels—*Omoo*, *Redburn*, *White Jacket*, and *Moby-Dick*, for example—to symbolize a little world, a microcosm. In this poem, then, the shaking oak in the keel suggests disturbance in the world of man, a parallel to the same idea developed earlier in the poem.

A poem from the *Rattle-Pieces* quoted by Newton Arvin as "insistence on seeing things... in the light of the unideal Actual and not in the light of his hopes and wishes"70 is "The Conflict of Convictions." This poem, rather longer than the first two poems discussed, begins

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

(Dismantle the fort,
Cut down the fleet—
Let no more shall be!
While the fields for fight in ages to come
G Angusal beneath the sea.71

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71
The Committee be
the, "Godfather" plat
however, the the the the the deep
question, the following two lines,
paragraph seems expected to.
seems "poetic" and not particularly
on their reading
"Great two lines," on say, mother's/But the wise man, 
The suggestion of anti-coalitions are the can do, the
or whether some spread of it be used in the text, and
many are concerned whether there are examples here of poetic
deduction of emotion with which both Robert Penn Warren and
Newton
The kinship of the Committee of Correspondence presents the
the contrary, the plows up some degree of the original poem.

The French time phrasing up some degree of the original poem.

"Thus is found, the manner's strange JUXTA-
then is cut short, in "and face men's letter fall.
the meeter, reckoning in maybe the letter, in the middle of the time, in "continues,"
best, introducing a death in the middle of the time, in "continues,"
outrageous silence over all," in which the meeter shone to a falling
end-stopped. Exception to this are meter patterns occur in "Heaven's
Admit the beat is "jambage" letter, with most of the lines heady
stead, but the surrounding lines are nearly all regular. The predic-
smoother than "metre" regular. the last line is sharpened for ex-
For the most part, "the Committee of Correspondence" is melodic,
presented here is first, a "height;" secondly, an "abyss;" and thirdly, "Heaven. . .over all." On the heights sounds a wail of recall, in the abyss there is derision, and in Heaven is "Ominous silence."

The heights are intended to represent a section, at least, of that part of the universe inhabited by man, while the abyss, from which derision rises, is the realm of Satan. Heaven, of course, is obviously the realm of God. The use of "starry heights," then, is not so much a primary image as a more intensified use of symbolism (a typical characteristic of what may appear a simple modifier in Melville's poetry.) "Starry" heights would be those heights which are directly under Heaven and which are lighted by Heaven; the territory of Christ's martyrs, the best that the world can offer. It is from Heaven's judicial district, or "starry heights" that the "bugle wails the long recall," giving rise to the derision from the "deep abyss."

The question might be asked whether really trite diction should be excused on the grounds that it is functioning in an additional capacity. Should a good poet select language which is not only capable of carrying his secondary meaning, but also effective on the primary level? The answer to the question in terms of Melville's poetry lies in his fundamental objectives. Melville was searching for language which would function in a way which would support his themes, exemplified by his use of mechanical terms and vocabulary primarily associated with the world of prose. At the same time, his very choice of poetic form implies a sense of restriction, or search
for freedom through restriction. What Melville strives for in the use of a trite term such as "starry" is to explode the triteness and force from it a new significance—just as he handles prosaic terms, forcing them to yield a new quality. An expression which is trite enough becomes prosaic and joins the ranks of law, mathematical, and business vocabulary.

If there is real triteness in the opening lines of "The Conflict of Convictions," it lies in the use of "deep abyss," wherein the modifier seems redundant. "Ominous silence" would seem to suffer from the same complaint, except that "ominous" picks up the major concern of the developing poem.

The tone of the following verses is set in these first lines through the suggestions of sounds or lack of sounds. "Wails the long recall," "Derision stirs," and "ominous silence" are used to represent the various aspects of the universe and to suggest the disturbance of order on the "starry heights" which has given rise to the silence on the one hand and derision on the other. The ensuing reference to "eager Hope" and "man's latter fall" carry further this initial foundation. The next line, "Events, they make the dreamers quail," gives grounds for Arvin's theory about the unideal Actual as opposed to optimistic hopes and wishes.

The problem of convictions is shown in the next few lines, with Satan as a "disciplined captain, gray in skill," and Raphael as a "white enthusiast still." The use of color imagery is noteworthy,
especially the use of "white" in connection with Raphael. White should be a symbol of purity or faith, yet in connection with Melville's particular brand of symbolism, connotations of varying natures are brought to mind; from the white Taj in Mardi, enthusiast in his own way, to the white whale of Moby-Dick. Throughout Melville's writings, white has had its obvious connotation of purity. Yillah, for example, is stressed as being white and pure, with the pearl on her bosom as an additional symbol. Yet Yillah is also limited because of her whiteness, and the dark queen Hautia is presented as a sort of alter ego. This is the kind of dual symbolism that is being set up in the reference to Raphael as a "white enthusiast." Melville suggests again the limiting quality of whiteness in the following line: "Dashed aims, whereat Christ's martyrs pale."

The italicized lines repeat the motif of the bugle and the wailed recall; the end of battle, the "congealing" of the "fields for fight" or the convictions or issues. The obvious suggestion of the issues of the Civil War is made subordinate to the greater issues between Heaven and the "deep abyss," saving the poem from topicality.

"The Conflict of Convictions" continues:

The terrors of truth and dart of death
To faith alike are vain;
Though consta, gone a thousand years,
Return again,
Patient she stands—she can no more—
And waits, nor heed a waxes hoar,
(At a stony gate,
A statue of stone,
Weed overgrown—
Long 'twill wait!)\(^2\)

The images presented in the italicized lines, of overgrown stone statues, are among those images which have appeared earlier in Melville's works. In Typee, the young Melville noted the stone statues or idols which were grown over by vines and underbrush and sadly neglected by native laymen and clergy alike. In Typee Melville was lighthearted about the problem.

The image itself was nothing more than a grotesquely shaped log, carved in the likeness of a portly, naked man. . . much decayed. The lower part was overgrown with a bright silky moss. Thin spears of grass sprouted from the distended mouth and fringed the outline of the head and arms. His godship had literally attained a green old age. . . A long prosperity of breadfruit and coco-nuts has rendered them /the natives of Typee/ remiss in the performance of their higher obligations. The wood-rot malady is spreading among the idols—the fruit upon their altars is becoming offensive—the temples themselves need re-thatching—the tattooed clergy are altogether too light-hearted and lazy—and their flocks are going astray.\(^3\)

\(^2\) "The Conflict of Convictions," p. 5.

From faint amusement at the state of the native religious prac-
tice, which he attributes to too much prosperity, Melville in his
later works takes up the image of the statue or idol and presents
it in serious content.

In Mardi, the stone statues are found on the island of Ma-
rama, where the blind guide mistakes the stone for a living tree;
indeed, maintains hotly that the statue is a green, living tree.
As in "The Conflict of Convictions," the stone statue is used as a
symbol of something which once existed in another form or role—
once a green tree, but now stone overgrown with weeds. Faith is
represented as in opposition to the facts of truth and death, as
being stonelike and unmoving even in the face of events which "make
the dreamers quail." Even the comets—here again Melville uses the
astronomical symbol of the comet or meteor which suggests chaos and
approaching disaster—cannot affect the stone. Faith cannot even
realize her own state of decay; "nor needs she waxes hoar."

The poem concludes:

    Power unannointed may come—
    Dominion (unsought by the free)
    And the Iron Dome,
    Stronger for stress and strain,
    Flings her huge shadow athwart the main;
    But the Founders' dream shall flee.
Age after age shall be
    As age after age has been,
    (From man's changeless heart their way they win):
    And death be busy with all who strive—
    Death with his silent negative.
YEÁ AND NAY—
EACH HATH HIS SAY;
BUT GOD HE KEEPS THE MIDDLE WAY.
HOME WAS IT
WHEN HE SPREAD THE SKY;
WISDOM IS VAIN, AND PROPHESY.  

Despite the fact that Melville is attempting something very different with language than is T. S. Eliot, certain elements of Melville's poetry are suggestive of Eliot's. "The Conflict of Convictions," for example, in its "Age after age shall be/As age after age has been,/(From man's changeless heart their way they win" resembles passages from The Wasteland.

Between the idea
And the reality
Between the motion
And the act
Falls the shadow
For mine is the Kingdom.  

Between the conception
And the creation
Between the emotion
And the response
Falls the Shadow
Life is very long.  

The same image, that of the shadow, is being used to suggest the problem of division which concerns both poets, with Melville's Iron

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Dome filling the position of Eliot's "For Thine is the Kingdom." Another parallel appears between Melville's "Death, with silent negative," and Eliot's "This is the way the world ends, / Not with a bang but a whimper." Resemblances between these two poets are probably due to the concern on the part of both with the problem of Faith in a world of chaos and approaching disintegration. There are also similarities in the use of metre; Eliot, like Melville, is fond of the two- or three-beat line and ballad forms in general.

It is interesting to find similarities of theme and structure in the poetry of Melville and Eliot. Lawrence Barrett states that one problem with the present generation's trying to read Melville's poetry lies in their familiarity with Yeats and Eliot, implying that there must be an antithesis present; and there is, of course, a great contrast between Melville's language and Eliot's, for where Eliot is highly concerned with primary imagery and the stimuli brought to bear on the reader through the use of this imagery, Melville is trying to force a prosaic vocabulary to yield a special effect. One can almost imagine Melville disdaining to use Eliot's language on the grounds that his own language works toward greater precision, or strives toward a more clear-cut stream between poet and reader.

