THE DESIGN OF MELVILLE'S PIAZZA TALES

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A Thesis

in

The Department

of

English

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement
for the degree of Master of Arts at
Concordia University
Montréal, Québec, Canada

September, 1976

ABSTRACT

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The Piazza Tales is a collection of six short stories which were written by Herman Melville in the period between the publication of Pierre, or The Ambiguities in 1852 and The Confidence-Man in 1857. Five of the tales, "Bartleby," "Benito Cereno," "The Lightning-Rod Man," "The Encantadas," and "The Bell-Tower," had appeared in Putnam's prior to 1856, while "The Piazza" was written specifically to serve as an introduction and gathering metaphor when the stories were collected for bookform.

The thesis examines The Piazza Tales in the context of Melville's other short fiction of the same period and offers an analysis of each of the stories which make up The Piazza Tales. It argues that the collection is not as strongly unified as has been thought and suggests that "The Lightning-Rod Man" has more in common with Melville's late short fiction than it has with the other Piazza tales. Finally, a perceptual hierarchy is deduced from the Melvillian universe which is presented microcosmically to the reader in The Piazza Tales. Towards this end, Plato's The Republic acts as a key source of reference, as the dissertation postulates that its impact upon the Tales is of major significance.

To Lynn
for love, patience and support

To Dr. David Ketterer
for guidance and advice

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Chapter I

Introduction

Between 1853 and 1856, Herman Melville wrote sixteen short stories of which fifteen were published with "The Two Temples" alone in the category of being too offensive to a certain segment of the public. This turn from the novel to the short fiction genre is usually explained as a consequence of the negative reviews filtering in on Moby Dick and Pierre. But the influence of two other specific factors should also be considered: the so-called "Agatha story" which Melville discussed with Hawthorne, and the inception of Putnam's Monthly magazine.

In the summer of 1851, while on a trip to Nantucket with Judge Shaw, his father-in-law, Melville heard of the tragic story of Agatha from a New Bedford lawyer named John Clifford. According to the records given to Melville, Agatha was a pregnant woman who had been deserted by her husband and left alone to endure. Struck by the poignancy of the story and the fortitude of Agatha, Melville suggested to his friend, Nathaniel Hawthorne, that he use the story as a source of fiction. After considerable discussion, Hawthorne remained reluctant; accordingly Melville tried somewhat unsuccessfully to make use of the material himself. He eventually put the theme aside and wrote "Bartleby" and "Cock-A-Doodle-Do!" Satisfied with

the public's reception of these short stories, both of which featuring endurance as a theme, Melville returned to the "Agatha story" to create the memorable character of Hunilla in "The Encantadas Or Enchanted Isles."

The "Agatha story" is important to an understanding of Melville's short fiction of 1853-56 not simply because it is in part responsible for Melville's turn to that genre, no doubt stimulated by his discussions of the theme with Hawthorne, but because the character of Agatha seems to be the source of a number of characters in Melville's short fiction, specifically in The Piazza Tales. Newbery puts this latter observation in perspective:

> Thus, if Pierre emphasizes man's separation from a metaphysical bond, the Agatha sketch introduces a group of stories which focus on the alienation of man from his own kind. We now meet the lonely, the outcast, the orphaned, and the widowed; we meet protagonists like Bartleby, Don Benito, Hunilla, Oberlus, the Dog-King, and Marianna. To Patricia Lacy ("The Agatha Theme in Melville's Short Stories," Univ. of Texas Studies in English, XXXV (1956), pp.96-105), the link between the Agatha sketch and Melville's later stories lies in the common theme of endurance. I would rather say that it lies in the theme of disturbed human relationships and in the theme of man's unmitigable loneliness in a sea of inscrutable malignity.[1]

[1] Ilse S.M. Newbery, "The Unity of Melville's Piazza Tales," Doctoral Diss. Univ. of British Columbia 1964, p.45.

