Development of Herman Melville's religious thought | an essay in interpretation

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF HERMAN MELVILLE'S
RELIGIOUS THOUGHT: AN ESSAY IN INTERPRETATION

by

FRANCIS LOUIS LA FORGE
B.A., Carroll College, 1949

Presented in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

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Rufus A. Coleman
Chairman of the Board of Examiners

[Signature]
Dean of the Graduate School

Date: June 2, 1952
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F. L. L.
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INTRODUCTION

In his essay on "Hawthorne and his Mosses," Melville said that "in this world of lies, Truth is forced to fly like a scared white doe in the woodlands; and only by cunning glimpses will she reveal herself, as in Shakespeare and other masters of the great Art of Telling the Truth, — even though it be covertly and by snatches." The various interpretations given Melville's novels testify to the difficulty of discovering their precise meaning through the glimpses of immortal truth they allow. The very nature of the novels, when they are considered separately, will continue to foster many interpretations depending on the viewpoint of the critic and the emphasis he gives to certain significant passages. But when the novels are viewed successively, an overall pattern emerges which is basically of religious context. The interpretation given here will concern itself with the development of Melville's religious thought, as it is developed from Redburn to Billy Budd.

Such an interpretation is based on the assumption that the religious attitudes reflected in the novels are Melville's. On this point there is general agreement. The religious concepts voiced by the omniscient author can only be taken as Melville's. George Snell has this to say:

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1Billy Budd, p. 131. All references to Melville's writings except as otherwise noted, are to the Standard Edition of The Works of Herman Melville (London: Constable and Company, 1922-1924).
It is evident that, preoccupied almost to the point of obsession with the riddle of man's relationship to God, Melville traced in his works a course that ran the gamut of a temperate hedonism (Typic, Omoo) through skeptical Christianity (Lardi) to a black pessimism (Moby Dick, Pierre) and a final reconciliation (Benito Cereno - Billy Budd).

William H. Gilman, who seeks to disprove Redburn as entirely autobiographical, admits that Melville's comments on religious matters are in all sincerity Melville's own beliefs. He writes:

Their liberal questionings about a belief that is just as much a part of the Christian credo as the idea of God the Father and of sin and repentance reveal a continuation of that inner conflict in personal faith which had appeared on a much wider scale in Lardi and which was to vex Melville for the rest of his life.

Gilman takes issue with those critics who say that in Redburn Melville adopted Christian terminology to his own purpose, pleading with orthodox Christians as though their beliefs were his own. Gilman asserts:

The orthodoxy is so firmly imbedded, so spontaneous in expression, and so preponderant that it must have been central in Melville's religious feeling.

But the interpretation to be advanced in this paper is founded on a further assumption: the characters themselves are projections of Melville's religious conflicts in its origin, development and final reconciliation. The identification of Melville with his characters meets with immediate objection. Such an objection is raised by Gilman. He says that the question of spiritual truth in Redburn is difficult to deal with and that the assessments of Redburn which declare it a

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3Ibid., p. 242.
romance on the surface only, and that its real meaning as autobiography lies deep below, where all but the obdurate will find the tragic story of Melville's own youth, can be given only guarded and tentative acceptance. Gilman declares that, "to insist that Redburn's emotions were Melville's neglects the fact that Melville was older and more experienced than Redburn and that many of the fictional hero's outbursts arose from incidents which did not occur." Gilman goes on to declare that the absence of a diary or letters in this early period indicates that Redburn as autobiography cannot be substantiated.¹

But it would be curious, indeed, if an author of Melville's stature would allow his beliefs to be expressed only in digressions. Neither can the idea that Melville's characterizations and actions were literary devices wholly for dramatic effect be entertained, for to do so would ignore the fact that Melville recognized that his novels would not be accepted. In a letter to Hawthorne he wrote: "That I feel most moved to write, that is banned, —— it will not pay. Yet, altogether, write the other way I cannot."² Such a position as Gilman's also ignores the fact that Melville considered himself akin to Hawthorne as "master in the great Art of Telling the Truth". He saw Hawthorne and himself as two of those few men who formed "a chain of God's posts around the world"³ The overall view of Melville's novels in which can be observed certain recurrent patterns and a development of religious

¹Ibid., pp. 203-205.
²Julian Hawthorne, Nathaniel Hawthorne and His Wife: A Biography, (Boston, 1885), I, p. 402.
³Ibid., I, p. 370.
belief, justifies an assumption which identifies Melville with his main characters; this viewpoint is accepted by a considerable number of critics. George C. Homans says: "The three novels (Hardi, Pierre, Moby Dick) are Melville's dramatization of a part of his spiritual life, and what is true of his characters must be taken as being true of himself." E. L. Grant Watson asserts that Pierre is a record (for a certain period) of Melville's mystical experience. Raymond M. Weaver insists that "Melville's complete works, in their final analysis, are a long effort towards the creation of one of the most complex, and massive, and original characters in literature: the character known in life as Herman Melville." Recent biographies have thrown much light upon the complex character of Herman Melville, but for a complete picture and for a complete understanding of the religious conflicts which formed the core of his personality one must turn to his own artistic creations.

Melville recognized that the only solution to the mystery of life was religious in nature. He was not alone in his time to challenge the beliefs of contemporary society. Yet few authors affected by the skepticism of the time were hit quite so hard as he by their disillusionment. Unlike Melville, most of his New England contemporaries found solutions to their questions. Emerson and Thoreau with their transcendental theories, and Lowell, Longfellow, and Holmes, with their

3Raymond M. Weaver, Herman Melville, Mariner and Mystic, (New York, 1921), p. 29.
Unitarian views, were relatively contented and optimistic. Whittier was a good Quaker. Whitman was buoyed by the worship of the universe. Even Hawthorne, with his obsession of the problems of sin, was contented enough in his own belief to sympathize with Melville.

Though expressing his wonderment at Melville's obsession with religious problems, at the same time Hawthorne showed his admiration for him in what has become a classic statement of Melville's spiritual condition. On his way to the Holy Land in 1856, Melville stopped to visit Hawthorne, at this time consul at Liverpool. One day out among the sand dunes near Southport, the two friends had a long conversation to which Melville referred in his Journal as "Good talk"; Hawthorne recorded the episode as follows:

"...he informed me that he had "pretty much made up his mind to be annihilated"; but still he does not seem to rest in that anticipation; and, I think, will never rest until he gets hold of a definite belief. It is strange how he persists — and has persisted ever since I knew him, and probably long before — in wandering to-and-fro over these deserts, as dismal and monotonous as the sand dunes amid which we were sitting. He can neither believe, nor be comfortable in his unbelief; and he is too honest and courageous not to try to do one or the other. If he were a religious man, he would be one of the most truly religious and reverential; he has a very high and noble nature, and better worth immortality than most of us."

While Hawthorne's statement expressed most completely the despair Melville felt of ever finding solution to his problems, it is curious that Hawthorne did not sense the reason for Melville's persistence in striving for a definite belief. Melville recognized the true nature of Hawthorne's works and it is curious that Hawthorne could not do the same.

with Melville, for Melville in his works unfolded his own spiritual development, in its beginnings, its conflicts and final reconciliation. Melville in expressing his own religious development did so not only for self-satisfaction, but also for the enlightenment of his fellow-man. Melville's criticism of Christianity, in the last analysis, was prompted by his boundless love for humanity. He believed Christianity responsible to a large measure for the miserable condition of man. From his own religious training he came to know the chief tenets of Christianity as espoused by Calvinism. He grew up believing in the hard doctrines of predestination and election. In his youth he believed in the total depravity of man and total goodness of God. But in his later years he rebelled against these ideas; he came to see God as a source of evil. In the solution of his religious conflict he retained his identification of a Christian; he was a rebel but a rebel within the confines of Christian doctrine. The concepts of man and God and the relationship between the two as espoused by Christianity were abrogated by the evidences of reality. Melville's conclusion was that Christianity, as practiced by contemporary society, was a corrupted version of Christ's teachings. What remained was the necessity of stripping Christianity of these corruptions so that the Truth would finally emerge.

Melville's religious speculations can be divided into the following three main divisions: the nature of man, the nature of God, and the relationship between God and man. His final reconciliation involves the apotheosis of the common man as Christ through whom the Father-Son relationship between God and man would be established. Melville anticipated his own final solution in his ideal Christian state of Serenia.¹

But at times he despaired of man's potentialities to realize this divine heritage. Though Melville could accomplish in his mind the final solution, he required that his ideas be demonstrated by reality. His belief in the essential goodness of man resulted in the creation in his novels of the man-god, with obvious Christ-like attributes, in which Melville's ideal would be realized. As such, Melville's characters illustrate his own religious thoughts and aspirations and demonstrate through their modifications, expressed in successive novels, the development of his religious thought — the origin and growth of his religious conflicts (Redburn, Mardi, Pierre, Moby Dick) and the final reconciliation in his posthumous novel, Billy Budd.

While this paper is primarily concerned with the novels mentioned above, some references will be made to Typee and Omoo in which Melville voices his early objections to Christianity. Similarly brief reference will be made to White Jacket. No mention is made of The Confidence Man, that strange allegory of the deceptive nature, as Melville saw it, of Christianity, which chronologically follows Pierre. Neither will reference be made to Melville's many short stories and poems, and his long metaphysical poem Clarel. The Confidence Man, in our opinion, merely repeats criticism of Christianity voiced in earlier novels expressed in Melville's most satiric manner. Clarel, a two-volume philosophical disquisition of allegorical framework, expresses in blank verse much of what Melville had previously said in prose and for that reason has been excluded.

A further note perhaps should be added, one which concerns the validity of other interpretations given by many critics to Melville's works. This paper is not designed to refute these approaches be they Freudian, socio-economic, or naturalistic. Though Melville, like his
fellow writers, voiced criticism of social and economic activities, these can be considered little more than incidental to the main action and characterization of his main novels. Freudian criticism has especially centered about the novel Pierre, largely because of the incest theme underlying the main action. Yet, in Pierre an analysis of the sister-brother relationship reveals no mention of the act of incest as being positively committed. The relationship is given symbolical reference by Pierre's statement that the choice between Lucy and Isabel is basically a choice between "Lucy or God." This assertion suggests a religious rather than a sexual symbology. Indeed, it may be further argued that, had Melville wished to elaborate a sexual theme he could have done so earlier in Typee and Mardi; yet in these narratives his treatment of Fayaway and Yillah is entirely without sexual reference.

In addition, Freudian analysis, as applied to Melville, has further deficiencies, since, by treating the novels separately, it ignores that which is most apparent in Melville, the fact that his novels are a progression of similar ideas. The cogency of this present thesis lies in that fact. The recurring patterns, ideas, and themes establish a kinship between the main characters of Melville's most important novels. The characters are motivated by a religious theme; they illustrate Melville's religious conflict and the final resolution of that conflict framed within the concepts of Christianity. Whether one likes it or not, the conclusions reached in Billy Budd, Melville's final summation and testament, are in the deepest sense religious.
CHAPTER I

CALL ME ISHMAEL

A student concerned with the development of Herman Melville's religious thought would do well to keep in mind the following passage from *Moby Dick*, in which the author at once reveals the nature of his religious conflicts and the paths in which these conflicts lead his thought. The passage is as follows:

There is no steady retracing progress in this life; we do not advance through fixed gradations and at the last one pause; —Through infancy's unconscious spell, boyhood's thoughtless faith, adolescence' doubt (the common doom), then scepticism, then disbelief, resting at last in manhood's pondering repose of If. But once gone through, we trace the round again; and are infants, boys, and men, and If's eternally. Where lies the final harbor, whence we unmoor no more? In what rapt ether sails the world, of which the weariest will never weary? Where is the foundling's father hidden? Our souls are like those orphans whose unwedded mother's die in bearing them; the secret of our paternity lies in their grave, and we must there to find it.\(^1\)

The foregoing passage emphasizes, in particular, two revealing factors in Melville's religious thought. It first establishes a pattern of development which Melville followed in his most significantly religious novels; and secondly; it suggests the relationship that Melville sought to establish between God and man. These two factors coalesce to form the Ishmael image which occurs in three of Melville's

novels, the implications of which this chapter will treat.