In the poem "Apathy and Enthusiasm," the problem of change is

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T. S. Eliot, p. 286.
again tackled. Here is the change from age to youth, presented through the metaphor of changing seasons, with winter giving way to spring.

O the clammy cold November
And the winter white and dead,
And the terror dumb with stupor,
And the sky a sheet of lead;
And events that came resounding
With the cry that All was lost.
Like the thunder-cracks of massy ice
In intensity of frost—
Bursting one upon another
Through the horror of the calm...

Then the glances 'tween the Fates,
And the doubt on every side,
And the patience under gloom
In the stoniness that waits
The finality of doom. 77

The imagery from the beginning of the poem is suggestive of death—"clammy cold November"—with the word "white" cropping up in the second line to suggest the coldness and sterility of winter. The metre runs quite smoothly through the first few lines, basically three-beat lines, butrenched in the seventh line with "Like the thunder-cracks of massy ice/In intensity of frost." Here we are given a four-beat line followed by a two-beat line, the latter of which is especially hard to scan. This wrenching coincides with the development of the metaphor of frozen masses cracking against

The arch formed out a doorway.
and I passed several generations
in the age that went before.
and they thought they knew the history
of the young man from their tale
after his father came to pass.
After that came from the depth
they remained from the death
of the people.
O, the tramp of the people,
and the sound of the feet was rent,
and the feet-bounded twenty weeks
and the weary weeks of ten
and the winter dead desolate.

"AGENCY and INHERITANCE continue:"

The to some of whose earlher were more frozen
there, this shrinking effort to represent the state of the thing revery-
extra syllables, to a that two-beat time without the extra syllable
from the body three-beat time, shrinking to a two-beat time with

Thus far the once was, the metre in this section is again rendered
at the same stroke on manner in which is on those of the green,
the point when these things become mere trammels of the meaningless.

Again. Here "pronounse the last stage of life, talk, or hope
the last part of the clear section depends up the stage of stones
value within the case for their veracity.

does keeping to the general pattern, this obvious case for mention
stresses in "messy," "me," "me," "interdict," and "heart," with them
sterility. Nowhere in these two lines is a predominating use of
actuality and the bases developed nor their very coldness and
one another and deepening the statements, which stands for the theme

-79-
And at the towers of Erebus
Our striplings flung the scoff.
But the elders with foreboding
Mourned the days forever o'er,
And recalled the forest proverb,
The Iroquois' old saw:

Grief to every graybeard
When young Indians lead the war. 78

The metre of this second section is far more regular than is the
first, with the three-beat line being maintained until the closing
lines. One result of this more regular metre is to give the second
section a feeling of motion, or speed; an increase in tempo from
the first part of the poem, which is in keeping with the general
theme of "enthusiasm" and images of melting rivers and springing
grass.

Obvious Christian symbolism is being brought into play in the
references to Lent, Easter, and the rendering of "the tomb of Faith."
The last image quoted refers to Faith's rising from the tomb of
stone in which it had been encased by the apathy of the winter sea-
son, or time of age, with connotations of Christ's rising on Easter.
It is this rising again of Faith which stirs the People from apathy
(with the capitalization of People suggesting chosen People, ama-
side of the fence, the idea of YEA and MAY, primitive short-sighted-
ness, and tribalism picked up again in the reference to the Iroquois,
and in opposition to Melville's "middle way"—note "The Conflict of

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Convictions"—and starts the machinery of Sumter's cannon. The whole problem of apathy and enthusiasm, of frozen old age and reborn youth slain by the rising of faith, echoes "Misgivings," and its reference to "The world's fairest hope linked with man's foulest crime."

The final lines, with the Iroquois proverb, recall the first section of the poem and emphasize the contrast which is being drawn and the suggestion of approaching chaos from either extreme. Again there is a resemblance to T. S. Eliot, in the portrayal of spring as a time of cruelty—the Easter symbolism—as well as revigoration.

"The March into Virginia" is cited by Lawrence Barrett as an example of the conflict between Melville's need to vary lines and rhyme within a single poem and his faith in "time and measure perfect," which Barrett says he tries to solve by keeping accent but varying syllabification.

Did all the letts and bars appear
To every just or larger end,
Whence should come the trust and cheer?
Youth must its ignorant impulse lend—
Age finds place in the rear,
All wars are boyish, and are fought by boys,
The champions and enthusiasts of the state:
Turbid arbors and vain joys
Not barrenly abate—
Stimulants to the power mature,
Preparatives of fate.79

Again, of course, Melville is concerned with the problem of youth and age and the effects of enthusiasm, and is pointing out that only boyishness could carry through for "Turbid arbors and vain joys."

Where, he is asking, rises this enthusiasm, the "trust and cheer" which leads the ranks of battle? As "Preparatives of fate," it is the very trust and cheer which leads the enthusiastic boys into conflict from which age shrinks. Age and apathy may be sterile, but enthusiasm is destructive; and innocence is dangerous; and it is this impasse, carried over from "Apathy and Enthusiasm," which is reflected in the irregular metre. The first real wrenching of metre occurs in the fourth line, where the problem of youth and its "ignorant impulse" is first presented. The accent falls heavily on "ignorant" and "impulse," words already emphasized by the irregularity of the metre.

"The March into Virginia" concludes:

All they feel is this: 'tis glory,
A rapture sharp, though transitory,
Yet lasting in belaureled story.
So they gayly go to fight,
Chatting left and laughing right.

But some who this blithe mood present,
As on in lightsome files they fare,
Shall die experienced ere three days be spent—
Perish, enlightened by the wailed glare;
Or shame survive, and like to adamant,
Thy after shock, Manassas, share.30
Here is the sense of the falseness of a "belaurelled story," the shallow aspects of honor. The line "Chatting left and laughing right" echoes an earlier image of a "leafy neighborhood" which the soldiers enter. Lawrence Barrett calls attention to the special nature of "leafy neighborhood;" it is the enemy who are the neighbors, and it is the enemy with whom the boys are chatting and laughing. The poem ends with the paradox of the innocent enlightened only by the volley which destroys them, and who yet are pulled toward the volley by their very lack of experience.

The poem "The Stone Fleet" is another which, written on a specific occasion during the Civil War, moves away from its topical theme to a more profound one. It is notable for the recurrence of the image of the stone, exemplified in the title with the juxtaposition of "Stone" and "Fleet." The poem begins

I have a feeling for those ships,
Each worn and ancient one,
With great bluff bows, and broad in the beam:
Ay, it was unkindly done.
But so they serve the Obsolete—
Even so, Stone Fleet;

The obvious tone of the poem is one of nostalgia, a regret for the old whaling ships which were being loaded with granite and sunk to block Southern harbors. With this note of nostalgia is a hint of Melville's side of the issue between Yea and Nay. With the estab-
lished image of the stone as the final stage of a freezing faith in mind, the poem can be read as Melville's own relationship to faith and what, in "The Conflict of Convictions" he expresses as "He who rules is old—is old." Despite the age of the ruler, there is yet a bond in Melville's mind.

"The Stone Fleet" continues:

To scuttle them—a pirate deed—
Sack them, and dismay;
They sunk so slow, they died so hard,
Fast gurgling dropped at last.
Their ghosts in gales repeat
Noe's old Stone Fleet:

And all for naught. The waters pass—
Currents will have their way;
Nature is nobody's ally; 'tis well;
The harbor is bettered—will stay.
A failure, and complete,
Was your Old Stone Fleet. 83

The metre is almost impossible to nail down. The first problem is Melville's use of a formal beat, as the iambic tetrameter of the first line quoted, which is then wrenched by a conflicting natural beat. The line could be formally scanned as absolutely regular iambic tetrameter, but asks to be read "To scuttle them—a pirate deed—". The same problem operates in the following line,


which might be read "Sack them, and dismay," which would follow through with the formal beat set in the first line, but has a natural reading of "Sack them, and dismay." The next two lines read quite smoothly, but the wrenching occurs again in the final two lines of the first stanza quoted, especially in "Wee's us, Stone Fleet!" where the hard drive of four strong beats pulls away from the expected iamb.

The metre of the last stanza is given a slower tempo, achieved in part by the growing tendency toward dactyls which reaches a peak in "Nature is nobody's ally; 'tis well;/The harbor is bettered—will stay." There is not the tension in the last stanza that is found in the preceding one, as is befitting the mood of resignation with which the poem nearly ends. The last two lines return to the wrenching of metre which typified the earlier lines. "A failure, and complete,/Was your Old Stone Fleet," is the natural scansion, as opposed to the iamb which the line can be forced into.

The tension found in the metre reflects the problem of the poem in general, which is the problem which Melville must try to resolve, attached by nostalgic bonds to the Old Stone Fleet as he is, and still recognizing the directions of the "Currents"—which actually take two directions; one which says that the ships are obsolete and must be used to block a harbor, and the other which says that the ships have failed even in that task, and have actually improved the harbors. In other words, to succeed, the ships would
fail, and in failing, they succeed. "Nature is nobody's ally."

The poem "A Utilitarian View of the Monitor's Fight" contains a statement by Melville on the nature of verse as well as on the nature of warfare, and is quoted by Lawrence Barrett as Melville's disavowal of a "bold and nervous style."