The form letters which were sent out by Putnam's, including one to Melville, to solicit contributions for its first magazine were dated October 1, 1852. The fact that Melville asked Hawthorne to return the Agatha material one month later strongly suggests that Melville intended to publish his own Agatha story in the new magazine.[2] That Melville should have wished to publish in Putnam's is not surprising, as the magazine declared itself to be an organ of original American work. Perhaps of even more significance, in view of Melville's choosing to also publish in Harper's, a magazine of the English tradition, was the fact that Putnam's paid $5 a page, whereas Harper's paid "the usual $3 per page."[3] Insofar as Melville's longer works were published in Putnam's, it would seem that he took financial advantage into consideration in selecting his publisher.

In December of 1855, J.H. Dix, the publisher of Putnam's, decided that the favourable public reception of Melville's short fiction in Putnam's merited a collection of the five stories. Originally to be entitled Benito

[2] Newbery, p.34; I am in complete agreement in this regard.

[3] Norman Eugene Hoyle, "Melville As A Magazinist," Doctoral Diss. Duke Univ. 1960, p.212.

Cereno and Other Sketches, Melville added an introductory story, "The Piazza," with the result that the collection was published as The Piazza Tales in 1856.

This thesis offers an examination of the stories which make up The Piazza Tales. The thesis receives its title from a conviction that the collection is not as strongly unified as has come to be generally accepted. While I remain indebted to Ilse Newbery for the excellent research apparent in her unpublished doctoral dissertation, "The Unity of Melville's Piazza Tales," I take issue with her basic premise of unity. I do not deny that unity is frequently characteristic of a work of art, but find that often scholars impose, rather than deduce, "a unity" on a given work to fulfill their own expectations, or standards, of what constitutes a work of art. In the case of The Piazza Tales, an argument for definite unity is subject to particular scrutiny insofar as the only criterion for the selection of the stories was that they were all published in Putnam's prior to the writing of "The Piazza."

I think that a case can be made that the stories collected in The Piazza Tales are in themselves a good sample of Melville's short fiction of the 1853-56 period. In this sense, they may be viewed as a microcosm, with

the macrocosm consisting of the whole of Melville's short fiction. Compressed in the microcosm, then, are many of the themes which characterize the macrocosm. What I have found in my analysis of The Piazza Tales is that four of the six stories are strongly unified, a fifth fits well into the unity established by the four, and a sixth, namely "The Lightning-Rod Man," blends only superficially with the others and, in terms of unity, would be better placed with some of Melville's late short fiction (eg. "I and My Chimney" and "The Apple-Tree Table," both published in Putnam's after the collection).

More importantly, I feel that the microcosm of The Piazza Tales offers a view to a Melvillian universe which is stratified by degrees of perception, and which is distinguished by a well nigh fixated emphasis on evil, as manifested in both the supernatural and natural realms. To put these findings into perspective, a perceptual hierarchy will be gleaned by way of conclusion from the universe presented in The Piazza Tales. Characters will be categorized through their behaviour and relative acuteness of perception. This system will have the result of putting the design of The Piazza Tales into a clearer perspective, while shedding additional light upon Melville's own particular philosophical conception of the universe.

Throughout my analysis of The Piazza Tales, and particularly in the "Piazza" chapter and in conclusion, I will be using Plato's The Republic as a key source of reference, as this thesis is the first work to postulate that the impact of The Republic upon the Tales is of major significance. We know through internal evidence in Mardi that Melville was reading The Republic while working on that book.[4] No doubt, Plato was still on Melville's mind when he turned to short fiction; Barrett's comments in his unpublished doctoral dissertation, "Fiery Hunt: A Study of Melville's Theories of the Artist," would tend to suggest this, given the fact that Moby Dick and Pierre immediately preceded the short fiction:

> No writer, not even Shakespeare, is mentioned more frequently in Moby Dick and Pierre than is Plato. His name appears at least five times in Moby Dick and six times in Pierre, and the allusions leave little doubt that Melville was closely familiar with at least some of the Dialogues.[5]

[4] Merton Miller Sealts, Jr., "Herman Melville's Reading in Ancient Philosophy," Doctoral Diss. Yale Univ. 1942, p.96.