In the original Biblical story, Ishmael, the son of Abraham and the bond woman Hagar, is cast off by his father. Denied of an earthly paternity, Ishmael is temporarily abandoned by Hagar, but at the intervention of Jehovah, who promises that He will make Ishmael a great nation, Hagar returns and cares for the boy.

Raymond L. Weaver, Melville's first biographer, sees Melville's use of the Ishmael image as being prompted by the failure of Maria Melville to care for the spiritual needs of her son. Weaver believes that in Redburn, "with the mother image like a fury in his heart, he (Melville) describes himself as a sort of Ishmael." Certain hints, especially in Pierre, seem to corroborate Weaver's belief that Maria failed in the role of Hagar. But the Ishmael image admits of a larger and more important function.

Melville did not limit himself to a literal use of Biblical imagery. On the literal level Melville, like Ishmael, was without earthly paternity insofar as his father had died when Melville was a boy of thirteen. But when transposed to a religious level, the Ishmael image reveals a larger significance. Melville uses the image of his father to reflect the religious concepts believed in youth — that period of boyhood's thoughtless faith. In the next period of development, adolescence doubt, these concepts are modified or rejected, and in the spiritual vacuum that results Melville feels himself to be a spiritual orphan, and this feeling prompts his identification with Ishmael.

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1 Raymond L. Weaver, Herman Melville Mystic and Mariner (New York, 1921) p. 63.

2 "Call me Ishmael" Melville says in the opening lines of Moby Dick. In Redburn p. 34 and in Pierre p. 101 Melville further identifies himself with Ishmael.
The first step in Melville's indentification of his father with God and the religious concepts believed in youth, involves an inquiry into the origin of early religious concepts.

Melville recognized that in infancy's unconscious spell, and boyhood's thoughtless faith, religious convictions are largely a matter of inheritance and training, in the precepts and example of the parents. Writing of Pierre's early religious beliefs, he explains:

"...It had been a maxim with the father of Pierre, that all gentle marhood was vain, all claims to it preposterous and absurd, unless the primeval gentleness and golden humanities of religion had been so thoroughly wrought into the complete texture of the character that he who pronounced himself gentleman, could also rightfully assume the meek, but kingly title of Christian. At the age of thirteen, Pierre partook with his mother of the Holy Sacraments.

It were needless, and more difficult, perhaps to trace out precisely the absolute motives which prompted these youthful vows. Enough that as to Pierre had descended the numerous other noble qualities of his ancestors; and as he now stood heir to their forests and farms; so by the same insensible sliding process, he seemed to have inherited their docile homage to a venerable Faith, which the first Glendenning had brought overseas from beneath the shadow of an English minister.¹

The inherited Faith, (Calvinism as espoused by the Congregational and Dutch Reform Churches) was long a tradition in the Melville and Gansevoort families. Melville's paternal great-great grandfather served for nearly a half-century as a clergyman in the Scotch Kirk. His grandfather, American-born Thomas Melville, was intended for the ministry, and studied divinity at Princeton. Though he abandoned his religious studies to become a merchant, he remained devoutly religious. Melville's maternal grandparent, General Peter Gansevoort, though less religious-minded than his wife, Catherine Van Schaich, had faith in God.

¹Pierre, p. 7.
and attended church regularly. Numerous letters show what an ardent Christian Catherine was and the religious influence she exerted over her children. Allen and Maria Melville, Melville’s parents, continued the tradition.

Fenelon’s Treatise on the Education of Daughters, a copy of which Allan owned, advises teaching religious principles to children when they are very young; and Justina, a long didactic novel that his wife read to at least one of the daughters, ends with the statement that parents who teach their offspring Christian doctrines will be able to stand before the throne of God on Judgment Day and say with humble confidence “Here I am, O Lord! and the children thou hast given me.”

The God Allan would so address is the all-just, all-powerful, jealous God of the Old Testament. For Allan, God was “…that divine first cause, who always moulds events to subserve the purposes of mercy and wisdom, often subjects poor human nature to the severest trials, that he may better display his sovereign power.”

Allan saw the hand of God in everything and nowhere was the divine omnipresence and power more in evidence than upon the seas. On one of his voyages he wrote his wife that, owing to the illness of the

1See her letters to General Gansevoort; her last will and testament; Allen Melville’s letters to Peter Gansevoort, her son, dated October 22, 1825; her son Peter’s letter to her, dated July 21, 1819, and December 29, 1825; her son Leonard Gansevoort’s letter to her dated May 17, 1812. The inventory of her personal property and effects lists many volumes of sermons, psalm books, and miscellaneous religious items. The letters are in the Gansevoort Lansing Collection of the New York Public Library. Subsequent mention of this collection will be noted G.L.C.

2Justina; or, the Will, a domestic story (New York, 1823). In the copy in the G.L.C. is pasted a piece of paper with the inscription: “Mother read this aloud [sic] to me.” Fanny P. Melville.

3Letter to Peter Gansevoort, dated March 10, 1823 (G.L.C.).
only clergyman on board, the captain asked him to conduct the services; he obliged; his letter continues: "...Indeed, if men are ever seriously inclined, or feel their total & immediate dependence on God, it must be on an element where his omnipotence alone can save from destruction."¹ His reverence and humility were such that he always wrote "GOD" with capital letters.

After his father's death, Welville's mother continued her son's religious education. The records of The First Dutch Reform Church of Albany show that just after her husband's death she became a member of that church by a profession of faith. Her daughters, Helen and Augusta, followed her example. No record is made of Herman Welville's participation in church rites, but whether or not he became a member of the Dutch Reform Church, he could hardly have escaped its pervading influence.

Welville's novels throw some light on his early religious experiences, and though his references cannot be substantiated by fact, they indicate at least the possibilities of their being true. Thus Redburn's lost feeling at not having a church to attend on Sundays while on shipboard and his claim to being a member of an Anti-Smoking and Juvenile-Total Abstinence Association,² while incapable of proof, are in keeping with the practices of the churches involved. That the boy had absorbed the teachings of the father and believed with him in the benevolence of the Deity is expressed in such lines of Redburn as "...we feel and we know that God is the true Father of all, and that none of His children are without the pale of His care."³

¹Letter dated May 12, 1818, (G.L.C.G.).
²See Redburn, pp. 47, 52.
³Ibid., p. 137.
Such youthful optimism, however, was soon to give way to doubt. The hard facts of reality gave rise to serious doubts in the belief in a benevolent Deity.

Redburn is Melville's first literary attempt to portray the transition from youth's thoughtless faith to adolescent doubt. It is a dramatic portrayal of a growing awareness of the inconsistencies of his inherited religion, an awareness which must result in their rejection. In Redburn Melville first identifies, though not too successfully, his father with God, and symbolizes by his rejection of the way of the father the rejection of hereditary beliefs.

Throughout the novel, Redburn continually relies on the memory of his father to sustain him in his beliefs. Redburn says that he had not known there were hard hearts in the world, he had not been aware of evil. Suddenly he was confronted with Captain Riva, Jackson, the sinful sailors, the slums of Liverpool and the indifference of the passing multitudes to the suffering of their fellow men. In the reminiscence of the first shock of his own helplessness Melville declares:

Talk not of the bitterness of middle-age and after life; a boy can feel all that and more, when upon his young soul the mildew has fallen; and the fruit which with others is only blasted after ripeness, with him is nipped in the first blossom and bud. And never again can such blights be made good; they strike too deep, and leave such a scar that the air of Paradise might not erase it.

As the ship left the Narrows Redburn heard the sailors speaking of the bright prospects awaiting them on their return. Their unconcern with the perils of the voyage led Redburn to fear, but then he reassured himself with the thought, "I remembered, how many times my own father had

\[1\text{Ibid., p. 10.}\]
said he crossed the ocean; and I had never dreamed of such a thing as
doubting him; for I always thought him a marvelous being, infinitely
purer and greater than I was, who could not by any possibility do wrong,
or say an untruth. ¹

Throughout the voyage Redburn occupied his leisure hours
leafing through an old Liverpool guide book which had belonged to his
father. Upon arriving in Liverpool, the boy intended to retrace his
father's steps as a sort of filial pilgrimage. Yet, when he attempted
to do so he found the landmarks referred to by his father destroyed.
Liverpool had changed; the Guide-Book was useless. What had guided the
father says Melville cannot guide the son and he admonishes Redburn as
to the unreliability in general of guide-books in the words:

Guide-books, Wellingborough, are the least reliable
books in all literature; and nearly all literature, in one
sense is made up of guide books... Every age makes its own
guide-book, and the old ones are used for waste paper. But
there is one Holy Guide-Book Wellingborough, that will never
lead you astray, if you but follow it aright; and some noble
monuments that remain though the pyramids crumble. ²

The way of the father, concludes Redburn, is not the way of the son. ³

It is hard to conceive Redburn as merely a novel of a boy's
running away to sea. The many frequent allusions to religious themes
with particular reference to Wellingborough, together with the guide-
book episode, seem to indicate that Melville intended something far
more meaningful. The identification of Wellingborough with Ishmael
points to an attempt on Melville's part to portray the growth of

¹Ibid., p. 38.
²Ibid., p. 179.
³Ibid., p. 100.
consciousness through knowledge of evil, which has as a concomitant feature the recognitions of the inconsistencies of previously accepted patterns of religious thought. Melville accomplished his aim much more successfully in Pierre, one of his most introspective novels.

Though the symbolism of Pierre has prompted many varied interpretations, when viewed in the light of Melville's other novels, its interpretation most closely approaches that given by E. L. Grant Watson, who writes:

"Pierre is a record (for a certain period) of Melville's mystical experience. It is the story of the coming of the knowledge of good and evil, of the fall from innocence and the paradisical unconscious spell of childhood; it is placed in a deliberately artificial setting... It is more than the story of the fall, for with the fall of innocence of this Modern Adam comes a soul-shaking increase of consciousness, which could only come to one who has the legend of Christianity as his spiritual inheritance."

But Pierre has a more particular reference to the religious experience of Melville than even Watson's viewpoint admits. Pierre is first a record of Melville's rejection of his inherited religious beliefs. The pattern seen vaguely in Redburn here reaches full stature. The transition from the period of boyhood's thoughtless faith to adolescent doubt is clearly shown. The identification of his father with the Deity and the subsequent rejection are forcefully demonstrated. Bereft of his early religious concepts, from the emptiness of his soul, Melville again uses the Ishmael image.

In Pierre Melville depicts the age of innocence by Pierre Glendinning's uncompromising faith in his dead father. In the first portion of the novel, Pierre is depicted as living in a veritable paradise

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free from the harshness of reality by the glories of family tradition and the memory of the father as prompted by his mother. Pierre continually has the image of his father before him both in mind and in actuality.

On the wall of the Glendinning drawing room hung a portrait of Pierre's father, which portrayed a man of most noble expression, possessing all the qualities demanded of the age. In Pierre's closet hung another portrait, also of his father, done earlier, which might best be described as an impromptu portrait of a fine looking, gay-hearted youthful gentleman. A certain undescribable something about the latter portrait caused Pierre to feel that it more truly portrayed his father than the first. His mother continually admonished him to the contrary and her view Pierre accepted. He could not doubt his mother, and in his idealization of the father he had erected a shrine to him through which Pierre communicated to God, as is shown in these words:

"In this shrine, in this niche of this pillar, stood the perfect marble form of his departed father; without blemish, unclouded, snow-white and serene; Pierre's fond personification of perfect human goodness and virtue. Before this shrine, Pierre poured out the fullness of all young life's most reverential thoughts and beliefs. Not to God had Pierre ever gone in his heart, unless by ascending the steps of that shrine, and so making it the vestibule of his abstractest religion."