Plain be the phrase, yet apt the verse,
More ponderous than nimble;
For since grim'd War here laid aside
His painted pomp, 'twould ill befit
Overmuch to ply
The rhyme's barbaric cymbal.

Hail to victory without the gaud
Of glossy; seal that needs no fans
Of banners; plain mechanic power
Plied cogently in War now placed—
Where War belongs—
Among the trades and artisans.

Yet this was battle, and intense—
Beyond the strife of fleets heroic;
Deadlier, closer, calm 'mid storm;
No passion; all went on by crank,
Pivot, and screw,
And calculations of caloric.

Needless to dwell; the story's known.
The ringing of those plates on plates
Still ringeth round the world—
The clangor of that blacksmiths' fray.
The anvil-din
Resounds this message from the Fates:

War yet shall be, and to the end;
But war—paint shows the streaks of weather;
War yet shall be, but warriors
Are now but operatives; War's made
Less grand than Peace,
And a sirene runs through lace and feather.84

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The stanza which particularly interests Barrett is the first; in
the "More ponderous than nimble" he gets ammunition for his charge
against Robert Penn Warren that Melville was less interested in
developing a style than in changing style to what he was saying.
Interestingly, "A Utilitarian View" is more regularly scanned than
many of the other poems, as can be readily seen by comparing it
with "The Stone Fleet." The metre is basically iambic tetrameter,
with an occasional shortened line, and with a two-beat line appearing regularly in next-to-last position at the end of each stanza.
This two-beat line, followed by a three-beat line with extra syllables, causes a hard drive, or emphasis, at the end of each stanza,
and is a favorite metrical device of Melville's, used, for example, in "The Stone Fleet."

The first stanza of "A Utilitarian View" contains all the elements of the main theme of the poem, and says in effect that since
war has now become the forte of the mechanic or artisan and is no longer romantic and full of "painted pomp," a highly ornamented verse form would be unsuitable, and so a "plain" phrase must be employed.
The word "painted" suggests falseness, implying that here at last War is baring its true nature and is no longer supported by the youths who figured in "Apathy and Enthusiasm" and "The March into Virginia." Also implied is the feeling that poetry, too, has suffered from "painted pomp," and must now be treated with "plain phrase." This view is substantiated by the echo of Henry Wadsworth
Longfellow in the fourth stanza—"Needless to dwell; the story's known./The ringing of those plates on plates/Still ringeth round the world—" with its connotations of excessive patriotism and emotional, romantic values attached to warfare. The general theme stated in the first stanza runs through the second, with its "Hail to victory without the gaud" and "Where War belongs—/Among the trades and artisans."

The third stanza picks up the idea of passionless battle being carried on through calculations, and serves as an example of Melville's use of prosaic vocabulary in verse. The fourth stanza becomes almost parody, with its recollection of Longfellow's patriotic poem, and the juxtaposition of such words as "ringeth," with its "poetic" connotations, with "black-smiths' fray."

The final stanza, with its imagery of "war-paint" and "feather" picks up the "painted pomp" and "barbaric symbal" of the first stanza. Here in the final lines, Melville is pointing out that War is still War, and always will be, but that the pomp and circumstance which has hidden its nature and caused its appeal to the young, romantic, and enthusiastic, is "streaked" and beginning to show the underside. The opening stanza, with its references to poetic style, suggest that the whole poem be read as a joint comment of war and poetry, and that the "war-paint" of poetry is beginning to streak. This interpretation is substantiated by Melville's turning to a prosaic vocabulary and attempting to force from it a greater truth, a greater realism, after the romantic enthusiasm and "poetic" poetry of Mardi.
The mood of the poem "Shiloh" is much quieter than that of most of the verses preceding it.

Skimming lightly, wheeling still,
   The swallows fly low
Over the field in clouded days,
   The forest-field of Shiloh—
Over the field where April rain
Solaced the parched ones stretched in pain
Through the pause of night
That followed the Sunday fight
   Around the church of Shiloh—
The church so lone, the log-built one,
That echoed to many a parting groan
   And natural prayer
   Of dying foesmen mingled there—
   Foesmen at morn, but friends at eve—
Praise or country least their care:
   (What like a bullet can deceive!)
   But now they lie low,
While over them the swallows skid,
   And all is hushed at Shiloh.85

The regularity and smooth flow of this poem gives it a quietness without the tension between resignation and regret found in "The Shame Fleet." One highly evident theme is the continuation of nature, symbolised in the skimming swallows, which pass over the dying. The suggesting of "clouded days" brings out the obscuring of the issues of men by nature which is taking place; and the "forest-field" is a hint of the clouded quality of the battle itself, which took place in a forest, or place of limited vision. In "Sunday fight" and "church of Shiloh" is the concept of a battle

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for principles, and a battle in the name of righteousness and religious convictions. The church itself, however, is "lone" and "log-built," suggesting aspects of nature in its make-up, and it echoes to "natural prayer" after the battle, suggesting an antithesis between principles of religion before the battle and the natural response afterward. As a later line sums up the matter, "(What like a bullet can deceive?)" Here again, in other words, Melville is concerned with religion, natural process, truth, and the methods of stripping away the facade which conceals truth. The most notable aspect of "Shiloh," however, is its feeling of elegiac calm, carried by the falling beat of most of the lines.

In the poem "Malvern Hill," there is again a concern for nature being handled with the theme of battle. The poem opens with an invocation:

Xe elms that wave on Malvern Hill
In prime of morn and May,
Recall ye how MacMillan's men
Here stood at bay?
While deep within yon forest dim
Our rigid comrades lay—
Some with the cartridge in their mouth,
Others with fixed arms lifted South—
Invoking so
The cypress glades? Ah wilds of woe!86

Lines like these bear out Newton Arvin's description of Melville as

86 "Malvern Hill, Collected Poems, p. 44."
the Brady of Civil War poetry; in the "rigid comrades" with "cartridge in their mouth" as primary imagery is indication that Melville was capable of achieving a visionary effect. The value of "cartridge in their mouth," however, is greater than merely primary imagery, for the phrase brings into focus the paradoxical aspects of the Silencer Death; the cartridge which should have silenced the soldiers was the bullet of the foe; but it is with their own cartridge in their teeth that they die. A contrast, too, is being presented in the early lines between the "prime of morn" and the "rigid comrades" who are "deep within yon forest dim"—another use of forest as being obscuring and a shortener of vision. The dead, indeed, have "fixed arms lifted South."

The poem concludes:

Does Malvern Wood
Bethink itself, and muse and brood?

We else of Malvern Hill
Remember every thing;
But sap the twig will fill;
Was the world how it will,
Leaves must be green in Spring. 87

Obvious, of course, is the reference to the continual process of nature, which moves in cycles and always is green in spring. There is a suggestion here of affirmation in the final line, in the idea that leaves will be green despite the affairs of the world, that the

87 "Malvern Hill," p. 45.
natural process will continue. Underlying this view, however, is a suggestion that the greenness of leaves is not totally admirable. Although the elms remember the past and all its bloodshed, yet the twigs will fill with sap, just as the young were charged with optimism in "Apathy and Enthusiasm," is the idea which Melville has tossed out in the last lines. The final line of the poem, after the comparatively swift tempo of the preceding verses, is slowed to a drag: "Leaves must be green in Spring," with the long vowels of "Leaves," "be," "green," and "Spring" contributing to the effect begun by the dactyl in the first foot. This dragging tempo suggests the double meaning being presented.

In "The House-Top," Melville takes the occasion of the New York draft riots to return to the sense of foreboding which was prevalent in "Misgivings."

No sleep. The sultriness pervades the air
And binds the brain—a dense oppression, such
As tame tigers feel in walled shades,
Vexing their blood and making apt for ravage,
Beneath the stars the rocky desert spreads
Vacant as Libya. All is hushed near by.
Yet fitfully from far breaks a mixed surf
Of muffled sound, the atheist roar of riot.

Here Melville is departing from his favorite tetrameter combined with short lines in favor of unrhymed iambic pentameter. The whole

sense of misgiving is carried in terms of animals, savagery; and
the "roofy desert" of the town furthers the impact of the tiger. As
in "Misgivings," the ocean is used as a symbol of force and approach-
ing disaster, shown here as "mixed surf/of muffled sound."

"The House-Top," however, has a more primary concern than sim-
ple misgivings, a concern which is first brought strongly forth in
the term "Atheist roar of riot," but which is being prepared in the
metaphor of the tiger-desert and man-city. "Roar" refers not only
to the tide, but to the tiger, and to the man. A few lines later,
the sense of chaos and destruction is described as "The Town is
sacrificed by its rats—ship-rats/And rats of the wharves;" and again
one is reminded of T. S. Eliot—"... rats' feet over broken glass/
In our dry cellar..." Melville's rats, however, are human
rats. In any case, the general sense of chaos and approaching dis-
aster is being associated with a dearth of religious conviction.