[5] Lawrence Nexsen Barrett, "Fiery Hunt: A Study of Melville's Theories of the Artist," Doctoral Diss. Princeton Univ. 1949, p.281.

In an investigation devoted almost entirely to Melville's novels, Merton Miller Sealts, Jr., in his excellent unpublished doctoral dissertation, "Herman Melville's Reading in Ancient Philosophy," points out that Melville took issue with Plato's governing idea of "the good" insofar as Plato had ignored evil in his hierarchy of ideas:

> But Melville was acutely conscious of the disguised dualism of Plato's own treatment of the problem of knowledge, and in metaphysics he felt that Plato had avoided the dualism of good and evil only by ignoring it. This was the evasion that called forth his most contemptuous reference, when Pierre apostrophizes "ye chattering apes of a sophomorean Spinoza and Plato, who once didst all but delude me that the night was day, and pain only a tickle. Explain this darkness, exorcise this devil, ye cannot."[6]

At the conclusion of the introductory story to The Piazza Tales, "The Piazza," the narrator ominously states that truth comes in with darkness. This declaration signals the fact that Melville, unlike Plato, will deal with both evil and pain in the subsequent stories. Indeed Melville does so almost to the exclusion of "the good"; and while he states categorically that there is a bright

[6] Sealts, p.104.

side to reality in "The Encantadas," Melville's apparent obsession with the black in The Piazza Tales makes this statement appear to be wishful-thinking.

From what has been said, I do not wish to leave the impression that Melville and Plato saw eye-to-eye on nothing. Quite the opposite holds true.[7] As Nathalia Wright makes clear in Melville's Use of the Bible, Melville's belief in a world beyond the world of sense is essentially Platonic: "Like the Platonists, he did believe truth resided in the unseen world of ideas and conceptions rather than in the world of material manifestations."[8] Melville and Plato arrived at different conclusions, but Melville's analyses and symbolism are essentially Platonic. Sealts notes this influence as follows:

> The foregoing comparison of Melville's thought with the doctrines of the Republic suggests certain generalizations regarding Melville's reading of Plato. In both politics and metaphysics he was in closer agreement with Plato as a negative critic than as a constructive thinker. When Socrates offers Plato's objections to democracy or discusses the illusions of sense-perception, Melville approves; when Socrates sketches

[7] Edwin Haviland Miller, Melville (New York: George Braziller, 1975), p.107, notes that in one letter to Hawthorne, Melville alluded to himself as "ugly Socrates."

[8] Melville's Use of the Bible (New York: Octagon Books, 1969), p.184.

> Plato's plans for an ideal state or outlines his metaphysical system, Melville replies that reason will never govern man, dispel illusion, or solve the problem of evil. In short, Melville frequently accepted a Platonic analysis of a philosophic question but rejected its Platonic solution. At the same time, his own meditations on the same subject are often colored by Platonic language and myth, as shown both in the present chapter and in discussion of dialogues other than the Republic. The inference is that despite Melville's unwillingness to accept Plato's thought in its entirety, he has nevertheless been considerably influenced by Plato's presentation of some of the major problems of philosophy.[9]

In The Piazza Tales, Melville is particularly influenced by the "Simile of the Cave" section of The Republic, which explains why it is relatively simple to deduce a perceptual hierarchy from the Tales. Barrett alludes to this same symbolism in his discussion of Mardi:

> Though there is only this one allusion in Mardi, the book is full of Plato's thought. Even the idea of the brotherhood of authors, first expressed in this novel, seems to have found support in the Dialogues, if not to have sprung from them. It will be remembered that this doctrine was based upon the premise that there is an absolute truth and that it is in their common dedication to it that authors find their brotherhood. It was a truth that Melville spoke of as a central sun, a symbol that Plato used in the myth of the cave. And it will be

[9] Sealts, p.105.