But the parental saint was soon to be sullied by Isabel's letter in which she declared herself to be Pierre's illegitimate half-sister. Her revelation leaves Pierre "stripped of his holiest shrine of all over-laid bloom, and buried the mild statue of the saint beneath the prostrate ruins of the soul's temple itself."

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1 Pierre, p. 76.  
2 Ibid., p. 77.
Picture of his father, crying out: "Oh symbol of thy reversed idea in my soul, thou shalt not hang thus. Rather cast thee utterly out than insult thee so. I will no more have a father." Without paternity Pierre likens himself to Ishmael, and as Ishmael, Pierre is not entirely given to spiritual chaos. Though he tears the picture of his father, a square of discolored wall remains in the place it had occupied. He could not, as Melville expresses it, pour out his memory in one libation. And though his whole moral being was overthrown and though its structure must be rebuilt, all was not desolation, for Pierre "seemed to feel that in his deepest soul, lurked an indefinite but potential faith, which could rule in the interregnum of hereditary beliefs, and circumstantial persuasions; not wholly, he felt, was his soul in anarchy. The indefinite regent had assumed the scepter as its right; and Pierre was not entirely given up to his grief's pillage and sack."

Seen in the pattern of youth's awareness of evil and the subsequent denial of hereditary beliefs, the novel, Pierre, becomes vastly clearer. Isabel, at this point, symbolizes the evil of reality which disproves early accepted religious concepts. Though such concepts are denied, they cannot be completely obliterated. This is especially important, for Melville's religious speculation continually centered about the doctrines of Calvinism which he totally rejected. Another important factor is treated in Pierre. By identifying his father with God and by attributing evil to his father, Melville declared God to be the source of evil. Herein lies Melville's basic condemnation of the Calvinistic concept of a benevolent Deity, and this idea formed the starting point for his reasonings as to the nature of God.

\[1\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 10.}\]
CHAPTER XI

NATURE OF GOD

Though to impute evil to God is blasphemy, Melville could do so with no qualms of conscience. In a letter to Hawthorne just after Moby Dick had been published, he stated: "I have written a wicked book and feel spotless as the lamb." Moby Dick is a wicked book when viewed by the orthodoxy of the time and place, for it is in the last analysis an attack upon Calvinism.

In the period of boyhood's thoughtless faith, Melville could rest secure in the belief of an all-just, benevolent Deity but this belief was shattered when he became aware of the existence of evil. Though the reality of evil pointed to the inconsistencies of his early religion, he could not deny the existence of God; he was no atheist. Nor could he take solace in the pantheistic notion of transcendentalism which denied or mollified the existence of evil. In widely recognized passages in White Jacket and Mardi, as well as Moby Dick and Pierre, Melville expresses his contempt for the transcendental soporific. In Moby Dick, the episode of Tashtego's fall into "Plato's honey head" and the chapter called "The Last Head" are the most conspicuous jibes at

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1 Weaver, p. 327.

2 In Pierre, Melville calls Plato, Spinoza, Goethe impostors of the truth and includes in the group transcendentalists, Huggeletonian Scots and Yankees, p. 232.
the pantheistic daydream. Melville must find the answer to the question: "Why has God permitted evil?" With Calvinism as his frame of reference, his inquiry became a search for a theodicy.

This question arose naturally from his early Calvinistic beliefs. Calvinism taught that in consequence of Adam's sin in eating the forbidden fruit, God brings into life all his posterity with a nature wholly corrupt, so that they are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all that is spiritually good, and wholly inclined to evil. Having fallen with Adam, mankind is under God's wrath and curse, and so made liable to all miseries in this life, to death itself, and to the pains of hell forever. Such a doctrine teaches that from this ruined race God, out of his mere good pleasure, has elected a certain number to be saved by Christ, not induced to this choice by any foresight of their good faith or good works, but wholly by his free grace and love; and that, having thus predestinated them to eternal life, He renews and sanctifies them by His almighty and special agency and brings them into a state of grace, from which they cannot fall and perish. It teaches that the rest of mankind He is pleased to pass over, and to ordain them to dishonor and wrath for their sins, to the honor of his justice and power.

How can one admit the doctrine of predestination and the elect and still maintain belief in a benevolent Deity? Melville phrases this question and gives a negative answer in the voice of Ahab; as he comforts insane Pip, Ahab exclaims: "There can be no hearts above the snow line. Oh ye frozen heavens! Look down here. Ye did beget this luckless child, and have abandoned him, ye creative libertines...Lo, ye believers in gods all goodness and in man all ill, lo you! see the omniscient gods
oblivious of suffering man; and man though idiotic, knows not what he
does, yet full of sweet things of love and gratitude." This was not
Melville's first address to his Calvinistic brethren; in Mardi he had
previously pictured contemporary Christian society, where the people of
Laramma believe in the tyranny of God and Christ and in the total
depravity of man. Oro and Alma demand that man grovel in the dust
and "declare himself the vilest creature that crawls." All unbelievers
are damned to eternal hell. Kohi, the historian, gives a brief account
of the Laramman Christ. Alma was an illustrious prophet who visited
the world previously under different titles — Brand and Manko. At
each appearance of Alma the Lardians seemed to be in a dark and
benighted age.

"Hence", says Kohi, "it was devoutly believed, that
he came to redeem the Lardians from their heathenish thrall;
to instruct them in the ways of truth, virtue and happiness;
to allure them to good by promises of beatitude hereafter;
and to restrain them from evil by denunciations of woe. Sep­
arated from the impurities and corruptions, which in a long
series of centuries had become attached to everything originally
uttered by the prophet, the maxims which as Brand he had
taught, seemed similar to those inculcated by Manko. But as
Alma, adapting his lessons to the improved condition of humanity,
the divine prophet had more completely unfolded his scheme;
as Alma, he had made his last observation."

Babbalanja, the philosopher in Mardi, voices Melville's objections to this
religious scheme:

"Mehi", he mildly observes, "without seeking to accuse
you of uttering falsehoods; since what you relate rests not
upon testimony of your own; permit me to question the
fidelity of your account of Alma. The prophet came to
dissipate errors, you say; but superadded to many that

2The material on Larama is drawn from Mardi, II, pp. 31-32.
3Thid., II, pp. 31-32.
have survived the past, ten thousand others have originated in various constructions of the principles of Alma himself. The prophet came to do away all gods but one; but since the days of Alma, the idols of Laramma have more than quadrupled. The prophet came to make us Lardians more virtuous and happy; but along with all previous good, the same wars, crimes, and miseries, which existed in Alma's day, under various modifications are yet extant. Nay: take away from your chronicles, Ishi, the history of those horrors, one way or other, resulting from the doings of Alma's nominal followers, and your chronicles would not so frequently make mention of blood. The prophet came to guarantee our eternal felicity; but according to what is held in Laramma, that felicity rests on so hard a proviso, that to a thinking mind, but very few of our sinful race may secure it. For one then I wholly reject your Alma; not so much because of all that is hard to be understood in his histories; as because of obvious and undeniable things all around us, which, to me, seem at war with an unreserved faith in his doctrines as promulgated by him in Laramma. Besides everything in this isle strengthens my incredulity; I was never so thorough a disbeliever as now.

The overwhelming force of evil of reality compelled Melville to reject orthodox Christianity, especially Calvinism. He could not, like Starbuck, the first mate of the Pequod in Moby Dick let faith oust fact. To reconcile evil and God two alternatives remained to Melville: First, God was not the author of evil; Manichean dualism could be invoked; secondly, Evil, authored by God, has a divine purpose. The temper of mind which led him to speculate on the divine purpose of evil in Mardi is absent in Moby Dick. In Mardi he suggests that Oro's sending of Alma to restore man's inheritance implies a wrong on Oro's part, "but Oro can do no wrong. Yet what seems evil to us may be good

1 Ibid., II, p. 32.
2 Moby Dick, I, p. 154, Starbuck looking down over the side of the ship into the calm waters murmurs: "Loveliness unfathomable, as ever lover saw in his young bride's eye! —Tell me not of thy tooth-tipped sharks, and thy kidnapping cannibal ways. Let faith oust fact; let fancy oust memory; I look deep down and do believe."
However, this is not a positive assertion to be believed, but rather expresses hope for its realization. The fact contravenes the hope and leads Melville to declare that one may as well hate a seraph as a shark, for both were made by the same hand. The same thought occurs in Moby Dick, where Fleece, while striking at the sharks seeking to devour the recently killed Sperm Whale now lashed to the side of the ship says, "you is sharks, sartin; but if you govern de shark in you why den you be angel; for all angel is nothing more den de shark well governed."

The idea of a God who condones sin, who is the author of evil is most forcibly demonstrated by Melville's use of the biblical prototypes — Jonah and Ahab. It will be recalled that Jonah, in the last chapter of the Book of Jonah, defends himself by maintaining that he fled to Tarshish because he knew that his prophecy of destruction would be revoked, if the wicked Ninevites were moved by it to repentance. Yet he was forced by God, through the agency of the whale, to return to Nineveh and declare what amounts to a lie. The Bible story of Ahab follows the same pattern. God asks for an angel to lie to Ahab and foretell victory when God himself knows Ahab will be defeated and killed. In both accounts evil appears to be justified — Nineveh repents, scandalous Ahab is killed. Though no doubt aware of it, Melville suppresses the idea of divine purposiveness. No mention is made of

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3Moby Dick, p. 293.
Nineveh's repentance and God's pardon in Father Mapple's sermon in *Moby Dick*. Neither is there mention of Jonah's criticism of God's command. "As with sinners among men, the sin of this son of Amotai was in his wilful disobedience of the command of God — never mind now what that command was or how conveyed."¹ Neither does Melville touch on the wickedness of Ahab, but seeks only to show his relationship to a dishonest God, even to giving him a false prophet in the form of Fedallah.²

The suppression of God's justification of evil does not answer, at this point Melville's question. — "We are to know God through his works but how can we arrive at a true concept of God when his works are both good and evil? If God can deceive prophets and kings how can we see his works as expressions of goodness and morality? To Melville the question is unanswerable. The God of the Old Testament is unfathomable.

At this juncture it is probably necessary to establish the point of view that the White Whale represents a divine being. At no time, except in the instance of the crazy Gabriel who asserts that the White Whale is the Shaker God incarnate,³ does Melville positively state that the White Whale is God. Yet *Moby Dick* is obscurely linked with the divine personality; it must be so conceived, since the personality of God, to Melville, is beyond comprehension. That *Moby Dick* has a divine

²*Ibid*, I, p. 326. A connection between Fedallah and God is symbolically portrayed in the episode wherein the Right Whale's head is hoisted and Fedallah glances from the wrinkles in the whale's head to the wrinkles in his hand. The relationship of Ahab through Fedallah to God is shown at the same time by the shadow symbol. Wherever Ahab stands Fedallah occupies his shadow; while if the Parsee's shadow was there it seemed only to blend with and lengthen Ahab's shadow.⁴
³*Ibid*, I, p. 313
significance first emerges from the fact that the hunt for him is impious. Melville writes of Ahab's shrewdness in disguising his true purposes in the early stages of the voyage, thereby stripping the hunt "of the strange imaginative impiousness which naturally invested it," and on the second day of the final chase, Starbuck cries out, "Oh, oh —— impiety and blasphemy to hunt him more." At the visit with the captain of the Jeroboam, Ahab is asked if he intends to pursue the White-Whale; he answers, "Aye." At this Gabriel levels the charge of blasphemy and foretells Ahab's doom: "Think, think of the blasphemer — dead, and down there! — beware of the blasphemer's end!" The search is blasphemous and impious because it is a prying into the personality of God, and the personality of God eludes us.