The town is redeemed from its state of decay and reversion to
animalism in the conclusion of the poem:

Wise Dragon comes, deep in the midnight roll
Of black artillery; he comes, though late;

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In code corroborating Calvin’s creed
And cynic tyrannies of honest kings;
He comes, nor parleys; and the Town, redeemed,
Gives thanks devout; nor, being thankful, heads
The grimy slur on the Republic’s faith implied,
Which holds that Man is naturally good,
And—*is* Nature’s Roman, never to be scourged.91

With these lines rush in the problem which has been in the background throughout not only the *Battle-Pieces*, but the rest of Melville’s works; that of Puritanism and original sin, an angry God and the doctrine of the elect. On one level the poem deals with the collapse of civil authority and the restoration of order by military force, which destroys the democracy; yet to the creed of the angry God, Melville attributes the deliverance of the Town from the collapse of its culture, as well as the "cynic tyrannies of honest kings" to which it gives thanks. The language used to carry this conquering and acceptance uses imagery of night and blackness, as befits the subtitle—"A Night Piece." There is "midnight roll," and "black artillery," and at last "grimy slur," which leads into the climax of the poem.

In the last three lines, Melville gives the values from which the town has turned, once under the influence of Atheism and afterwards under Calvinism.

On the whole, the metrical system of "The House-Top" is not striking. The blank verse suggests an air of formality. While

there are lines in which the values of the syllables are shifted from the basic iambic pentameter, the poem is for the most part regular. The main interest of the poem lies, then, not in a unique handling of metre, but in its once again treating the problem of religion, lack of faith, and disintegration; as well as concern for the outcome of the collapse of authority and order; and suggests a shortcoming in faithlessness and overwhelming religious conviction alike.

In "Look-Out Mountain," Melville again uses his old symbol of the mountain as aspirations and religious faith.

> Joy, joy, the day is breaking,  
> And the cloud is rolled from sight;  
> There is triumph in the Morning  
> For the Anarch's plunging flight;  
> God has glorified the Mountain  
> Where a. Banner burneth bright,  
> And the armies in the valley  
> They are fortified in right.  92

The most noticeable feature of "Look-Out Mountain" is its regularity of metre; it shows tension in the first stanza, being drawn between a two- and three-beat line, but settles down to three beats for the remainder of the poem, as illustrated in the stanza quoted above. The main interest of the poem in regards to metre is the raciness it achieves through the quick movement of the lines—"They are for-  
> tified in right" is the typical tempo.

The sense of the poem, too, lacks the tension which one has come to expect of Melville's poetry. The victory in the Mountain is given all the trappings of a joyous occasion, the triumph of good over evil, and this feeling is substantiated by the raciness of the metre. That Melville should ever see the problem of good and evil in such clear-cut, optimistic tones is an uncomfortable discovery that reminds one of some of the poems of Mardi, and of the enthusiasms of the voyagers' embracing the doctrines of Alma.

In the last two lines, an additional puzzle is presented. What "armies," and what is the meaning of "They are fortified in right?" Until these closing lines, one has the feeling that the conflict between Wrong and Right on the mountain is paralleled by rival armies in the valley, with mountain and valley standing for the realms of gods and men respectively. Yet all the armies in the valley rejoice at the triumph of Right and are equally fortified by it. Perhaps Melville is suggesting the futility of distinguishing Right from Wrong in the causes of human battlefields, but there hardly seems justification within the text of the poem for drawing this conclusion, especially taking into account the jauntiness of the presentation. Without the general feeling of a "conflict of convictions," supported by a metre drawn between convention and a roughness almost beyond scansion, the whole poem is suggestive of the optimism of the poetry of Mardi and is illustrative of the value of the very conflicts within the body of many of the poems in the Battle-Pieces.
"The Armies of the Wilderness" is one of the several long poems included in the Battle-Pieces, and because of its length must be considered piecemeal. The poem, however, does contain some of Melville's most vivid imagery of battle.

In glades they meet skull after skull
Where pine-cones lay—the rusted gun,
Green shoes full of bones, the mouldering coat
And cuddled-up skeleton;
And scores of sush. Some start as in dreams,
And comrades lost becom:.
By the edge of those wilds Stonewall had charged—
But the Year and the Man were gone.93

The poem closes:

None can narrate that strife in the pines,
A seal is on it—Saracen lore!
Obscure as the wood, the entangled rhyme
But hints at the maze of war—
Vivid glimpses or livid through peopled gloom,
And fires which creep and char—
A riddle of death, of which the slain
Sole solvers are.

Long they withhold the roll
Of the shroudless dead. It is right;
Not yet can we bear the glare
Of the funeral light.94

As in "A Utilitarian View of the Monitor's Fight," Melville is concerned with the artist's relationship to his subject; but while in the

94 Ibid., p. 69.
former poem he stressed his hopes of finding expression through anti-poetic means, "The Armies of the Wilderness" concludes with the feeling that truths, or even coming to terms with the nature of the experience, can only be hinted at by the writer; that only "vivid glimpses," especially apropos of this poem and its striking primary imagery, can be conveyed through an "entangled rhyme." This one line—"Obscure as the wood, the entangled rhyme"—serves to show that Melville was aware of what he was doing with language and metre, and weakens the case for mere ineptitude.

The "truth" at which the writer can only hint is, of course, the truth of death, a truth which can be reached only by the dead. Melville approaches this problem on several different levels within the last two stanzas of the poem. The first level, carried through realistic imagery, is simply the skeletons in the wood which hint at "the Year and the Man" which have passed, and suggest the fate of the discoverers of the skeletons. These "vivid glimpses," the "Green shoes" and "smoldering coat" are only suggestions of what went on in the battle, lost now in wood and pine cones.

The second level, a parallel to the first, suggests that strive in general can never be interpreted entirely, and at best any general meaning can be but hinted at. The phrase "entangled rhyme" suggests a complicated order; if meaning or order can be applied to a world which is "obscure as the wood" which hides the skeletons,
it is an order so entangled as to afford only glimpses of insight. The "entangled rhyme" also suggests the artist, whose business it is to comment, interpret, or warn--shown in "Misgivings"--who also can offer only "Vivid glimpses or livid through peopled gloom, /And fires which creep and char." The glimpses, vivid or livid, are afforded through a wilderness of people ("peopled gloom") such as the skeletons are glimpsed through the pine-cones, also an area of "peopled gloom," and of a fire which is presented as a destroying force.

All these elements are the composite parts of a riddle which equals death, and which can only be solved by the dead. The final lines of the poem, which use the actual withholding of the lists of Civil War casualties to indicate a withholding of the truth from the living, emphasize the need of the riddle. "It is right; /Not yet can we bear the flare/of the funeral light" shows through its use of "light" to mean "enlightenment" that the living are unable to bear the knowledge gained by the dead, or the answer to the riddle. Just as the skeletons hint at the battle in the wilderness which took place a year previously, and suggest the future, so Melville points out that one can catch glimpses of the strife of life in "peopled gloom" (an idea borne out in the title of the poem, "The Armies of the Wilderness") but cannot understand the whole essence of what has passed by and is passing by; nor would one be able to bear the knowledge if it could be obtained.
"The Armies of the Wilderness" is presented through the rough metre of "Misgivings" or "Conflict of Convictions." Melville uses an approximate four-beat line from which to stray, and there is continual tension between the expected scanion and the actual. "In glades they meet skull after skull/Where pine-cones lay—the rusted gun,/Green shoes full of bones, the mouldering coat/And cuddled-up skeleton" scans with lines varying from two beats to five. There is a tendency toward dactylics, which slows the lines and gives a feeling of sobriety which underlies the quicker, less serious feeling of iambic tetrameter, from which the poem departs. Most of these lines could be scanned as iambic tetrameter with a little wrenching.

The poem "The Swamp Angel" is again concerned with the general problems of approaching disaster, of unheeded warnings, and of good and evil, which are worked out through the Battle-Pieces.

There is a coal-black Angel With a thick Afric lip, And he dwells (like the hunted and harried) In a swamp where the green frogs dip. But his face is against a City Which is over a bay of the sea, And he Breathes with a breath that is blastment, And dooms by a far decree.

By night there is fear in the City, Through the darkness a star soareth on; There's a scream that screams up to the zenith, Then the poise of a meteor lone— Lighting far the pale fright of the faces, And downward the coming is seen; Then the rush, and the burst, and the havoc, And wails and shrieks between.
It comes like the thief in the gloaming;
   It comes, and none may foretell
The place of the coming—the glaring;
   They live in a sleepless spell
That wizens, and withers, and whitens;
   It ages the young, and the bloom
Of the maiden is ashes of roses—
   The Swamp Angel broods in his gloom.

Swift is his messengers' going,
   But slowly he saps their halls,
As if by delay deluding.
   They move from their crumbling walls
Farther and farther away;
   But the Angel sends after and after,
By night with the flame of his ray—
   By night with the voice of his screaming—
   Sends after them, stone by stone,
   And farther walls fall, farther portals;
   And weed follows weed through the Town.95

The shrill tone of the "Swamp Angel," together with its forecasting of total disaster at the beak of a black angel, is indicative of Melville's own religious background, the concepts of predestination, natural depravity of man, and inner evil, most of which appear here. Again, as in "The Armies of the Wilderness," Melville uses a topical reference from which to draw a more general picture. This time the topical reference is a double one, for the black Angel with "thick Afric lip" is not only the gun which pointed toward Charleston, but obviously refers to Negro slavery, which caused a blight on both Northern and Southern society; the blight itself stemming from the original guilt of bringing slaves into the country in the first place.

95 "The Swamp Angel," Collected Poems, pp. 70-1.
The source of guilt festers and broods until it erupts and destroys itself and those connected with it, an idea already worked out by Melville in Benito Cereno.