> remembered that Melville believed that all visible things are symbols of that truth... The world that surrounded him was a mass of symbols, shadows, as it were of deeper truths. And this whole doctrine of symbolism, which accounts for so much in Melville's career, was essentially Platonic.[10]

With considerable justification, then, I will be referring to The Republic, and in particular to the myth of the cave, throughout my discussion of The Piazza Tales. Also, I will be pointing out thematic and imagistic parallels with a view to discerning the degree to which Melville departed from Plato in establishing his own philosophical position. To this end, and because it will serve as a context to The Piazza Tales, Melville's short fiction exclusive of the collection will be the object of attention prior to my analyses of "The Piazza," "Bartleby," "Benito Cereno," "The Lightning-Rod Man," "The Encantadas," and "The Bell-Tower."

[10]Barrett, p.282.

Chapter II

Short Fiction of the 1853-56 Period

In the following pages, a background to The Piazza Tales will be presented in three rather unequal parts, with the last part meriting the most attention: 1) Melville's magazine-writing career; 2) The tastes and demands of Melville's literary public; and 3) Melville's short fiction of the 1853-56 period, exclusive of The Piazza Tales. As this thesis is not primarily concerned with any one of these three aspects of the literary milieu of The Piazza Tales, no attempt at detail is pretended; rather, an effort is made to equip the reader with a general understanding of external influences which may have a bearing on the stories in the collection. Melville's short fiction of the 1853-56 period is given particular attention because it is marked by many of the same themes which vein the whole of The Piazza Tales.

Norman Eugene Hoyle's unpublished doctoral dissertation, "Melville As A Magazinist," offers not only a comprehensive treatment of Melville's magazine years but is, as far as I have been able to ascertain, the only work of its kind[1]: a surprising fact, surely, in view of the

[1]I am greatly indebted to Prof. Hoyle for his research into Melville's early years of magazine-writing.

growth in interest in Melville's short fiction which has taken place in the last three decades of Melvillian scholarship. This condition would appear to be the result of a tendency on the part of students and scholars alike to view Melville's interest in magazine-writing as a genre as secondary to the business of writing novels. While this may be the case, it is a point of view which ignores Melville's history of magazine association as well as underrating the influence of the Hawthorne relationship. Taken together, Melville's short fiction including The Piazza Tales has a consistency in quality which does not characterize the novels despite Melville's masterpiece, Moby Dick.

Melville's short fiction career began, as is the case with most writers, without distinction as "Fragments from a Writing-Desk" (1839) will testify: two short works which the nineteen-year-old Melville probably enjoyed writing more than did his public reading.[2] His next attempt, "The Death Craft," is of interest again only in terms of its being the work of a young writer experimenting with a new art. Following these early efforts,

[2]Herman Melville, "Fragments from a Writing-Desk," Democratic Press and Lansingburgh Advertiser (May 4 and 18, 1839).

Melville put away his pen and boarded the Acushnet, ceasing to write until the latter 'forties when he gathered together his sailing experiences for the popular Typee.

It was at Wiley and Putnam, the publishers of Typee, that Melville made the acquaintance of Evert Duyckinck, a meeting which blossomed into a literary comaraderie. Through the encouragement and intellectual stimulus of Duyckinck, an influence similar to the one exerted by Hawthorne in the following decade, Melville published a possible eleven reviews in the Literary World,[3] and helped Duyckinck and Cornelius Matthews on the Yankee Doodle. This second period of magazine activity, beginning in 1847 with the review of J. Ross Browne's Etchings of a Whaling Cruise and Captain Ringbolt's Sailor's Life and Sailor's Yarns (Literary World, I, March 6, 1847), came to a close with the triumphant "Hawthorne and His Mosses, by a Virginian Spending July in Vermont," which was published in the Literary World on August 17th and 24th in 1850 and

[3]Hoyle lists eleven articles written by Melville between March of 1847 and the publication of "Bartleby"; six of these, however, are considered as "Possible Magazine Contributions." A twelfth article, "The Authentic Anecdotes of 'Old Zack'," appeared in seven installments in Yankee Doodle in 1847.

which demonstrated for the first time Melville's insight into not only the work of Hawthorne, but his own and the nature of art as well. As Norman Eugene Hoyle points out, "The maturation that is clearly observable from the first review to 'Hawthorne and his Mosses' parallels that from Typee to Moby Dick."[4] Melville then turned his attention completely to the writing of Moby Dick and Pierre, leaving a gap in his magazine-writing career which extended until the publication of "Bartleby" in 1853 and which was punctuated only by a review of Hawthorne's The House of the Seven Gables in 1851.