The theme —- the inscrutable riddle of God —- permeates several chapters in Moby Dick. In the chapters on the whale itself, Melville asserts we can only bunglingly classify and explain him. He quotes from Beale, the cetologist, concerning the "impenetrable veil covering our knowledge of the cetacea." In the same chapter the whale's biological mystery is linked with the divine unknowableness: "To grope down into the bottom of the sea after them; to have one's hands among the unspeakable foundations, ribs, and very pelvis of the world; this is a fearful thing. What am I that I should essay to hook the nose of this leviathan! the awful tauntings in Job might well

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1Ibid., II, p. 22.
2Ibid., II, p. 314. Gabriel refers to Harry Lacey of the ship Jeroboam who was killed while trying to harpoon Moby Dick. He was hurled from the whale boat by Moby Dick's tail and sank immediately. Significantly neither the whale-boat nor its crew were harmed.
3Ibid., I, p. 122.
appal me. 'Will he (the leviathan) make a covenant with thee? Behold the hope of him is vain!' In the chapters "The Tail" and "The Fountain" the there is repeated. In "The Fountain" the danger of inquiry is indicated when the reader is told to "Let the deadly spout alone."

"Nor is it at all prudent for the hunter to be over-curious touching the precise nature of the whale spout. It will not do for him to be peering into it and putting his face in it. You cannot go with your pitcher to this fountain and fill and bring it away..."

So far, Melville uses the whale to symbolize the inscrutable riddle of God. It is impious to hunt him because the Divine personality is beyond mortal comprehension and to delve into the nature of God is presumptuous. The hunt is impious, also, because such an undertaking involves doctrinal heresy which imputes evil to a benevolent Deity and admits of no divine purpose. The riddle of the Deity and Divine authorship of evil, with the denial of Divine purposiveness, is especially demonstrated in the chapter entitled "The Tail."

From his Calvinistic training Melville was well aware of the doctrine of predestination and its implications. He, as well as Calvin and many others, was conscious of its incomprehensibility. It is doubtful that he could have read Calvin in the original on this point; but, he more than likely read him in Pierre Bayle's Dictionary.¹

¹Ibid., I, p. 12.

²Ibid., I, p. 35.

In his chapter entitled "Concerning the Manichees" Bayle cites Calvin's acknowledgment of the incomprehensibility of Predestination: "The mysteries of God belong to God, but the things which are revealed to us and to our children. Moses heard the word of God, but did not see his face, because we walk by faith and not by sight, and of that God the glory of whose majesty we are not able to bear, we behold with Moses, the works, only as it were in their back parts."\(^1\) With this quotation in mind, Melville's concluding paragraph in the chapter "The Tail" becomes most revealing:

"Dissect him how I may . . . I go but skin deep; I know him not and never will. But I know not even the tail of this whale, how understand his head? Much more, how comprehend his face, when face he has none? Thou shalt see my back parts he seems to say, but my face shall not be seen. But I cannot make out his back parts; and hint what he will about his face, I say again he has no face."\(^2\)

Both Melville and Calvin have seized upon a biblical passage to symbolically portray their ideas. In Exodus XXXIII, 23 Jehovah says to Moses: "And I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts: but my face shall not be seen." Calvin uses this to illustrate his conviction that God's toleration of evil, His creation of the morally repellent scheme of predestination, are matters beyond human understanding. Melville adapts the sentence with Calvin in mind and uses the tail, the back parts to signify God's works, the face, God's purposes. But Melville cannot make out the back parts, and he denies the whale has a face. In other words, he cannot understand God's works,


\(^2\) "\textit{Toby Dick}, p. 356."
and as for His divine purposes, He has none. Melville had expressed a similar pessimism earlier in Mardi:

Yet some tell of a hereafter, where all the mysteries of life will be over; and the sufferings of virtue reconciled. Oro is just, they say. Then always — now and evermore. But to make restitution implies a wrong; and Oro can do no wrong. Yet what seems evil to us may be good to him. If he fears not, he has no other passion, no ends, no purposes... and things that are, have been, ever will be.¹

Such surmises lead logically to the complete denial of a Deity and, indeed, Ahab at times wonders if there is anything beyond. In the famous chapter, "The Whiteness of the Whale", Melville briefly suggests, that atheism may be the answer to the hidden cause we seek. Using imagery drawn from scientific empiricism, he draws a picture of nature, as we see it, colored as a ray of light. We see nature diffused through mediums; its color is not inherent but is imparted to it by the great principle of light which forever remains white and colorless in itself. Nature itself deceives us by taking on colors not its own, only the light source remains true. If light operated without medium upon matter, it would impart to all nature its own blank tinge. When transposed into the spiritual realm, the imagery of blankness, whiteness, indefiniteness, yet full of meaning is crystallized in the form of the Albino whale. The whale symbolizes the "palsied universe which lies before us like a leper".² The whale in its whiteness is like a landscape of snows, it is the image of "a colorless, all color of atheism from which we shrink", and like a Lapland landscape blinds the wretched infidel who refuses to wear colored glasses.³ In this passage from "The Whiteness

of the Whale" Melville has defined, by scientific allegory, whiteness as the image of un-illusion, in contrast to the world colored, or made illusory by faith.

But it is to be noted that Melville shrinks from the idea of atheism; and for all his freedom from disillusion the infidel is wretched, and blinded by the very whiteness he gazes upon. Melville could not long entertain doubts as to the existence of a divine Being and his exposition of the Albino whale as symbolizing the ultimate truth, in effect, atheism, cannot be taken as a final position. The idea of whiteness, blankness, rather reinforces the theme seen earlier: the incomprehensibility of the ways of God and the inability of man to arrive at a concept of God by an inquiry into his nature demonstrated by his works.

The problem centers again about Melville's chief worry — God's evil-doing. He had demonstrated, through the instrument of the whale, the inscrutability of the ways of God; he had proven God to be the author of evil; but a Deity who admits of evil violates our concept of divine benevolence which is our sole hope.

Believing in God, as he must, Melville found powerful argument in that theory which, while admitting of the separate existence of evil, removed the responsibility for it from the God of goodness. Evil in such a doctrine is ascribed to a second agent or principle. Though Melville could have become acquainted with the doctrine of the dual-principle from various sources, perhaps his chief reference was Bayle's Dictionary. Bayle devotes a chapter to the Manicheans, who in early Christian times believed in the existence of co-equal gods, one of good and the other of evil. More particular to Moby Dick, however are Bayle's comments on
Zoroaster, who also taught the doctrine of the dual principle.

Bayle gives an account of Zoroaster by drawing on traditional biography. Zoroaster is something of a semi-god with occult powers. Tradition has it that Zoroaster was miraculously struck by lightning and, in consequence, was looked upon as the inventor of magic. The Persians adored him as a saint for whom a thunderbolt served as a vehicle to mount up to heaven. The accusation of black magic was made against Zoroaster. Whether or not he is another Zoroaster, Ahab nevertheless has many of the saint's qualities. Something dreadful happened to Ahab off Cape Horn, where he engaged in some dark act before the altar in Santa.\(^1\) He looks "like a man cut away from the stake, when the fire has runningly wasted all the limbs" and he bears a long, livid scar from "tawny scorched face and neck" to the heel which suggests the scar of a lightning-struck oak.\(^2\) His origin is definitely occult; he addresses the spirit of fire in the corporants as "sir" and "my fiery father".\(^3\) Ahab, like the Zoroastrians, believed in the dual principle, in the worship of the principle of light and fire which was in eternal conflict with that of darkness. In the chapter "The Candles", Ahab salutes the corporants as "thou clear spirit of clear fire, whom on these seas I as a Persian once did worship, till in the sacramental act so burned by thee that to this hour I bear the scar."\(^4\) Ahab's alter-ego is, a Parsee, a follower of Zoroaster, and Fedallah too, it is implied, has participated in these sacramental rites.

In keeping with the Zoroastrian theme, Moby Dick becomes a

\(^1\)Ibid., p. 28. \(^2\)Ibid., p. 114. \(^3\)Ibid., p. 172. \(^4\)Ibid., p. 171.
symbol of the evil principle, and thus Ahab, in his hunt, is allied to
the principle of goodness which is eternally at war with evil. Melville
states explicitly what the White-Whale symbolizes for Ahab. Ever since
the combat in which the frenzied captain lost one of his legs to the
whale:

Ahab cherished a wild vindictiveness against the whale,
all the more fell for that in his frantic morbidness he at
last came to indentify with him not only all his bodily woes, but
all his intellectual and spiritual exasperations. The White-Whale
swam before him as the monomaniac incarnation of all those
malicious agencies which some deep men feel eating in them,
till they are left living on with half a heart and half a
lung. That intangible malignity which has been from the
beginning; to whose dominion even the modern Christians ascribe
one-half of the worlds; which the ancient Ophites of the
East reverenced in their statue devil; —Ahab did not fall
down and worship it like them; but deliriously transferring
its idea to the abhorred White Whale, he pitted himself, all
mutilated, against it. All that most maddens and torments;
all that stirs up the lees of things; all truth with malice in
it; all that cracks the sinews and cakes the brain; all the
subtle dimensions of life and thought; all evil; to crazy
Ahab, were visibly personified, and made practically assailable
in Moby-Dick. He piled upon the whale's white bump the sum
of all the general rage and hate felt by his whole race from
Adam down; and then, as if his chest had been a mortar, he
burst his hot-heart's shell upon it. 1

Melville further identifies the Whale with Satan in the following passage:

Out of the bottomless profundities the gigantic tail
seems spasmodically snatching at the highest heaven. So
in dreams, have I seen majestic Satan thrusting forth his
tormented colossal claw from the flame Baltic of Hell. 2

It immediately becomes pertinent to ask, to what extent does
Melville subscribe to the doctrine of duality? What is Melville's final
position concerning Hanichean or Zoroastrian dualism? Is Ahab finally a
heroic figure contesting with Satan? An affirmative answer to these and
the hunt for the whale is not impious as previously declared.

1 Ibid., p. 229-230.
2 Ibid., p. 354-355.
So far, Melville intends Moby Dick to represent, on the one hand, the God of the Old Testament, the Calvinistic concept of God, and on the other hand, Satan. The duality of the whale arises largely, according to Melville, from the mood that one is in: "if in the Dantean, the devil, will occur to you; if in that of Isaiah, the archangels." The particular reference to Isaiah is most significant for it is the Jehovah of Isaiah who says, "I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace and create evil; I the Lord do all these things." However, and for whatever purposes, Melville confuses the identity of the whale, the whale most particularly stands for God. Melville's probing into the doctrines of the Manichees serves only to emphasize the darker side of God. His monotheism is best expressed by Ahab, who says, "There is one God that is Lord over the earth, and one captain that is Lord over the Pequod." If good is to be attributed to God so must evil. Ahab, when gazing one day at the calm sea, exclaims:

"Look! see yon albacore! who put it into him to chase and fang that flying fish? Where do murderers go, man? Who's to doom, when the judge himself is dragged to the bar?"