In "The Swamp Angel," the idea of festering corruption is carried in the title, with its juxtaposition of "swamp" and "angel," and in the image of the swamp with "green frogs." Here "green" suggests life, but the kind of underworld, infested life found in a swamp. The word is used for such a double connotation as it is in "The Armies of the Wilderness," where "green shoes" suggest mildew and decay and is especially strong because of the healthy, life-image of the first meaning of "green."

The fact that the black one with the "thick Afric lip" is called an Angel, capitalized throughout the poem, extends the meaning from comment on society and warfare to religion. Just as the Negro destroys the fabric of society from within, the destroying Angel "saps the halls" and wreaks havoc from within, following the idea of inner evil.

In the second stanza, nature images are used again to suggest chaos and internal disorder. The meteor, symbol of disorder, is repeated from "The Portent" and "The Conflict of Convictions," where it is also used as an unheeded sign or warning.

Further likeness to Calvinism comes in the third stanza, "It comes like the thief in the gloaming;" Christ or the destroying Angel—or shells from the big gun—comes upon the unsuspecting and
depressed world and wreaks vengeance on the sinners, shown in "Then the rush, and the burst, and the havoc;/And wails and shrieks between." The final stanzas emphasize the inescapability of the Angel's sentence, and the utter destruction which follows his destroying rays.

While there is some irregularity of metre in "The Swamp Angel," there is no great discrepancy between an expected scanion and the actual reading, as in "The Armies of the Wilderness." For the most part, Melville maintains a three-beat line with a rising ascent, tending to make the poem move quickly with a minimum of doubt or hesitation. This use of metre supports the tone of the poem, but loses in total effect when compared with such a poem as "The Armies of the Wilderness," where the metre contributes to the feeling of doubt and humiliation in the face of human ignorance. There is no doubt in "The Swamp Angel," or questioning; but rather a diatribe against the shortcomings of society and a warning of its ultimate end.

The poem "The Martyr" works from a topical theme to reach a religious meaning.

He lieth in his blood—
The father in his face;
They have killed him, the Forgiver—
The Avenger takes his place,
The Avenger wisely stern,
Who in righteousness shall do
What the heavens call him to,
And the parricides remand;
For they killed him in his kindness,
In their madness and their blindness,
And his blood is on their hand.

There is sobbing of the strong,
And a pall upon the land;
But the People in their weeping
Bare the iron hand:
Beware the People weeping
When they bare the iron hand.96

Obvious reference is being made to Christ, the "Forgiver," as well as to the assassination of Abraham Lincoln. The main theme is built around the place of the Forgiver being taken by the Avenger, as though a benevolent deity were being replaced by a god of vengeance. Then the final stanza, with its suggestion of the People themselves performing the role of Avenger out of their grief, brings up the paradox of the iron hand stemming from tears, or vengeance being called upon by sorrow. Similar to the paradox of "The Swamp Angel," where the source of infection is the original sin of enslaving another race, Melville finds infection stemming here from the sin of parricide and the actual grief over the sin.

The metre of "The Martyr" adheres closely to the basic three-beat lines being used. Most irregular is the repeated "Bare the iron hand," which while maintaining the original three beats, achieves an elongated effect through the final two accented syllables.

Both "iron" and "hand" are diphthongs, and contribute to the length of the line.

The final poem of the *Battle-Pieces* is "A Meditation," in which Melville again turns to the problem of guilt, the source of evil, and responsibility.

> Of North or South they recked not then
> Warm passion cursed the cause of war:
> Can Africa pay back this blood
> Spilt on Potomac's shore?
> Yet doubts, as pains, were vain the strife to stay
> And hands that fain had clasped again could slay.97

As in "The Swamp Angel," Africa is specified as the source of the trouble, the guilt which festers into destruction of all involved.

"Yet doubts, as pangs, were vain the strife to stay" indicates the uncontrollable quality of evil which is once given admission. One is reminded of the storm imagery of such poems as "Misgivings," where the storm, once begun, sweeps everything in its path. The conflict between emotions and the overwhelming sweep of war is reflected in the metre. The first two lines quoted are in regular iambic tetrameter. The following two lines, "Can Africa pay back this blood/Spilt on Potomac's shore," pull away from the expected regular scansion into a roughness befitting the conflict being portrayed.

97
"A Meditation" concludes:

A darker side there is; but doubt
In Nature's charity hovers there:
If men for new agreement yearn,
Then old upbraiding best forbear:
"The South's the sinner!" Well, so let it be;
But shall the North sin worse, and stand the Pharisees?

O, now that brave men yield the sword,
Mine be the manful soldier's view;
By how much more they boldly warred,
By so much more is mercy due:
When Vicksburg fell, and the moody files marched out
Silent the victors stood, scorning to raise a shout.98

The poem seems less profound than many of those in the collection, mainly because Melville allows the topical interest to take away over any general themes which he might build toward. The final word of the poem, which seems to ask for mercy for the Southern side on the grounds that unforgiveness is the greater sin, lacks the questioning and examination of the human state which is carried in "The Armies of the Wilderness" in terms of Civil War imagery.

The basic tone of John Marr and Other Sailors, the second collection of Melville's poetry, is one of nostalgic resignation. Melville's preface to the poem "John Marr" describes a sailor who, having given up the sea and gone far inland to marry and settle, pines for his old companions. As John Marr becomes more and more aware of his exile in a world of strangers,

...these phantoms, next to those of his wife and child, became spiritual companions, losing something of their first indistinctness and putting on at last a dim semblance of mute life; and they were lit by that aureola circling over any object of the affections in the past for reunion with which an imaginative heart passionately yearns.99

This paragraph is indicative of a major theme of John Marr and Other Sailors; here, as in the Battle-Pieces, Melville is concerned with the problem of reality and illusion. While in the Battle-Pieces he is strongly aware of reality being obscured by a cloud of romantic idealism, in John Marr and Other Sailors he is almost willing to let nostalgia obscure the truth.

O, not from memory lightly flung,
Forgot, like strains no more availling,
The heart to music haughtier strung;

There is a feeling throughout the poem "John Marr" of the novel *Mardi*; less of the poetry than the book as a whole. The images of flowing water, "tides that enter creek or stream," suggest the watery search for Yillah and the final dream-like glimpse which Taji catches of her, borne out to sea by a gulf stream. The water images, with their suggestions of flux or instability, support the dream-like state in which John Marr exists, as well as the ghost-like quality of his companions, "swimming out from seas of faces."

While John Marr's old companions are not lightly flung from memory "like strains no more availing," yet their presence is likened to the tides. Finally the lines "Alien myriads memory traces,/
To enfold me in a dream," indicate John Marr's dissociation from reality. The poem continues:

I yearn as ye. But rafts that strain,
Parted, shall they lock again?
Twined we were, entwined, then riven,
Even to new embracements driven,
Shifting gulf-weed of the main!
And how if one here shift no more,
Lodged by the flinging surge ashore?

Nor less, as now, in eve's decline,
Your shadowy fellowship is mine.

The metre works to support the images of shifting and drifting. In
"Twined we were, entwined, then riven,/Ever to new embraces
driven," the accent shifts from the beginning iambic tetrameter to
a falling beat, emphasized by the feminine rhyme of "riven" and
"driven," and by the tension between the expected pattern of "Ever
to" in the fourth line and the actual reading of "Ever to new."

While men are tossed and wrenched apart by drifting current,
and driven here and there, coming "Ever to new embraces,"
occasionally one, like a piece of sea weed, is lodged ashore, or
forced apart from the general drift where he can stand aside and
view his past acquaintances. It is in this position that Melville
places John Marr, dissociated from the life he knew; and in this
description of John Marr is a likeness to Herman Melville the ar-
tist, dissociated and misunderstood by the world in which he finds
himself.

The problem of reality, then, becomes one of choice: Will
one drift into daydreams of past acquaintances until the very dream
forms a quasi-reality to take the place of a world which one can
neither accept nor be accepted by? Or will one, like the weed in

101
"John Marr, p. 165."
"The Tuft of Kelp," be purer but bitterer for its disengagement from the sea?

"The Tuft of Kelp," a very short poem, sums up the problem of human isolation and the problem of reality which hinges on it.

All dripping in tangles green,
Cast up by a lonely sea
If purer for that, O Weed,
Bitterer, too, are ye?102

The "tangles green" which typify the weed may represent the highly complicated nature of man's mind, suggesting a man soaked in the "green" or living puzzles of existence. Cast out of a natural environment, the weed is "puruer," perhaps through dissociation or through greater perspective toward the life it lived. The "lonely sea" compares with the line from "John Marr," "Swimming out from seas of faces," and suggests the loneliness of a crowd. If the weed is purer for being forced from the crowd, sea, or familiar world, it is also bitterer; here is the paradox which keeps one from ultimately seeing reality, for if one must be either impure or bitter, according to Melville, one's vision will be distorted.

The poem "The Aeolian Harp" again is concerned with the problem of the artist in relationship to his world.

102
List the harp in window wailing
Stirred by fitful gales from sea:
Shrinking up in mad crescendo—
Dying down in plaintive key!
Listen: less a strain ideal
Than Ariel's rendering of the Real.
What that Real is, let hint
A picture stamped in memory's mint.