Although Melville's literary public was demanding, its tastes were questionable. In his doctoral dissertation, "Literary Influences and Technique in Melville's Short Fiction: 1853-1856," Robert Bruce Bickley analyzes a number of literary reviews of the 'fifties with a view to discovering what these tastes were. His conclusions are not surprizing considering the fact that "The Two Temples" was rejected by Putnam's as being offensive to certain wealthy circles and "The Bell-Tower" was almost rejected because of its symbolic texture.[5] Sentimenta-

[4] Hoyle, p.11.

[5] Ibid., pp.177-178.

lism was still important to the critics, as was "quaintness," "picturesqueness," and mystery[6]: in his time Melville was praised for these latter three qualities and the meaning of his works ignored. Bickley puts this phenomenon into perspective:

> To generalize for a moment about contemporaneous criticism of the short story at mid-century, we note two or three trends in the major criticism. The literary public, at least, seems to have been interested in descriptive competency and verisimilitude and stylistic artistry before almost all other criteria. Hawthorne was commended for his picturesque qualities, Poe and Hawthorne for their use of mysterious backdrops, and Poe and Simms for their realism. Character portrayal was of secondary importance to the critics, and plot and form received even less consideration; it would seem that Poe's concern for structure and unity was not shared by others. Finally, and this will be of major importance when we turn to Melville's short fiction, the reviewers either did not appreciate or for some reason largely chose to ignore the problem of greater implications and subtleties of meaning in the stories they read.[7]

[6] Robert Bruce Bickley, Jr., "Literary Influences and Technique in Melville's Short Fiction," Doctoral Diss. Duke Univ. 1969, p.52. A large part of this thesis appears in Bickley's new book, The Method of Melville's Short Fiction (Durham, North Caroline:Duke Univ. Press, 1975).

[7] "Literary Influences and Technique in Melville's Short Fiction," p.30.

If Bickley is correct, Melville's theory of the short story did not differ dramatically from the expectations of his literary public: "I see Melville's critical doctrines as falling into four main categories... Of primary importance are originality of character and the realistic, truthful treatment of material; meaning and, fourthly, structure receive less emphasis in terms of the amount of space devoted to them, although, as shall be seen, meaning is an implicit part of Melville's consideration of character and realism."[8] Where Melville did differ with the critics was in his theories of allegory and symbolism. As a consequence of this, both Moby Dick and, particularly, Pierre were critical failures. This fact of life was no doubt borne in mind when Melville turned wholeheartedly to short-fiction writing in 1853. The symbolism and levels of allegory which are implicit in many of these stories are less obtrusive, or buried as landmines should be. More importantly, Melville "modified his rhetoric," relying more on irony and understatement to make his points.[9] As a result, Melville's short fiction

[8]"Literary Influences and Technique in Melville's Short Fiction," p.33.

[9]The Method of Melville's Short Fiction, pp.21-22.

met with substantial success, a matter of irony, surely, insofar as the literary public in a great many instances did not understand what, in fact, Melville had in mind.

For the remainder of this chapter, Melville's short fiction of the 1853-56 period, with the exception of the stories found in The Piazza Tales, will be discussed to the extent that they share certain themes with the Tales and are marked by a similar tone and technique. While these stories lack the drama and depth of some of The Piazza Tales, they are nevertheless entertaining and often provocative. They are approached in the order that they were written in order to form a chronological context to The Piazza Tales.

"Cock-A-Doodle-Do! Or the Crowning of the Noble Cock Beneventano" was published in Harper's in the same month that the second part to "Bartleby" appeared in Putnam's, December of 1853. It may be viewed generally, as Barrett sees it, as a satire on the "cheer up old man" philosophy,[10] or more specifically, as Hoyle correctly claims, as a "parody of Thoreauvian transcendentalism."[11]

[10] Barrett, p.79.