In the last analysis, Ahab is not allied to goodness in conflict with evil but rather the reverse. He has much in common with Milton's Satan; he is aided and abetted by Fedallah, a sort of Mephistopheles, and by the five Dailla oarsmen, who are hinted to be "paid spies and secret confidential agents on the water of the devil, their lord."
Starbuck characterizes most of the crew when he calls them "a heathen crew that have small touch of the human mothers in them. Whelped somewhere by the sharkish sea."\(^1\) Though Ahab addresses his accusations against the Deity to the heavens, and the light and corporants and not to the whale, he nevertheless unmistakably seeks revenge upon an unjust God. When he explains his hunt to Starbuck, he says that all visible objects are but as pasteboard marks. Every living act, each event is but the moulding of the features of some unknown but reasoning thing. One must strike through the mark. The White Whale is the mark, the wall, shoved near to him. He concludes: "Be the White Whale agent, or be the White Whale principal, I will wreak that hate of the unknown but reasoning thing upon him."\(^2\) In keeping with this idea, at the end of the novel, when the whale rams the Pequod, Ahab declares the ship to be "god-bullied".\(^3\) That Ahab's quarrel is with God is emphasized by Ahab's incantation over the harpoon with which he seeks to destroy Moby-Dick. As he tempers it with savage blood, he says, "Ego non baptizo te in nomine patris, sed in nomine diaboli".\(^4\) In a letter to Hawthorne at the time of writing Moby-Dick, Melville declared this incantation to be the secret motto of the book.\(^5\) This is finally why Ahab's hunt is impious; why the book, in Melville's eyes, is a wicked one. Melville in his

\(^{1}\)Ibid., I, p. 211.  
\(^{2}\)Ibid., I, p. 204.  
\(^{3}\)Ibid., II, p. 366.  
\(^{4}\)Ibid., I, p. 176.  
\(^{5}\)Julian Hawthorne, Nathaniel Hawthorne and His Wife; a Biography (Boston, 1905), I, 146. Melville wrote: "Shall I send you a fin of the Whale by way of a specimen mouthful. The tail is not yet cooked, though the hell-fire in which the whole book is broiled might not unreasonably have cooked it ere this. This is the book's motto (the secret one), Ego non baptizo te in nomine — but make out the rest yourself."
inaibility to account for the purposes of evil had concluded that the
Calvinistic concept of God was wrong. Though Melville shows Ahab to
be the cause of his own doom, he does so with sympathy. Even so, Ahab’s
destruction implies the existence of a God, and at the same time pictures
the fate of one who seeks to arrive at the nature of God through a
minute analysis of God’s works. Is God’s nature, then, beyond all
understanding?

Though Melville believed that human understanding, reasoning
from the particulars of creation, God’s works, could not arrive completely
free of doubt at the truth of the nature of God, he nevertheless felt
that man at certain moments intuitively glimpsed eternal truths.

"And so through all the thick mists of the dim doubts
in my mind, divine intuitions now and then shoot, enkindling
my fog with a heavenly ray. And for this I thank God; for all
have doubts; many deny; but doubts or denials, few along with
them, have intuitions. Doubts of all things earthly, and
intuitions of some things heavenly; this combination makes
neither believer nor infidel, but makes a man who regards them
both with equal eye."

Whether by intuition or by the promptings of his subconscious self,
Melville sought to believe in a God who is Father to all mankind, not
the creator of the Calvinistic ideas of Predestination and the Elect.
Though Ishmael partook of the hunt with Ahab, he alone is saved, and,
significantly, saved by the crew of the ship Rachel who is seeking her
missing children. Rachel functions as Magar to reestablish the orphan
with Divine paternity.

The concept of God, the Father of mankind, is specifically

1_Holy Dick, I, p. 351.
treated in Mardi. In the chapter on "Serenia", Melville depicts man as being imperfect yet residing in the infinite love of God. The love of God, evinced by the love of Alma, the Nardian Christ, is not engendered by Alma's divinity, miracles, or promises of eternal reward, but because of an "instinct in us; — a fond, filial, reverential feeling."¹ In Serenia, Melville characterizes Christianity stripped of corruptions; through the correct application of the teachings of Christ the proper relationship between man and God, that of love, is established. Such a relationship is in contrast to the only possible connection between man and God, that of fear, as espoused by contemporary Christianity, especially Calvinism.

The belief in a wholly benevolent Deity as portrayed in Serenia necessitates the denial of the Calvinistic doctrine of total depravity. By attributing evil to God not to corrupt man, Melville had taken the first step necessary to negate the doctrine of total depravity and had prepared the way for the concept of inherent goodness.

¹Lardi, II, pp. 362-372.
CHAPTER III
THE NATURE OF MAN

Melville's speculations as to the nature of man were framed with reference to Calvinistic doctrines. It will be recalled that Calvinism taught that man was totally corrupt, that he was incapable of good, and that he himself was responsible for his depraved state. As previously pointed out, Melville objected to this doctrine for he believed that if good was to be attributed to the Deity so must evil. God, the creator, must be held responsible for the nature of his creatures. But Melville could not absolve man so easily from the responsibility of his own actions. In White Jacket he writes, "The worst of our evils we blindly inflict upon ourselves," and still again he says, that in "our own hearts, we mould the whole world's hereafters; and in our own hearts we fashion our own gods...Ourselves are Fate." The contradictions in Melville's own thought as to the principal or agent of evil and the reconciliation of these apparent contradictions formed the core of his resolutions concerning the nature of man.

Though Melville at times might doubt that we are children of God, he nevertheless believed that man had a spark of the divine within him. One of the bases of his democracy was the idea that all men are "sprung from one head, and made in one image." In Moby Dick he affirmed

1 White Jacket, p. 504.  
2 Ibid, p. 404.
3 "Mr. Parkman's Tour", Literary World, IV (March 31, 1849), p. 291.
"that great democratic dignity which, on all hands, radiates without end from God; Himself! The great God absolute! The centre and circumference of all democracy! His omnipresence, our divine equality."\(^1\) The equality of man sustained by divine presence admits of no justification unless man directly participates in the divinity. The idea that man is created in the image of God is reinforced by the statement in \(\text{Mardi}\) which asserts that "in his faculties high Oro is but what a man would be infinitely magnified."\(^2\) Melville's process of magnification is not enlarged upon except as given in the hint of Bardiaanna that "we are but steps in a scale that reaches farther above us than below."\(^3\) Despite his pessimistic view as to man's lowly position in the scheme of creation, Melville believed that man, because of his origin in the Deity, could scale the ladder to the source of goodness.

Melville's belief in the inherent goodness of man, in contrast to the Calvinistic doctrine of man's depravity, occasioned his earliest criticism of Christianity. In \(\text{Typee}\) and \(\text{Omoo}\) his chief criticism is essentially that the missionaries, however noble their motives, succeeded only in robbing the native of his inherent innocence and supplanting it with an overpowering sense of guilt from which he was not given the means to escape. By forbidding the native his simple games and festivals, which were judged evil, the missionaries caused him to indulge the more in idleness and sensuality.

In his idealistic portrayal of the native, Melville denies the efficacy of orthodox religion and emphasizes the idea of the sufficiency

\(^1\)\(\text{Moby Dick, I, p. 114.}\) \(^2\)\(\text{Mardi, II, p. 123.}\) \(^3\)\(\text{Tbid., II, p. 299.}\)
of inherent goodness. The peaceful and friendly relationship of the
Typees he attributed to an "inherent principle of honesty and charity
toward each other", to the "universally diffused perception of what is
just and noble..." The natives "seemed to be governed by that sort of
tacit common sense law which, say what they will of the inborn law­
lessness of the human race, has its precepts graven upon every breast."¹
In Mardi, Bardianna affirms that "we need not be told what righteousness
is; we were born with the whole Law in our hearts."² In the persons of
Queequeg and Tashtego, harpooners of The Pequod, Melville has character­
ized the goodness and nobility of primitive man.³

Although Melville believed in the inherent goodness of man, in
man's affiliation through creation with the Divinity, to the point where
certain characters were the crystallization of these beliefs, he was
troubled by man's sad condition. Granted the universal diffusion of
the moral law and its emblazonment on the hearts of one and all, granted
that man is made in the image of God, what disposed man toward evil?
Pierre asks, "Ah, if man were totally made in heaven, why catch we hell­
glimpses."⁴ Babbalanja, referring to the notion of the scale of being,
asks, "Are we angels or dogs."⁵ The distinguishing feature of man in
contrast to lesser creatures and the faculty by which he is allied to
the divinity is reason. Bardianna affirms the high position of reason;
he says, "Undeniably, reason was the first revelation; and so far as it

¹Typees, pp. 269-270. ²Mardi, II, p. 303.
³See Moby Dick Chapters "A Bosom Friend", "Queequeg in His Coffin",
"Cisterns and Buckets".
⁴Pierre, p. 121. ⁵Mardi, II, p. 131.
tests all others, it has precedence over them. It comes direct to us, without suppression or interpolation; and with Cro's indisputable imprimatur. But Melville was well aware of the inadequacies of human reason, Bardianna continues, "But inspiration though it [reason] be, it is not so arrogant as some think. Nay, far too humble, at times it submits to the grossest indignities. Though in its best estate, not infallible; so far as it goes, for us, it is reliable. When at fault it stands still." The imperfection of reason in a large measure gives evidence of man's imperfectibility. To Babbalanja's question Melville would answer that we are neither angels nor dogs but rather both — angelic dogs. Though man has within himself a spark of the divine, the failure of reason, that divine revelation by which man is in the image of his creator, to arrive at the ultimate truth, necessitated Melville's search for the source of man's imperfection.

Calvinism attributed man's total depravity to the First Fall. Melville's casual references to the First Fall indicates that he thought about it. But however much he reasoned about it, he was loath to assign man's plight to the sin of Adam and Eve. In a reflection on Hawthorne's Losses from an Old Hanse, he referred to "that Calvinistic sense of Innate Depravity and Original Sin, from whose visitations, in some shape or other, no deeply thinking mind is always free," and he added that "in certain moods, no man can weigh this world without throwing in something, somehow like Original Sin, to strike the uneven balance."
This something which is somehow like Original Sin and which
disposes man to evil cannot, in Melville's mind, be attributed to man
himself nor to the sin of Adam and Eve, for God is the author of both
good and evil. If we attribute man's goodness to his creator, then
we must likewise assign man's imperfection to the same source. Melville
symbolically portrays his reasoning on this subject in the person of Ahab.

Ahab, it will be recalled, lost a leg in an early encounter
with Moby Dick and now walks the deck with a peg-leg fashioned from the
jaw-bone of a whale. However naive such an interpretation may appear, it
seems unmistakable that Melville wishes Ahab's deformity to signify
man's imperfection. And as Moby Dick, the symbol of the Deity, is the
direct cause of Ahab's imperfection, so is God the direct cause of man's
imperfect nature. The tragedy of Ahab sprang essentially from his
total concern with evil. Ahab in this respect is like the Calvinist
who is totally concerned with the inherent depravity of man, but unlike
the Calvinist, Ahab does not believe man responsible for his corrupt
condition; the Deity alone is responsible. Ahab does not bow down
before the wrath of the Calvinistic God; he would strike against him and
destroy Him and in the end Ahab himself and all his crew with one
exception are annihilated.

Melville made further concessions to Calvinistic doctrine than
the admission that there is something, somehow like original sin; he
believed that certain men seemed to illustrate perfectly the doctrine
of total depravity. Some men were prevented by their very natures from
being good. "It is easier for some men to be saints than for others not
to be sinners," he writes. He refers in White-Jacket to a sin that

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1Jardi, II, p. 156.
"seemed something imposed, and not voluntarily sought; some sin growing out of the heartless predestination of things; some sin under which the sinner sank in sinless woe." Writing of Bland, the villainous master-at-arms, he says: "...a studied observation of Bland convinced me that he was an organic and irreclaimable scoundrel, who did wicked deeds as the cattle browse the herbage, because wicked deeds seemed the legitimate operation of his whole infernal organization. Phrenologically, he was without a soul." Melville similarly describes Jackson in *Redburn* as an atheist and an infidel whose wickedness seemed to spring from his woe. Claggart, the master-at-arms, of the Indomitable, is Melville's final characterization of these Cains afloat. Speaking of Natural Depravity, defined by Plato, as a depravity according to nature, Melville says that this definition, though savoring of Calvinism, "by no means involves Calvin's dogma as to total mankind. Evidently its intent makes it applicable but to individuals." He continues to say that such a depraved nature partakes of nothing of the sordid and sensual. The actions of such individuals are entirely irrational, and spring entirely from their evil nature. "Such was Claggart," says Melville, "in whom was the mania of evil nature, not engendered by vicious training, or corrupting books, or licentious living but born with him and innate, in short "a depravity according to nature."