The harp stands for the artist, which is "stirred by fitful gales
from sea," or brought to comment by the uneven currents of his world.
In "less a strain ideal/Than Ariel's rendering of the Real" is
Melville's aim in his shorter poems; to get at the real and away
from the ideal. Yet the "Real" must be "rendered" and hinted at,
suggesting that it is impossible to see reality in its entirety.

While in "John Marr" memory was shown as building a dream world
of quasi-reality, "memory's mint" in "The Aeolian Harp" is a way of
hinting at Reality. The poem continues, showing what emerges from
"memory's mint."

Dismasted and adrift,
Long time a thing forsaken;
Overwashed by every wave
Like the slumbering kraken;
Needless if the billow roar,
Oblivious of the lull,
Leagues and leagues from shoal or shore,
It swims—a levelled hull:
Balwarks gone—a shaven wreck,
Nameless, and a grass-green deck.

103
A lumberman: perchance, in hold
Prostrate pines with hemlocks rolled.104

The wreck, the physical Real dredged up by memory, is only the outward sign of the Reality of which the Aeolian harp sings, the nameless hull which is left after the battering of ocean storms. Whatever the wreck held, whatever it was, can only be hinted at.

The images of ocean and of green growing things are repeated here from "Misgivings" of the Battle-Pieces, and used in much the same way. The ocean is a batterer or destroyer, something which causes the drifting, skeleton-like state of the wreck. The last line quoted above, "Prostrate pines with hemlocks rolled," suggests the "hemlock shakes in the rafter, the oak in the driving keel." The basic difference between the two lines is that while in "Misgivings," the hemlock and the oak are being battered and torn by storms, while in "The Aeolian Harp" they have been tossed until nothing remains but the skeleton of the wrecked ship. The language of the first poem suggests motion, action—"hemlock shakes," "driving keel," while the second poem has a kind of quietness—"prostrate pines," "hemlocks rolled." There is none of the resistance of "driving keel" in "The Aeolian Harp," for all that belongs to the defeated past and is a part of the Real which can only be hinted of.

The difference between "Misdigvings" and "The Aeolian Harp" is representative of the difference between the Battle-Pieces and John Marr and Other Sailors as a whole. From the poet deeply concerned with the plight of society in a disintegrating setting, of life constantly beset by chaos symbolised by upheavals of nature, Melville himself seems "Dismasted and adrift, long time a thing forsaken."

It is as if a peak had been reached, the disaster predicted in the Battle-Pieces culminated by complete destruction, leaving only the shell which hints of things past. If "The Fortent" seems a calm before a storm, "The Aeolian Harp" is a calm following destruction.

William Ellery Sedgwick, citing Bartleby and some of the stories from The Enchantad, says of the late Melville,

The conclusion is obvious; Melville was accepting failure and the long, dreary consequences of failure. He was learning, as his hero Pierre had not finally learned, catlike to walk in the dark. Obscurity and anonymity, these are his themes—more particularly, the obscure anonymous heroism of life... Now, with Moby-Dick and Pierre behind him, he knew that the worst fate which his youthful imagination could paint was reserved for him, to float on vulgar shoals. But his nature imagination came to his rescue. His imagination rescued him, I say; but then with Melville truth of soul and imaginative vision were the same.105

Certainly there is a sense of obscurity and anonymity in both the Battle-Pieces and John Marr and Other Sailors. The whole idea of

105 William Ellery Sedgwick, Herman Melville, the Tragedy of Mind (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1945), pp. 124-5.
an artist dissociated from his society fits this tone. Indeed, reading the *Battle-Pieces* and then turning to *John Marr*, which was published twenty-two years later, gives one some sense of the process of resignation which Melville was apparently undergoing.

While in the *Battle-Pieces* there is often a sense of futility, of giving an unheard warning, the largest single concern is for a whole world approaching disaster. In *John Marr and Other Sailors* the futility has become supreme, and there is less concern for the world than for the individual who has been cast up by that world.

On the whole, the structure of the poems in *John Marr and Other Sailors* is rougher and less distorted than those of the *Battle-Pieces*. As in "John Marr," Melville still uses metre to support his images or ideas, drawing dactylics into a predominantly iambic line, or varying the number of syllables in other ways; or he writes a line which pulls away from its formal scanion into something more irregular, suggesting a conflict of ideas. Yet scanning "The Aeolian Harp," even though the lines vary in numbers of feet and syllables, gives no sense of the wrenching of "A Conflict of Convictions." The lines "Dismasted and adrift;/Long time a thing forsaken;/Overwashed by every wave/Like the slumbering kraken," suggest a quiet washing of waves, a slumbering loneliness, but do not share in the violence of "What if the gulf's their slimed foundations bare?/So deep must the stones be hurled/Whereon the throes of ages rear/The final empire and the happier world."106

Perhaps the best single piece of John Marr and Other Sailors, and representative of the general tone, is "The Maldive Shark."

About the Shark, phlegmatical one,
Pale set of the Maldive sea,
The sleek little pilot-fish, azure and slim,
How alert in attendance be.
From his saw-pit of mouth, from his chomel of maw
They have nothing of harm to dread,
But liquidly glide on his ghastly flank
Or before his Corganian head;
Or lurk in the port of serrated teeth
In white triple tiers of glittering gates,
And there find a haven when peril's abroad,
An asylum in jaws of the Fates!
They are friends; and friendly they guide him to prey,
Yet never partake of the treat—
Eyes and brains to the dotard lethargic and dull,
Pale ravener of horrible meat.107

The white, or "pale" image of the shark becomes here the symbol of Fate or evil in much the same way that the whale functions in Moby-Dick. The importance here, however, is the concept of a lethargic, brainless, blind Fate guided by little fish which find safety in the jaws of that Fate but "never partake of the treat."

Religious suggestions appear in the line "white triple tiers of glittering gates," in its reference to the "pearly gates" of a promised land. It is a niche in these glittering gates which provide the pilot-fish with a haven; yet the force behind the gates is neither the angry god of Calvinistic doctrine, which figures in the

107 "The Maldive Shark," Collected Poems, p. 200. This edition includes nine lines at the end of "The Maldive Shark" which belong at the beginning of "To Ned," printed on the following page.
poem "The Swamp Angel," nor the benevolent figure which the transcendentalists found in nature. Instead there is a "dotard lethargic and dull" which is the "ravener of horrible meat." This image of a dotard guided by small fish, neither loving nor wrathful, comes far closer to the picture of nature held by such later writers as Stephen Crane, where external forces become impersonalized and completely detached from the concerns of men.

By the time "The Maldivian Shark" was written, then, Melville had come to look on nature as less directly concerned with the affairs of man. In the Battle-Pieces, nature-imagery is used constantly to convey a sense of chaos and disorder, implying a relationship between the natural world and the social world. This view reaches a head in "The Swamp Angel," where Melville pictures a wrathful figure of retribution calling down on man all the forces of the natural world.

The poems of John Marr and Other Sailors, however, while retaining the concept of nature as a destroying force, tend to look upon it as impersonal. Such a poem as "The Tuft of Kelp," in which the weed (man) is cast up from the sea stresses this dissociation of man and nature; nature is no longer a force with which one can associate oneself, but simply a cold, blind "dotard." This new view of nature may account for some of the drifting tone which characterizes John Marr; as well as being cut adrift from youth and friends—the social world in general—Melville has become detached from the
very physical world which he uses as metaphor to carry his themes.

Of the remaining poems of John Mury and Other Sailors, several have the nostalgic tone of the title piece. Melville looks back to the idyllic scenes of his youth with a longing made more intense by the realization that all this has been irrevocably lost. In the poem "To Ned" he appeals to the companion of his Typee adventure.

The charm of scenes untried shall lure,
   And, Ned, a legend urge the flight—
The Typee-truants under stars
     Unknown to Shakespeare's Midsummer-Night;
And man, if lost to Saturn's Age,
Yet feeling life no Syrian pilgrimage.

But, tell, shall he, the tourist, find
   Our isles the same in violet-glow
Enamoring us what years and years—
   Ah, Ned, what years and years ago!
Well, Adam advances, smart in pace,
But scarce by violets that advance you trace.108

The adventures of his youth have become "legend," a better-than-life dream which can never be relived. Melville recognizes the futility of maintaining a romantic dream in the lines "Well, Adam advances, smart in pace,/But scarce by violets that advance you trace." The uneven metre and involved syntax of the poem parallel the feeling of a conflict between a beloved dream and a prosaic reality.

In "The Berg," Melville returns to the idea of nature as an impersonal force.

108
"To Ned, Collected Poems, p. 201."
I saw a ship of martial build
(Her standards set, her brave apparel on)
Directed as by madness mere
Against a stolid iceberg steer,
Nor budge it, though the infatuate ship went down.
The impact made huge ice-cubes fall
Sullen, in tons that crashed the deck;
But that one avalanche was all—
No other movement save the shuddering wreck.109

The only effect even a warlike ship prepared for conflict with the world ("Her standards set") can have on nature is to stir from it the trivial violence of "ice-cubes," which contribute to the wreck. The iceberg itself suggests the white lethargic shark, described by Melville as "stolid" and "Sullen." The poem concludes with an address to the iceberg itself, to the "dead indifference of walls,"110 an echo of Bartleby.

The last poem of the collection, "Pebbles," represents a coming of terms with the problems of religion, nature, and man's dissociation from either.