[11] Hoyle suggests that Melville found "the germ of the story" in Thoreau's "Walking," p.103. See also Egbert S.

"Cock-A-Doodle Do!" begins in much the same way as "The Piazza" with the narrator sallying "out to walk on my hillside pasture."[12] His depression, caused by a "miserable world" in which train crashes are ordained by "the heavens themselves" (p.212), is liberated by a triumphant cock-crow. This cock-crow draws him into a fantasy world of well-being, quite divorced from reality. The narrator's attempts to locate the cock-crow become immediately as frustrating as those of the narrator of "The Piazza" in the latter's first attempts at locating the visual illusion of Marianna's house.[13]

Oliver's "'Cock-A-Doodle-Do!' and Transcendental Hocus-Pocus," New England Quarterly, XXI (June 1948), pp.204-16.

[12] Selected Writings of Herman Melville, Modern Library edition (New York:Random House, 1952), p.112. All future references to Melville's short fiction will be to this text with the page number appearing directly after the quotation cited. The short stories in Selected Writings were printed from the same plates as those used in Jay Leyda's definitive The Complete Stories of Herman Melville (New York:Random House, 1949).

[13] In view of the fact that the cock-crow in "Cock-A-Doodle-Do!" is a source of illusion and the sun in "The Piazza" has a similar function (with Marianna's house the object of the illusion), it is interesting that Melville's narrator in "Cock-A-Doodle-Do!" refers to the cock as "Brother of the Sun"(p.129).

Finally and significantly, the narrator of "Cock-A-Doodle-Do!" notes, "I began to think there was some sort of deception in this mysterious thing" (p.135).

When the narrator leaves his house to pay Merrymusk for having sawed and split his wood, he is much like the narrator of "The Piazza" on a quest which concludes at Marianna's abode. Alluding to this similarity, Bickley states, "'Cock-A-Doodle-Do' and 'The Piazza'... are stories with surprisingly complete ties with the tradition of quest literature, for both contain archetypal elements of the voyage out from the home, the Perilous Passage, the second house with its vision, and the return."[14] Merrymusk's house, like that of Marianna, lies "in a very lonely part of the country" (p.138) and is equally depressing. On a return visit, the narrator witnesses not only the same poverty, but the deaths of Merrymusk and his family. The story ends almost paradoxically with the narrator announcing that he has never since felt "the doleful dumps" (p.147), apparently still persuaded by the illusion of well-being - despite the tragic scene offered by the Merrymusk house and its pompous contrast, a cock.

[14] "Literary Influences and Technique in Melville's Short Fiction," p.256. For a further discussion of this, see The Method of Melville's Short Fiction, pp.212-23.

There is much in this story which lends itself to comparison with The Piazza Tales. The theme of appearance, or illusion, versus reality and the attack on transcendental well-being surfaces most prominently. Merrymusk, as a symbol of stoical endurance, appears in different forms throughout the Tales. Like Bartleby, he is silent, but his tragic condition suggests a clue to Bartleby's mysterious past. There is a considerable amount of sexual punning at play throughout the story, too obvious to go into justifying Berthoff's premise that "the title and much of the language of the narration (!oh, noble cock! oh, noble man!') fairly flaunt a bitter sub-theme of man's enslavement to the force of sex."[15] This sexual punning appears frequently elsewhere in Melville's short fiction, including The Piazza Tales.

Also interesting in "Cock-A-Doodle-Do!" is Melville's stance on philosophy, if one can make the dangerous assumption that the narrator speaks on behalf of the author in this regard. The cock is referred to as "a philosophic crow" (p.127), a "bird of cheerful Socrates - the game-fowl Greek who died unappalled" (p.129).

[15] Warner Berthoff, ed., Great Short Works of Herman Melville (New York:Harper and Row, 1966), p.75.