Melville concludes that though certain individuals are inherently evil, the vast majority of mankind are inherently good. The vast majority

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3. See *Redburn*, p. 131.  
4. *Billy Budd*, p. 58.
of mankind, though imperfect, nevertheless have a spark of the divine within them and it is in this identity with the Deity that mankind's hope and salvation lies. In his Bible, Melville annotated the verses of John (10: 31-36) on the divinity of man referring to a flyleaf at the end of the volume where he had written:

> If we can conceive it possible, that the creator of the world himself assumed the form of his creatures, and lived in that manner for a time upon earth, this creature must seem to us of infinite perfection, because of such a combination with his maker. Hence, in our idea of man there can be no inconsistency with our idea of God; and if we often feel a certain disagreement with Him and remoteness from Him, it is but the more on that account our duty, not like advocates of the wickedness of our nature; but rather to seek out every property and beauty, by which our pretension to a similarity with the Divinity may be made good.¹

The above passage not only emphasizes Melville's belief in man's similarity with the Divine wherein lies his final hope, but it introduces Christ, the man-God, in Whom Melville hoped to find proof of man's inherent goodness from which man can be identified with God, and the proper relationship between God and man established.

CHAPTER IV

MAN'S RELATIONSHIP TO GOD

The Ishmael image which recurs in Redburn, Pierre, and Moby Dick suggests the father-son relationship between God and man which Melville sought to establish. In Mardi this relationship of God and man emerges in Serenia, Melville's ideal Christian state.

In Serenia the land of love, all human relationships and the relationship between God and man are based upon the teachings of Christ.\(^1\) Alma, the Serenian Christ, is drawn in contrast to the Christ of Hararmania, the Christ of Christianity.\(^2\) No reference is made in Serenia to previous incarnations of Alma; his divinity makes him unique: "...never before was virtue so lifted up among us, that all might see; never before did rays from heaven descend to glorify it." But Alma is loved not only because of his divine origin, his miracles, his teachings which give eternal life, but also because of "an instinct in us; --a fond, filial, reverential feeling."

- There are no temples in Serenia, no priesthood: "Alma preached in the open fields, --and must his worshippers have palaces?" The money that might have been used for temples is used for charity. Since

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\(^1\)Mardi, II, 362. The rest of the material on Serenia is drawn from Mardi, II, pp. 1-199.

\(^2\)The religion of the Haramman was previously discussed in Chapter II, pp. 3 and 4.

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all Serenians are apostles living their religion every day of the week, priests are not needed. The Serenians worship in a simple way; they do not fast; their aspirations are their prayers. As to the practicability of Alma's teachings, those were given for life on earth, not heaven.

The important thing in Serenia is not what a man professes to believe, but what he does. "He who hourly prays to Alma, but lives not up to the world-wide love and charity — that man is more an unbeliever than he who verbally rejects the Master, but does his bidding."

In his New Testament Melville marked a number of verses having to do with faith and good works: "What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? And: "Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works." Alma is the supreme example of man doing good works: "He fed the famishing; he healed the sick; he bound up wounds. For every precept that he spoke he did ten thousand mercies."

No peculiar revelation was made by Alma: "All that is vital in the Master's faith, lived here in Mardi and in humble dells, was practised long previous to the Master's coming." In this connection one thinks of Melville's belief in the inherent goodness of man as shown by his treatment of the natives and their idealization in the form of Queequeg and Tashtego. Alma, the Serenian Christ, functions to open to the minds of men the moral law which is emblazoned on the hearts of everyone. The old man of Serenia, who sets forth Melville's Christian ideals, says

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1 James 2:14, 18.

2 Previously discussed in Chapter III "Nature of Man".
that Christ "but opens unto us our own hearts". He affirms that Christ is the perfect embodiment of right reason, "that function of the mind which enables man to live according to the ethical laws decreed by God."  

Peculiar to Alma, in contrast to the Christ of Christianity, is the fact that the efficacy of Christ's teachings depends not upon his divinity, but rather upon his human nature and upon his active sympathy for suffering mankind. Whatever Melville may have believed concerning the divinity of Christ, he was tremendously influenced by Christ's teachings, especially as they are embodied in the Sermon on the Mount. Melville in various novels implied his belief in the divinity of Christ. In Typee he referred to that "divine and gentle Christ" and in White Jacket he mentions Christ as being "My Savior", "the divine Prince of Peace", "our blessed Redeemer," and "He in whom we believe." Such remarks are in the Christian tradition but Alma, the ideal Christ, is chiefly noted as the supreme example of man doing good. He fed the famishing, healed the sick, and bound up wounds — the particular admonitions of the Sermon on the Mount. Through Alma, God's command of love is observed: "The Master's great command is Love; and here do all things wise and all things good, unite. Love is all in all. The more we love the more we know; and so reversed". The relationship of love between man and man and man to God is established through the teaching and example of Alma. Babbalanja, the Philosopher of Mardi, is readily

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1 Mardi, II, 366.  
3 Typee, p. 273.  
4 See White Jacket, pp. 234, 262, 267, 403.  
5 Mardi, II, p. 49.
converted to the religion of Serenia, but Taji, as Melville, cannot be fully convinced.

Melville entertained doubts about the ability of man to become Christ-like. He was not totally convinced that the teachings of Christ were of this world. Beyond this he further revealed disbelief in Christ peculiar to himself. In Moby Dick, in a passage extolling the beauty of strength, Melville comments on the charm of the statue of Hercules, on Eckermann's description of Goethe's manly corpse, and on Michelangelo's portrayal of the physical power of God the Father; then he adds:

"And whatever they may reveal of the divine love in the son, the soft hermaphroditical Italian pictures, in which his idea has been most successfully embodied: these pictures, so destitute as they are of all brawniness, hint nothing of any power, but the mere negative, feminine one of submission and endurance, which on all hands it is conceded, form the peculiar practical virtues of his teachings."

It is significant that this passage should occur in Moby Dick, so singularly free is its central character, Ahab, from any Christ-like humility. But however unlike Christ, Ahab may appear to be, he functions as a Christ in seeking to establish the proper relationship between God and man. Ahab, though lacking one leg, does not hesitate to engage in combat with the whale, the symbol of the Deity.

The White Whale as symbolic of that concept of the Deity which admits of the divine origin of evil, but fails to show divine purposiveness except to demonstrate divine power has been previously discussed. Significant to this chapter is the relationship between God and man such a concept engenders. The concept of a wholly benevolent Deity permits men to rest in the anticipation of God's love, but again the presence of evil denies such hope. Ahab expresses the true worship of such a

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1 Moby Dick, II, p. 119. 2 Chapter II, "The Nature of God".
Deity: "...I know thee, thou clear spirit, and I now know that thy right worship is defiance. To neither love nor reverence wilt thou be kind; and o'er for hate thou canst but kill; and all are killed.... But war is pain, and hate is woe. Come in thy lowest form of love, and I will kneel and kiss thee; but at thy highest, come as mere supernal power; and though thou launchest navies of fullfreighted worlds, there's that in here that still remains indifferent.""
crucifixion in his face; in all the nameless regal overbearing dignity of some right we...
"The Iron Crown of Lombardy" he wears was fashioned "of the nails used in the Crucifixion." To Ahab the proper relationship between God and man can only be achieved by overcoming the evil permitted by the Deity. His attack on evil symbolized by Moby Dick, together with this arraignment of God for permitting evil, is enacted on behalf of all mankind. Ahab, like Anacharsis Clootz, who spoke before the French Assembly for the rights of man, defies the Deity so that man may obtain their rightful heritage. Melville refers to Ahab's crew as an "Anacharsis Clootz deputation from all the isles of the sea, and all the ends of the earth, accompanying old Ahab in the Pequod to lay the world's grievances before that bar from which not many of them ever came back."°

However Ahab may, by function or appearance, emerge as Christ, his method is in direct contrast to the method of the Galilean. Had Ahab's visage ever been recorded for posterity there would have been nothing hermaphroditical in the portrait. Ahab supplants the negativistic teachings of Christ, with firm, direct and terrifying action. In his defiance of the Deity, Ahab stands as Prometheus, although his method is unlike that of Christ who would have all bow down in humility before the power of God. Ahab's obsession with evil permitted by God engenders his identification with Prometheus. His obsession leads to madness and his madness causes his destruction. Melville sympathetically explains the tragedy of Ahab:

\[1\text{Ibid., I, p. 154.}\]
\[2\text{Ibid., I, p. 209.}\]
\[3\text{Ibid., I, pp. 149-150.}\]
God help thee, old man, thy thoughts have created a creature in thee; and he whose intense thinking thus makes him a Prometheus; a vulture feeds upon that heart forever; that vulture the very creature he creates."

Though Ahab’s destruction demonstrated the futility of defying the Deity as a means of establishing man in his proper relationship to God, Ahab himself at one point symbolizes the relationship Melville sought to realize.

On board the Pequod is black Pip, the cabin boy. He is driven insane by his first encounter with Moby Dick. Looking upon Pip’s misery, Ahab exclaims: "Oh ye frozen heavens! Look down here. Ye did beget this luckless child, and have abandoned him, ye creature libertines." He asserts that Pip shall henceforth live with him, and Pip, grasping Ahab’s hand, declares that he will never let go; whereupon Ahab exclaims: "...lo you! see the omniscient gods oblivious of suffering man; and man, though idiotic, and knowing not what he does, yet full of the sweet things of love and gratitude."  

The emergence of Ahab as the man-god through whom the relationship between God and man is established emphasizes Melville’s belief in man’s spiritual potentialities. And the demands of this belief in man’s affinity with the divine and in man’s infinite capability to do good necessitates Ahab’s defeat. For Melville believed, as previously shown, that man’s hope lies not in concern with evil but rather upon man’s similarity with God, upon man’s inherent goodness. Melville’s

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1Ibid., I, pp. 252-253.  
3See Chapter III of this thesis.
emphasis upon the human nature of Christ as portrayed by Alma points
to the potentiality of man to become Christ-like by developing
to fruition his innate capabilities for goodness through following
the example of Christ. Melville was to give complete embodiment of
these ideas in the character of Pierre.

The riddle of Pierre has attracted the attention of a consid­
erable number of critics. The most frequently advanced interpretations
are based upon the psychological method which assigns to the various
characters of the novel specific faculties of the author's mind.1
William Braswell continues the psychological approach with hints
from Redburn which refer to the theory of Paracelsus and Carpanella
that every man has four souls within him. Braswell's thesis is,
essentially, that Melville by having major characters symbolize various
faculties of the soul, relates the development of his inner life. How­
ever revealing these criticisms may be, the novel admits of a more
truly religious context.2

The first portion of Pierre has been previously discussed as
symbolically portraying Melville's growth of consciousness through
knowledge of evil, and the rejection of previously accepted religious
principles the knowledge of evil entails.3 The remaining section of
the novel, when viewed as a continuation of the established pattern,

1See E. L. Grant Wilson's, "Melville's Pierre," New England
Quarterly, III, (April, 1930), pp. 195-231, and George C. Herman's,
"The Dark Angel: The Tragedy of Herman Melville," New England Quarterly
V, (October, 1932), pp. 699-730.