I

Though the Clerk of the Weather insist,
And lay down the weather-law,
Pintado and guanet they wist
That the winds blow whither they list
In tempest or flaw.

109

110
Ibid., p. 204.
Old are the creeds, but stale the schools,
Revamped as the mode may vear,
But Omi from the schools to the beaches strays,
And, finding a Coast hoar with time, he delays
And reverent lifts it to ear.
That Voice, pitched in far monotone,
Shall it swerve? shall it deviate ever?
The Seas have inspired it, and Truth---
Truth, varying from sameness never.

In hollows of the liquid hills
Where the long Blue Ridges run,
The flattery of no echo thrills,
For echo the seas have none;
Nor aught that gives man back man's strain---
The hope of his heart, the dream in his brain.

On ocean where the embattled fleets repair,
Man, suffering inflictor, sails on sufferance there.

Implacable I, the old implacable Sea:
Implacable most when most I sail serene---
Pleased, not appeased, by myriad wrecks in me.

Curlèd in the comb of you billow Andean,
Is it the Dragon's heaven-challenging crest?
Elemental and ramping of ravening waters---
Yet Christ on the Mount, and the dove in her nest!

Healed of my hurt, I laud the inhuman Sea---
Yes, bless the Angels Four that there converse;
For healed I am even by their pitiless breath
Distilled in wholesome dew names rosmarine.
I need to see the right side of the page to understand the context of the text.
feeling of resignation and acceptance. The bitterness of such poems as "The Tuft of Kelp" is outweighed by the tone of "Pebbles," where Melville is able to turn from concern for both good and evil in favor of Truth, embodied by the Sea.
Conclusion

The volume *Thuluseon* was published in 1891. Of the poems included, the editor of the *Collected Poems* believes that the section entitled "Fruit of Travel Long Ago" and containing about twenty short poems, was probably written around 1859, earliest of all Melville's poetry except that in *Mardi*.

This group, "Fruit of Travel Long Ago," has as its main concern the nature of art and the relationship between form and art. The poems which reflect this concern are scattered among a number of others which seem like the random jottings of a man on holiday. The poem "In a Bye-Canal," for example, picks up many of the images which recur in Melville's writings, but treats them jocularly.

A swoon of noon, a trance of tide,
The hushed siesta brooding wide
   Like calms far off Peru;
No floating wayfarer in sight,
Dumb noon, and haunted like the night
   When Jael the wiled one slew.
A languid impulse from the air
Plied by my indolent gondolier
Tinkles against a palace hoar,
   And, hark, response I hear!
A lattice clicks; and lo, I see
Between the slats, mute summoning me,
What loveliest eyes of scintillation,
What basilisk glance of conception!
   Fronted I have, part taken the span
Of portents in nature and peril in man.
I have swum—I have been
Twist the whale's black flukes
   and the white shark's fin;

-116-
The enemy's desert have wandered in,
And there have turned, have turned and scoured,
Following me how noiselessly,
Envy and Slander, lepers hand in hand.
All this, But at the lattice eye—
"Hey! Gondolier, you sleep, my man; Wake up!" And, shooting by, we ran;
The while I mused, This, surely now,
Confutes the Naturalists, allow!
Sirens, true sirens verily be,
Sirens, waylayers in the sea.

Well, wooded by these same deadly misses,
Is it shame to run?
No! flee them did divine Ulysses,
Brave, wise, and Venus' son.112

One notable feature of this poem is its use of internal rhyme. In
the first lines are ". . .swoon of noon. . .brooding," with the
vowel sound carried through into "Peru" in the third line. These
long vowel sounds tend to slow the lines and support the lazy feel-
ing of "Dumb noon."

In the lines "Fronted I have, part taken the span/Of portents
in nature and peril in man,/I have swum—I have been/Twixt the whale's
black flukes and the white shark's fin," Melville almost seems to be
summing up the poetry in the Battle-Pieces and in John Marr. Now
the man who has "part taken the span of portents in nature" and who
has "swum. . .twixt the whale's Black fluke and the white shark's fin,"
or delved into the depths of the difference between black and white,
or good and evil, lumps all this experience together and dismisses
it as inadequate preparation for coping with a girl looking out a

112
"In a Bye-Canal," Collected Poems, 239-40.
window at him.

Howard Vincent, in dating "Fruit of Travel Long Ago" earlier than the Battle-Pieces is probably basing his opinion on the triviality of many of the poems of the collection, and on the imagery, which is drawn from Melville's trip to the Near East during 1856-7. Many of the poems do seem trivial and less profound than those of the earlier volumes, as does "In a Bye-Canal," quoted above. Yet several of these poems are far better than the bulk of Needs and Wildings, which contains Melville's last poetry. Then too, certain lines, such as those quoted from "In a Bye-Canal," are so suggestive of the problems worked out in the Battle-Pieces and in John Marr and Other Sailors that one can only wonder whether the whole collection, or part of it, is not part of the poetic meanderings which Melville seems to have settled into after the tone of resignation in John Marr. If these poems were written in 1859, they would be chronologically closest to the Battle-Pieces; yet the general tone is far closer to that of Needs and Wildings. The uncertainty of dating makes it difficult to see the poems of Timoleon in the whole scope of the poems; also complicated by the great variation in the pieces of the collection.

One of the better poems of "Fruit of Travel Long Ago" is "In a Church of Padua."

In vaulted place where shadows flit,
An upright sombre box you see:
A door, but fast, and lattice none,
But punctured holes minutely small
In lateral silver panel square
Above a kneeling-board without,
Suggest an aim if not declare.

Who bendeth here the tremulous knee
No glimpse may get of him within,
And he immured may hardly see
The soul confessing there the sin;
Nor yields the low-sieved voice a tone
Whereby the murmurer may be known.

Dread diving-bell! In thee imurned
What hollows the priest must sound,
Descending into consciences
Where more is hid than found.

The relationship between priest and supplicator is summed up in the lines, "Who bendeth here the tremulous knee/No glimpse may get of him within,/And he immured may hardly see/The soul confessing there the sin." Then the image of the diving bell, suggesting the exploration of the deep, or "Descending into consciences," is brought in to emphasize the difficulty, or impossibility, of any real understanding seeping through the "punctured holes minutely small." Melville is stressing, then, a kind of dissociation between man and religion, a distance which cannot be overcome, even with willingness and cooperative effort on both sides. The symbol of the box or cell works out on both sides, showing the sinner encased in a "vaulted place where shadows flit," which suggests the dark and im-

113
"In a Church of Padua," Collected Poems, p. 241.
penetrable quality of the mind or soul, and at the same time showing the priest in a diving-bell or closed cell in which he must make his explorations.

The metre of the poem is regular iambic tetrameter, showing no variations or wrenchings except in the final line, which is shortened to three beats which stress the final comment: "Where more is hid than found."

One of the poems which is concerned with art and which stresses the importance of form is "Greek Architecture."

Not magnitude, not lavishness,
But Form—the Site;
Not innovating wilfulness,
But reverence for the Archetype.\textsuperscript{114}

Lawrence Barrett quotes this poem as part evidence for Melville's turning to poetry from prose. He was driven to it, says Barrett, because he was aware of the failure of his own formlessness—the failure, apparently, of such formless "magnitude" as \textit{Moby-Dick.}

Here it seems that Barrett has failed to take into account the last two lines of the poem, "Not innovating wilfulness,/But reverence for the Archetype." That Melville has had regard for the archetype from the beginning is evident from an examination of his writings, taking into account the symbols of fire, ocean, mountain, and beast

\textsuperscript{114} "Greek Architecture," \textit{Collected Poems}, p. 248.
which have been present since *Types* and reach a peak in *Moby-Dick*. Taking into account both the admiration for form and for the archetype, however, one gets some idea of Melville's artistic aim.

The bulk of the remaining poems are notable only for their lack of outstanding qualities. One which reflects a passage from Shakespeare's *Winter's Tale* is "The Attic Landscape," the last stanza of which is as follows.

"'Tis Art and Nature lodged together,
Sister by sister, cheek to cheek;
Such Art, such Nature, and such weather
The All-in-All seems here a Greek."

F. O. Matthiessen, in his book *American Renaissance* indicates that the following passage in Melville's copy of *The Winter's Tale* is double-scored.

Yet nature is made better by no mean
But nature makes that mean: so, over that art,
Which you say adds to nature, is an art
That nature makes. You see, sweet maid, we marry
A gentler soion to the wildest stock,
And make conceive a bark of baser kind
By bud of nobler race: this is an art
Which does mend nature, change it rather, but
The art itself is nature."

---

Despite surface similarities in theme, the shallowness of Melville's poem in comparison with the passage from Shakespeare is obvious. Where Melville describes Art and Nature as sisters, living cheek by cheek, Shakespeare suggests the more complex view of nature—itself an art—mending art; that is, while Melville sees two dissociated elements in close contact with one another, Shakespeare sees the same elements as at once separate and the same.

Of the remaining poems in Timoleon, two predominant themes are religion and art. These poems vary in merit to the extremes that are apparent in a comparison of "The Ravaged Villa" and "Art." The first of these is a rather commonplace comment on the antithesis between Art and Mammon.