At another point occurs this rather mock-heroic description: "Oh, brave cock! - oh, noble Shanghai! - oh, bird rightly offered up by the invincible Socrates, in testimony of his final victory over life" (p.128). That some peculiar association between the cock and Socrates is intended seems fairly apparent, although this is contrasted by the fact that Merrymusk lives a Socratic, or temperate, life. In order to clarify this seeming ambiguity, it is advantageous to make a distinction between Socrates, the man, and Socratic philosophy, as filtered through the eyes and ears of Plato. I think it is safe to say that Melville had a profound respect for the man, but not for the philosophy: in a sense, the earliest version of transcendentalism. Sealts confirms this in stating that Socrates was "one of his spiritual heroes"[16]; Sealts also points out quite convincingly how Melville reacted to Plato's philosophical system:

> Melville's attitude toward Plato's system of thought is best approached from the philosophical position of dualism. Plato's dualistic distinctions between body and soul, matter and spirit, sense-experience and spiritual perception, the mass of mankind and an aristocracy of ability, all were completely acceptable to Melville. Plato, as a

[16] Sealts, p.119.

> transcendental idealist, states these problems of early Greek philosophy only as a preliminary to the construction of his own system, which attempts to resolve the various dualisms into a higher monism. Melville, on the other hand, was so thoroughly grounded in the principles of dualism that such a procedure appeared to be merely a shallow evasion. Though reading Plato at the time of Mardi evidently did much to establish Melville as a dualist, he felt obliged in Pierre, after four years of meditation on Plato's theme, to denounce Platonism and all other forms of transcendental thought.[17]

"The Two Temples" was rejected by Putnam's in May of 1854, the same month that the third and final part of "The Encantadas" appeared in the magazine. The cause of the rejection stemmed from Melville's attack on the elitist Grace Church in New York, the subject of "Sketch First" and a subject which the editors at Putnam's considered too controversial to handle. The diptych, itself, is a rather entertaining and straightforward satire on not only Grace Church and its clientele, but on Christendom in general.

"Sketch First" outlines the adventures of a poor doctor who is able to attend service at a church frequented by the wealthy only by means of hiding in its bell-tower. When he is discovered, he is turned over to the

[17] Sealts, p.120.

police and made to pay a large fine. In "Sketch Second," the same American doctor finds himself penniless in London, England. In contrast to his reception in the American church, he is given a warm welcome and finds charity in an English theatre. The irony implicit in the doctor's discovery of peace in a secular, as opposed to a religious, temple is underscored by the fact that the motif of "Sketch Second" is ecclesiastical whereas that of "Sketch First" is theatrical.[18]

Although "The Two Temples" is well-written and is successful as a piece of social criticism, it does not have much in common with the stories which make up The Piazza Tales. Apart from the attack on Christendom and the doctor's use of a bell-tower as a point of observation (an echo of "Sketch Fourth" of "The Encantadas,"[19] and a locale which appears again in "The Bell-Tower"), the only other similarity worthy of comment arises from a statement of the doctor while in the church's tower: "Book in hand,

[18]John Paul Runden, "Imagery on Melville's Shorter Fiction: 1853-1856," Doctoral Diss. Indiana Univ. 1952, p.94.

[19]The doctor announces at one point: "I seemed gazing from Pisgah into the forests of old Canaan" (p.155) reminding one of the "Pisgah View from the Rock" in "The Encantadas."

responses on my tongue, standing in the very posture of devotion, I could not rid my soul of the intrusive thought, that, through some necromancer's glass, I looked down upon some sly enchanter's show" (p.153). The "sly enchanter" theme permeates the whole of The Piazza Tales, although characters such as the narrator of "The Piazza" and Delano from "Benito Cereno" are more successful than the doctor in ridding their souls "of the intrusive thought."

Subsequent to the rejection of "The Two Temples" by Putnam's, "Poor Man's Pudding and Rich Man's Crumbs" appeared in Harper's (June, 1854). Similar in style to "The Two Temples," "Poor Man's Pudding and Rich Man's Crumbs" is comprised of two contrasting sketches, the latter again set in England. Also, "Poor Man's Pudding and Rich Man's Crumbs" is concerned with the themes of charity[20] (or lack thereof) and class hypocrisy.