2See William Braswell, op. cit., Chapter VI, "The Story of the

3Chapter I, "Call Me Ishmael".
can be seen as an attempt by Melville to create in Pierre a man-god, who, infinitely capable of good by his very nature, assumed the mantle of Christ, and established the father-son relationship between God and man.

In his portrayal of youth's thoughtless faith Melville identifies his father with God. The knowledge of evil, which proves the inconsistencies of the Christian concept of a benevolent Deity results in the rejection of those concepts. In Pierre, evil created by God is symbolized by Isabel who is Pierre's illegitimate half-sister. What remains for Melville is the acceptance of evil and the utilization of evil as an instrument of good. With the doctrine of the total depravity of man in mind, Melville sought to turn the inherent imperfection of man into an agent of good. In Moby Dick, Melville through Ahab defied God, the author of evil; in Pierre he accepted evil as being necessary to the attainment of truth, and more, the imperfection of man — that something somehow like original sin — did not prevent man from becoming through his own efforts another Christ.

The inability of Christianity to account for evil and the compromising attitude of Christianity arising from the conflict between the teachings of Christ and the demands of society are forcefully demonstrated by the treatment accorded Dolly, the mother of a bastard child, and Ned, the father, by Mrs. Glendinning, and Reverend Falsgrave. Perplexed by the problems arising from the revelation of Isabel that she is his illegitimate half-sister, Pierre enters the discussion of Mrs. Glendinning and Reverend Falsgrave concerning what was to be done with Dolly and Ned. With the implications of his own recognition of Isabel in mind, Pierre seeks to obtain the kind of treatment for the unfortunate
pair that is advocated by Christ. Mrs. Glendinning and Falsgrave sum up the Christian attitude in such cases by agreeing that wretchedness should be the principal's lot, for the words of the Bible say that the sins of the father shall be visited upon the children to the third generation.¹

Reflecting on his resolution to help Isabel, Pierre asks: "Should the legitimate child shun the illegitimate, when one father is father to both? His mother answers emphatically in the affirmative; so Pierre puts the question to Falsgrave: "...should the one refuse his highest sympathy and perfect love for the other, especially if that other be deserted by all the rest of the world?" What think you would have been our blessed Savior's thoughts on such a matter? And what was that he so mildly said to the adulteress? Falsgrave evasively answers:

It is one of the social disadvantages which we of the pulpit labor under; that we are supposed to know more of the moral obligations of humanity than other people. And it is a still more serious disadvantage to the world, that our unconsidered, conversational opinions on the most complex problems of ethics, are too apt to be considered authoritative, as indirectly proceeding from the church itself. Now nothing can be more erroneous than such notions; and nothing so embarrasses me, and deprives me of that entire serenity, which is indispensable to the delivery of a careful opinion on moral subjects, than when sudden questions of this sort are put to me in company. Pardon, this long preamble, for I have little more to say. It is not every question, however direct, Mrs. Glendinning, which can be conscientiously answered with a yes or no. Millions of circumstances modify all moral questions; so that though conscience may possibly dictate freely in any known special case; yet, by one universal maxim, to embrace all moral contingencies,—this is not only impossible, but the attempt, to me, seems foolish.

Pierre then inquires whether the biblical injunction, "Honor thy father

and mother," should not always be obeyed; for, he says "...as that command is justly said to be the only one with a promise, so it seems to be without any contingency in the application." He gives the question particular reference: "For instance should I honor my father, if I knew him to be a seducer." Mrs. Glendinning feels the question blasphemous, while the minister replies: "...that is another question in morals absolutely incapable of a definite answer, which shall be universally applicable." At each evasive reply Falsgrave's breakfast napkin falls down to reveal a brooch he is wearing, "representing the allegorical union of the serpent and dove"—- the allegorical representation of Christ's counsel to his disciples to use the wisdom of the serpent and the gentleness of the dove. The hesitancy of Falsgrave to counsel forgiveness which would be in direct conflict with the ideas of Mrs. Glendinning, his benefactress, suggests the inability of Christianity to cope with problems of morals freely without the contingencies of fleshly alliances and worldly benefices. Delly is banished from the community.

The decision of his mother to exile Delly impels Pierre to aid his illegitimate sister. In doing so he feels himself "divinely dedicated" and he resolves to make an "unequaled renunciation of himself".1 Without seeking to expose his father's guilt to his mother, Pierre proposes to conceal the identity of Isabel, but assist her by declaring to the world that she is his wife. Such a course of action would wreck his projected marriage to Lucy, his childhood sweetheart, but to Pierre the choice is "Lucy or God". Melville is careful to point

1Ibid., pp. 148, 150.
out that Pierre's decision is a purely gratuitous act; consciously, he acts upon the purest motives as is revealed by his having a "Christ-like feeling." As a consequence of his act, Pierre is disowned by his mother.

In the remaining pages Pierre takes Isabel and Delly to the city where Lucy later joins them. Pierre commences to write a monumental book which is to reveal the ultimate truths. But matters grow worse; it is suggested that Pierre commits incest, he murders a kinsman, he curses God. In the last scene, laid in a prison cell, Lucy, hearing that Pierre is Isabel's brother, dies of shock; and Pierre and Isabel commit suicide.

The incidents described lend themselves most readily to an allegorical interpretation of a religious sense. The banishment of Pierre, Delly, and Isabel suggests a similarity to the discharge of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. Peculiar to this modern Adam is the fact that he already has at his command the example of Christ by which his heritage can be reestablished.

Christianity, as Melville knew it, declared that man because he was totally corrupt, was incapable of attaining salvation through his own action. It is significant, therefore, that Pierre takes Delly and Isabel, who symbolize the darker side of man's nature, his imperfection, with him to the city. As he pursues his intention to write his book, Delly and Isabel at first prove a measure of assistance to him. The suggestion that Pierre and Isabel commit incest indicates, however, that Melville was not totally convinced that man could completely arise

\[1\] Ibid., pp. 150-151.
above the evil inherent in his nature. Melville felt that something like the teachings of Christianity was necessary to sustain man in his endeavour. Lucy, who symbolizes, through her connection with the Glendinning family, the religion of youth, comes to Pierre's assistance. In a letter she writes that she is coming to him for: "...a deep, deep voice assures me, that all noble as thou art, Pierre, some terrible jeopardy involves thee, which my continual presence only can drive away."\(^1\)

After Lucy arrives, Pierre is never alone with her; though, as before, alone with Isabel. Yet Lucy exerts a beneficent sway over him: "Pierre felt that some strange heavenly influence was near him, to keep him from some uttermost harm; Isabel was alive to some untraceable displacing agency."\(^2\) Lucy promises to aid in supporting the household with her crayon-sketches; but now does nothing to help Pierre and also begrudges him the time in which he works.\(^3\) But the influence for good exerted by the promptings of the residues of his discarded faith and a modified Christianity as represented by Lucy are not sufficient to overcome evil; Isabel finally conquers.

In his despair at seeking to establish man's heritage in the divine family, Melville pictures Pierre as murdering his kinsman, Glen Stanly, the only "unoutlawed human being by the name of Glendinning,"\(^4\) to whom have fallen Pierre's farm and fortune.

At the end, in prison, Pierre recognizes that his motives for championing Isabel were not solely prompted by a Christ-like feeling.

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\(^1\) *Tbid.*, p. 433.


The inferred incest indicates that he was motivated by Isabel's physical beauty and the promptings of lower instincts. As he reviews his life he says:

It is ambiguous still. Had I been heartless now, disowned, and spuriously portioned off the girl at Saddle Meadow, then had I been happy through a long life on earth, and perchance through a long eternity in heaven! Now, 'Tis merely hell in both worlds. Well, be it hell. I will mould a trumpet of the flames, and, with my breath of flame, breathe back my defiance.

From Christ-like humility in the acceptance of suffering, and God-created evil, Pierre ends as defiant as Ahab who had said: "...of thy fire thou madest me, and like a true child of fire, I breathe it back to thee." Seeing Lucy die, Pierre cries:

"Girl! wife or sister, saint or fiend!" — seizing Isabel in his grasp — "in thy breasts, life for infants lodgeth not, but death milk for thee and me! — The drug!" and tearing her bosom loose, he seized the secret vial nestling there.

Though Melville believed in the inherent goodness of man, and the ability of man, notwithstanding his imperfections, to attain to the divine, to assume a Christ-like stature, such beliefs were not realized in Pierre. Though in Mardi, Melville, in the religion of Serenia, had pictured the efficacy of the teachings of Christ to establish the proper relationship between men and man and God in this life, in Pierre he seems to despair of man's ability to realize the ideal. Indeed, the underlying theme of the whole novel seems to be the impracticability of Christian virtue. The destruction of Pierre stems

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1 Ibid., p. 502.
from his attempt to become as Christ, emphasizing the point that the teachings of Christ are not of this world. Pierre, as it demonstrates the utter futility of the teachings of Christ to alleviate the sufferings of mankind in this world through the establishment of the order of divine love, stands as Melville's most crushing condemnation of Christianity. The theme of the novel is set forth in the presentation of Plotinus Plinlimmon's pamphlet. ¹

At the outset of his voyage to the city Pierre finds a discarded pamphlet in the coach. It is implied that if Pierre had thoroughly comprehended and acted in accord with the teachings of Plinlimmon he would have escaped disaster.

Before presenting the pamphlet, Melville asserts that the secret for reconciling the world with the soul has never been found. Plato, Spinoza, Goethe, the New England Transcendentalists who have claimed to have found it are branded "impostors". They "pretend somehow to have got an answer "from God; but "how can a man get a Voice out of Silence." Melville says that the pamphlet seems to him "more the excellently illustrated re-statement of a problem, than the solution of the problem itself"; but since men generally accept such illustrations for solutions, "therefore it may help to the temporary quiet of some inquiring mind; and so not be wholly without use."

Plinlimmon’s pamphlet entitled — "Chronometricals and Horologicals" uses an elaborate conceit involving "time" to espouse the doctrine of dual wisdom. The wisdom (time) of Christ is heavenly time, chronometrical.

¹Ibid. The pamphlet with prefatory remarks is contained in Book XIV, pp. 284-300.
Man's wisdom is of this world and therefore horological and peculiar to a certain locality. The chronometrical time of Christ is compared to a heavenly Greenwich time. As it is folly for a Chinaman to use earthly Greenwich time in his locality — he would be going to bed at noon when his neighbors would be sitting down to dinner — so too it is folly for man to set his horologe to the chronometrical heavenly Greenwich and any attempt to force heavenly time upon earth is doomed to failure. Though Christ practised chronometricals, he was beset with woe and death. Yet, he remained entirely without folly or sin. "Whereas, with inferior beings, the absolute effort to live in this world according to the strict letter of the chronometricals is, somehow, apt to involve those inferior beings eventually in strange unique follies."

The teachings of Christ are chronometrical and cannot be followed to the letter of the law and more particularly cannot be enforced universally. There is also a chronometer for infidels. What man can at most expect to arrive at is a virtuous expediency, somewhere between Christ and horological time. Therefore, man does not give all to the poor, but gives some "with self-considerate generosity." Neither does man make a complete unconditional sacrifice of himself for any cause, or any being. A virtuous expediency is the highest obtainable earthly excellency for man, "and is the only earthly excellence that their Creator intended." To do more, to expect more of man, to expect him to aim at heaven, while on earth, and to attain it in all earthly acts on pain of hell, as Christianity demands, moves man, upon finding it impossible to do so, to run away "into all manner of moral abandonment, self-deceit and hypocrisy; or else he openly runs like a mad dog
The tragedy of Pierre illustrates the wisdom of Plinlimmon, for Pierre sacrifices himself with "uttermost virtue" which proves in the end but a "betraying pander to the monstrous vice.\(^1\) The death of Lucy, symbol of the residues of an early discarded belief, indicates that Pierre has run like a mad dog into atheism; his suicide symbolizes the destruction of the soul.