In shards the sylvan vases lie,
Their links of dance undone,
And brambles wither by thy brim,
Choked fountain of the sun!
The spider in the laurel spins,
The weed exiles the flower:
And, flung to kiln, Apollo's bust
Makes lime for Mammon's tower.117

The idea of real artistic effort being overcome by Mammon, was, of course, a real problem to Melville and often present in his writings. Yet this poem really says nothing more about the theme than that artistic effort is often overcome by Mammon. Even Lawrence Barrett's pointing out that "fountain of the sun" is a symbol of long standing

117
in Melville's writings does little to help the case.

A later poem in the same volume is also concerned with the problem of Art.

In placid hours well pleased we dream
Of many a brave un-bodied scheme.
But form to lead, pulsed life create,
What unlike things must meet and mate:
A flame to melt—a wind to freeze;
Sad patience—joyous energies;
Humility—yet pride and scorn;
Instinct and study; love and hate;
Audacity—reverence. These must mate,
And fuse with Jacob's mystic heart,
To wrestle with the angel—Art.118

In this poem Melville turns from the conflict between Art and the forces outside Art, and concentrates on the problems within Art itself. The result seems far less trite. Several lines put one in mind of Melville's own work; for example "A flame to melt—a wind to freeze; Sad patience—joyous energies" sounds much like elements of Moby-Dick, in the emphasis on fire and water, and the opposing qualities of "sad patience" and "joyous energies," which are worked out in the characters of various members of the crew of the Pequod.

The whole notion of art bringing together unlikes is one of the main features of the Battle-Pieces, where conflicts of thoughts

or emotions result in tensions reflected in uneven metre. The metre of "Art" is a fairly regular iambic tetrameter which at first reading seems to break down in the ninth line, where Melville abruptly switches to dactyls. Notice, however, the balance of the line internally: "Audacity—reverence. These must mate."

The poem "Shelley's Vision" deals with much the same problem.

Wandering late by morning seas
When my heart with pain was low—
Hate the sensor pelted me—
Deject I saw my shadow go.

In elf-caprice of bitter tone
I too would pelt the pelted one:
At my shadow I cast a stone.

When lo, upon that sun-lit ground
I saw the quivering phantom take
The likeness of St. Stephen crowned:
Then did self-reverence awake, 119

As in "The Ravaged Villa," Melville is concerned with the relationship of art or artist with the outside world. Instead of the condemning tone of the former poem, however, one gets a sense of the personal struggle within the artist; "I too would pelt the pelted one." The problem becomes the development of "self-reverence" within the artist himself, instead of condemning the "sensors," as in "The Ravaged Villa."

"Shelley's Vision" also illustrates another metrical preference

of Melville's. He likes to conclude a stanza of basic iambic tetrameter with a line of dactylic, and in this poem he does it twice. First there is "At my shadow I cast a stone," and finally there is "Then did self-reverence awake." The rhyme-scheme moves from the near-rhymes of "seas-me" to the more disparate approximates of "tone-one-stone" in the second stanza; and ends with the exact rhymes of "ground-crowned" and "take-awake" in the final stanza, paralleling the return to self-esteem with a movement back to regularity.

On the whole, the poems of Timoleon are of uneven merit, varying from light humor to the more complex issues of "In a Church of Padua." If there is a dominant theme, it is concern for art and the artist in a hostile world.

The concern for art and the artist carries through to the body of unpublished poems entitled Weeds and Wildings. While many of the poems of this group seem trivial, working with images of flowers and weeds without even the exuberence and spontaneity of Mardi, a few selections are of interest. These poems are among the most personal of all Melville's works; often sounding as though he was talking to himself with no thought of being heard by anyone else. An example of these few poems is "Madam Mirror." Here Melville works with the conceit of a hidden mirror in an attic; but the reference is obviously to himself.

With wrecks in a garret I'm stranded, Where, no longer returning a face,
I take to reflections the deeper
On memories far to retrace.

In me have all people confided,
The maiden her charms has displayed,
And truths unrevealed and unuttered
To me have been freely betrayed.
Some truths I might tell of the toilet
Did not tenderness make me forget. . .

Tho' lone in a loft I must languish
Far from closet and parlor at strife,
Content I escape from the anguish
Of the real and the Seeming in life. 120

Notable is the relative smoothness of metre, especially compared with the wrenchings of the Battle-Pieces. The general tone is one of quiet and timelessness, brought about partly through the frequent use of feminine rhymes, which cause the lines to end on a falling beat; for example, "languish. . .anguish," or "confided. . .unuttered."

In the first line of the poem, Melville uses his favored image of the shipwreck to indicate the destruction of man's hopes and aspirations; here he himself is stranded with wrecks in a garret, discarded, with only memories to reflect upon. The reflection upon memories brings to mind many of the nostalgic poems of John Hare and Other Sailors, especially "To Ned," where past freedoms or aspirations were still green and fresh.
Yet Melville has found solace for the loss of his youthful hopes in the sanctuary he had found, "Far from strife, Content I escape from the anguish/Of the Real and the Seeming in life." Melville as artist, or reflector of the Real, is the mirror, the Seeming; and the anguish has been his as he has struggled to make the Seeming into the Real or at least to resolve the two.

Again, he has escaped from the anguish between Real and Seeming shown in such a poem as "Shiloh," where only the anguish of death can indicate the difference between reality and appearance, the basic humanity present in both sides of the battle.

Finally, the tone and theme of the poem indicate the frame of mind Melville had reached, where content to live obscure in a dusty haven, he reflects memories instead of present concerns. The same theme is reiterated through several of these final poems.

Looking at the whole body of Melville's shorter poems, then, beginning with the poetry of Mardi and working through to the body of unpublished works, the basic trend is a shift from irresponsible lighthearted composition with indications of developments to come, to the harsh doubts and contortions reflected in the Battle-Pieces. A feeling of resignation develops in John Marr and Other Sailors; and while the poetry of Timoleon is too diverse to attach much weight in regard to general theme, the resignation moves into the later poems of Waads and Wildings, culminating in the dead quiet of such poems as "Madam Mirror" or "Time's Long Ago!" All these devel-
developments are reflected in the metre of the poems. That of Wood is hit-or-miss, but suggesting better things to come, as in "The Song of the Paddlers." In the Battle-Pieces, wrenching and distortion is extreme. Wrenching of metre is still prevalent in John Marr and Other Sailors, but beginning to subside; and is still less common in the unpublished poetry.

The language of the poetry raises another problem. Again, as has been shown, critical views on Melville's language vary, from the belief that here was a prose writer out of his element, to the feeling that if only one were well enough acquainted with the whole Melville canon and the development of the symbolism, much would be clear which is presently obscure. While reading the Battle-Pieces, one often has the feeling that Melville was writing an anti-poem, perhaps best exemplified in "A Utilitarian View of the Monitor's Fight." Newton Arvin especially stresses the anti-poetic quality of much of the diction of the poems.

While Arvin's observations about the diction of the poetry are sound, the matter of anti-poeticism can be taken beyond the use of language and be seen as one of the elements affecting the versification. That is, Melville is not only striving to move away from his poetic predecessors by using language commonly associated with prose, and by carrying much of his meaning through highly personal symbols, but reacts through the structure itself. A main source of tension in the poems rises from the strict adherence to form on the
one hand, and reaction against it on the other. Lawrence Barrett approaches this problem when he says

The need to do so vary lines and rhyme within a single poem inevitably raised another ambiguity, for it was hardly compatible with his faith in the "time and measure perfect" of all art whose aim is sure. In a number of his best poems he solved the conflict by rigorously keeping accent but varying syllabification to get the effects he wanted. The result is a poetry which shows the unusual combination of being fundamentally assonantal and at the same time heavily ensmatopoeic. Perhaps it is a bastard form of poetry, but to say so is rather beside the point.121

As an example of this view, Barrett cites "The March into Virginia." One can question whether the "conflict" is solved, however, for it seems more or less apparent throughout the Battle-Pieces, emerging in the general classification of tension.

By the time Melville wrote his next volume of verse, John Marr and Other Sailors, twenty years after the Battle-Pieces, the basic concern for chaotic change and upheaval had shifted to a feeling of dissociation, marked by the nostalgic tone of such poems as "John Marr," and "To Ned," as well as the awareness of man's isolation and futile position in the world, shown in "The Tuft of Kelp" and "The Berg." Indeed, reading the Battle-Pieces and then turning to

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Barrett, p. 619.
John Marr is part indication of the whole drift of Melville's thought and sense of resignation during this time. The basis pattern of resignation and metrical regularity can be traced through to the final short poems, the collection entitled *Weeds and Wildings*, which ends in a tone of dead quiet.

Lawrence Barrett takes a step in the right direction when he notes that conflicts are at work in Melville's poetry which would seem to account for violences and wrenchings of metre. Yet his view seems limited when he attributes this conflict to the struggle between head and heart, or the attempt to relate form to idea. To be sure, the struggle between head and heart, with victory on the side of the head, is what characterizes the poetry and poetic discussions of *Mardi*. The poetry of *Mardi* is notably formless, with a few embryonic exceptions, and the verses of the *Battle-Pieces* are kept rigidly within a tight structure, usually iambic tetrameter, although at times there is a violent attempt to break out of these arbitrary limits. This shift from lighthearted formlessness to a grim adherence to form, however, seems less an attempt to reconcile head and heart as a gradual working toward the acceptance of the human lot which begins to emerge throughout the later poems, especially in *John Marr* and *Other Sailors.*
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