In **Moby Dick** and **Pierre**, Melville attempted to create a man-god, modeled upon a masculine Christ, through whom the proper relationship between God and man would be established. The tragic ends of Pierre, and Ahab, indicate that he had not reached a solution. Essentially, he had not positioned evil, and the imperfection of man in the scheme of divine purposiveness. While the novels point out the imperfections of Christianity, Melville could offer no concrete illustration to verify his conception of the ideal religion depicted in **Serenia**. He was to achieve this end in **Billy Budd**.

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\(^1\) **Pierre**, II, p. 502.
Melville's belief in the essential goodness of man, despite his inherent imperfection, prompted a corollary conviction in man's ability to become through his potentialities for good another Christ. The apotheosis of the common man as Christ would realize the father-son relationship suggested by the Ishmael image. The failure of Ahab and Pierre to realize this relationship, to establish God as Father to all mankind results largely from Melville's inability to justify the existence of evil. Before the idea of a truly benevolent God could be established, God-created evil must be admitted into the scheme of divine purposiveness — the evil of reality must be reconciled to the idea of a benevolent Deity. In Billy Budd, Foretopman, Melville achieved this final reconciliation.

Billy Budd is the culmination of Melville's efforts to create a man-god, who, while modeled upon the virtues of Christ, was entirely without the effeminate weakness, the hermaphroditical which characterizes the traditional pictures of Christ. In Billy, the man-god and the Ishmael image merge to achieve final reconciliation with God.

Billy is, first of all, the Handsome Sailor; he is the personification of Melville's masculine ideal. And, he is more; he is the epitome of primitive goodness, "little more than an upright barbarian, much perhaps as Adam presumably might have been ere the urbane Serpent
wriggled himself into his company."\(^1\)

But for all his personal beauty and goodness Billy is not without blemish. He has a speech defect which is apparent only when he is under sudden, strong provocation. Then Billy stutters or even worse. "In this particular", Melville writes, "Billy was a striking instance that the arch interferer, the envious marplot of Eden still has more or less to do with every human consignment to this planet of earth."\(^2\)

Melville's final concession to the doctrine of the fall indicates that he had come a long way religiously since the writing of *Moby Dick*.

The Ishmael image appears in *Billy Budd* in modified form. Billy is a foundling, "a presumable bye-blow, and evidently, no ignoble one."

There is something "in the mobile expression, and every chance attitude and movement, something suggestive of a mother eminently favored by Love and the Graces; all of this strangely indicated a lineage in direct contradiction to his lot."\(^3\) In beauty and nobility Billy resembles Pierre. Like Pierre, who was driven from the paradise of Saddle Meadows into the harsh world of reality, so, too, Billy is impressed from his ship, *The Rights of Man*, into hard service aboard the British battleship *Indomitable*. But unlike Pierre, Billy in his impressment does not consider sacrificing himself to an ideal; he takes his enforced enlistment as he would take any "vicissitude of weather."\(^4\)


\(^2\) *Ibid*, p. 300.

\(^3\) *Ibid*, p. 296.

The contrast between the world on board the "Rights of Man" and the "Indomitable" is basically the same contrast Melville had drawn between the ideal state, Serenia, and Christianity, as represented in Laramma. Billy on board the "Rights" functions as Alma; he is the "peacemaker," whose virtues "went out of him, sugaring the sour ones."\(^1\) On board the "Indomitable", Billy, for all his acceptance on the top and gundecks, and though he himself had accomplished the abrupt transition without abashment, in his position as the handsome sailor aboard the seventy-four was "something analogous to that of a rustic beauty transplanted from the provinces and brought into competition with the high-born danes of the court."\(^2\) Though Melville in \textit{Pierre} seemed to demonstrate that the teachings of Christ were not of this world, and any attempts to follow them literally would be doomed, he, nevertheless, at the same time, believed that in Christ lay mankind's hope. In \textit{Pierre} the teachings of Christ as presented by Christianity were demonstrated in the person of Falsgrave. In particular the deceptiveness of Christianity was accented by the mention of a cameo brooch which depicted the allegorical union of serpent and doves the essence of Christianity. With this idea in mind, the following line describing Billy Budd becomes especially significant: "For the rest, with little or no sharpness of faculty or any trace of the wisdom of the serpent, nor yet quite a dove, he possessed that kind of degree of intelligence going along with the unconventional rectitude of a sound human creature, one to whom not yet has been offered the questionable apple of knowledge."\(^3\) Billy, as Alma,

\(^1\)\textit{Ibid.}, p. 291.
\(^2\)\textit{Ibid.}, p. 297.
\(^3\)\textit{Ibid.}, p. 299.
represents Christ stripped of the corruptions with which he is invested by Christianity. In Serenia the father-son relationship between God and man is established through the teachings and example of Alma. Previous to Billy Budd, the tragic deaths of Ahab and Pierre, Melville's literary attempts at the creation of the man-god, emphasize Melville's inability to solve the riddle of God-created evil.

In Claggart, The Indomitable's master-at-arms, Melville has symbolically portrayed his belief in the idea that some individuals are totally depraved in contrast to the Calvinistic doctrine of total depravity, and in the belief that God was directly responsible for man's suffering. These two ideas have been discussed previously in the chapters relating to the nature of God and the nature of man. Their recurrence in Billy Budd emphasizes the relationship between the last of Melville's novels and his previous works.

In his position of master-at-arms Claggart is a link in the chain of authority which extends up to Captain Vere. The name Indomitable suggests an identification with the concept of an all-powerful Deity; that is, the world aboard the man-of-war is governed by an all-powerful being. In this respect Captain Vere functions as the Deity, or at least, the agent of the Deity. His name, Starry Vere, suggests the idea of the ultimate truth, an identification with God.

Claggart's dislike of Billy Budd stems from Billy's significant personal beauty. He recognized the essential goodness of Budd and his own evil nature prevented him from sharing in this innocence. He had "no power to annul the elemental evil in him, though readily enough he

\[1^\text{Ibid.}, p. 323.\]
could hide it; apprehending the good, but powerless to be it.\(^1\)

Claggart finally brings the charge of mutiny against Billy before Captain Vere. When he repeats the charge in the presence of Budd, Billy is so enraged that his speech defect renders him speechless; in anger he strikes Claggart, accidentally killing him. Though Vere recognizes Billy's innocence, he declares Billy must hang.

Billy's vocal defect, symbolic of man's imperfection, is Melville's final concession to the doctrine of original sin. In Calvinistic thought, man's first fall resulted in his total corruption and prevented him from the performance of good. Billy's defect is apparent only at certain times and its result is not a total disposition to evil, but rather an inability to see the end a certain act may logically entail. Billy did not intend to kill Claggart; had he been able to answer Claggart's charges he would not have struck him; Billy certainly did not foresee that his blow would bring about Claggart's death. Though he demands that Billy hang, Captain Vere recognizes Billy's essential innocence.

The suffering of mankind imposed by the Creator is symbolically portrayed by Vere's severe judgment. Christianity, in a similar situation would justify Vere's decision; but Billy has committed no sin; he is all innocence. In the novels previous to *Billy Budd*, the suffering imposed upon mankind by the Deity admits of no justification and moves both Ahab and Pierre to the defiance of the Deity. Billy, on the other hand, accepts his judgment in true Christian humility.

\(^{1}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 323.\)
Following his interview with the Captain, in which he learns of his sentence, Billy is pictured lying between two guns with all the innocence of a slumbering child. With his last breath he cries, "God bless Captain Vere." ¹

The martial law which demands Billy's death corresponds to the Divine law. In Captain Vere's justification of Billy's sentence according to martial law, Melville justifies the ways of God to man. Billy's intent or non-intent is not to the purpose; what alone can be the basis for his judgment is the fact that he struck and killed a superior officer. Clemency is beyond question: "The people (meaning the ship's company)" says Vere "have a native sense; most of them are familiar with our naval usage and tradition; and how would they take it? Even could you explain to them -- which our official position forbids -- they, long moulded by arbitrary discipline have not that kind of intelligent responsiveness that might qualify them to comprehend and discriminate. No, to the people the foretopman died, however it be worded in the announcement will be plain homicide committed in a flagrant act of mutiny. What penalty for that should follow, they know. But it does not follow. Why? They will ruminate..."² Their ruminations will lead them also to mutiny, Vere implies, for "clemency they would account pusillanimous. They would think that we flinch, that we are afraid of them -- afraid of practicing a lawful rigor singularly demanded at this juncture lest it should provoke new troubles. What a shame to us such a conjecture on their part, and how deadly to discipline."³ The great mass of men, Melville would say, persist in their belief in God and follow

¹Ibid., p. 367.
²Ibid., p. 357.
³Ibid., p. 357.
His law, because they fear Him. Remove fear and anarchy would result.

God imposes suffering upon mankind to perpetuate belief in Him and for the preservation of divine order such belief entails.

But Belville beyond the necessity of order was to justify the existence of evil in a more forceful manner. On the morning of Billy's execution, the crew assumed their usual places and all was made ready. In a way to remind one of Christ's Crucifixion, Billy was hanged from the mainyard, not, as was usual, from the fore-yard. In such a position the fore and aft masts were on either side, symbolical of the crosses of the thieves beside the cross of Christ. Relating this part of the hanging, Belville wrote, "it chanced that the vapery fleece hanging low in the East, was shot through with a soft glory as of the fleece of the Lamb of God seen in mystical vision and simultaneously therewith, watched by the wedged mass of upturned faces, Billy ascended; and ascending took the full rose of the dawn."

Noticeably lacking in Billy's death was the spasmodic jerking usually seen in such instances. At his burial birds flew around the whirlpool his shotted hammock made as he was consigned to the sea. These incidents had a profound effect upon the sailors, not only those of his own ship but, in time, of the whole navy. Chips from the spar from which Billy was suspended were revered as chips from the Cross. They continually recall Billy's fresh young face, "never deformed by a sneer or subtler vile freak of the heart within." Billy becomes a saint to be revered and emulated; the sailors are moved to goodness through memory of Billy. Evil, as represented by Claggart, becomes through

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\[1\text{Ibid., p. 367.}\]  \[2\text{Ibid., p. 374.}\]
the death of innocence the indirect agent of good. Like Alma, Billy is an agent of good.

Once evil is reconciled with the idea of a benevolent Deity the father-son relationship emerges — naturally. Billy, the foundling, like another Ishmael, establishes God as the Father of all mankind. Captain Vere, symbolizing the Deity, in his sentencing of Billy to death, exhibits these contradictory attributes of the Deity which Melville sought to reconcile. On the one hand, as the All-powerful, Just, Chastising God of the Old Testament, Vere demands Billy's death; on the other hand, as a Benevolent Deity, Vere recognizes Budd's essential innocence and feels compassion for him. He takes upon himself the unpleasant task of announcing the court's verdict. What transpires between him and Billy at that last meeting is never fully known, but it is rumored that "the austere devotee of military duty letting himself melt back into what remains primeval in our formalized humanity may in the end have caught Billy to his heart even as Abraham may have caught young Isaac on the brink of resolutely offering him up in obedience to the exacting behest." Melville's reconciliation with the exacting Deity is expressed in Billy's poignant cry: "God bless Captain Vere!". Billy, as Ishmael, realizes his heritage; the orphan has found his father; Melville has reached his Serenia.

\[1\] Ibid., p. 359.
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