"Picture First: Poor Man's Pudding" is the more interesting of the two sketches in the diptych. It begins with a satirical blast at the naiveté of transcendentalism with the "Poet Blandmour" as its representative. Urged by

[20] Hoyle, p.122.

Blandmour to personally take in an example of providential nature, the narrator visits the poverty-stricken house of a woman named Martha. His quest is to discover if "Poor Man's Pudding" is as "relishable as a rich man's" (p.169). His discovery parallels that of the narrator in "The Piazza."

Martha is remarkably like the character of Marianna in "The Piazza." She has had, and is still experiencing, a most trying existence: one which is characterized by endurance and solitude. Martha, herself, states poignantly: "I am left so lonesome now; day after day, all the day long, dear William is gone; and all the damp day long grief drizzles and drizzles down my soul" (p.175). Her husband, William, is as Marianna's brother, an interruption in a depressing existence.

The narrator shrewdly notes the moral of the story: "Of all the preposterous assumptions of humanity over humanity, nothing exceeds most of the criticisms made on the habits of the poor by the well-housed, well-warmed, and well-fed" (p.177). This moral echoes throughout the whole of The Piazza Tales with the isolated protagonists "poor" in the sense that their needs, for one reason or another, have not been and cannot be fulfilled.

"Picture Second : Rich Man's Crumbs" is a straight-

forward piece of satire in which England is shown to be as guilty as America in perpetuating the myth of the happy, and well-cared-for, poor. In both of these sketches, Melville points out the tragic impossibility of understanding a condition which one has never experienced - nor is likely to, while sitting on a "comfortable sofa, before a blazing fire" (p.177).

The next two short stories, "The Happy Failure: A Story of the River Hudson" and "The Fiddler," were published in Harper's in July and September, respectively, of 1854, thus chronologically framing "The Lightning-Rod Man" (Putnam's, August, 1854). Both "The Happy Failure" and "The Fiddler" are examples of a philosophy of "acceptance," the narrators of which are shown to be successful in coping with what would constitute "failure" in most men's eyes.

"The Happy Failure" and "The Fiddler" are also closely aligned in that both deal with a "happy failure"[21] which is probably of autobiographical significance. The first story relates the experience of a man who is released from a self-imposed burden by accepting defeat. It may also be viewed as a criticism of science, as Hoyle

[21] See Barrett, p.75, and Hoyle, p.138.

points out, "The story suggests the absurdity of an illimitable faith in science, technology, and progress, and satirizes the pretentiousness of scientific jargon."[22] The object of the defeat is a contraption which is supposed to drain swamps. It becomes as Sisyphus's rock to the inventor over the years until he ironically discovers happiness in a resignation to failure.

"The Fiddler" is a more challenging short story although still subject to cliché. It concerns the narrator's encounter with a sincere, gay person named Hautboy, whose music acts as a cock-crow in raising the narrator's spirits. Hautboy is described in a manner suggestive of the two-sided tortoise in "The Encantadas" and appears to be as close to Melville's conception of the ideal person as possible:

> It was plain that while Hautboy saw the world pretty much as it was, yet he did not theoretically espouse its bright side nor its dark side. Rejecting all solutions, he but acknowledged facts. What was sad in the world he did not superficially gainsay; what was glad in it he did not cynically slur; and all which was to him personally enjoyable, he gratefully took to his heart. It was plain, then - so it seemed at the moment, at least, that his extraordinary

[22] Hoyle, p.139.

> cheerfulness did not arise either from deficiency of feeling or thought. (pp.235-36)

When the narrator discovers that Hautboy was a great, child prodigy, who is happy despite the condition of being forgotten by the same public which had once worshipped him, he buys a fiddle, and proceeds to take lessons. The lessons, of course, which the narrator takes from Hautboy concern how to adjust to the failure of one's no longer being in the public eye.

"The Paradise of Bachelors and The Tartarus of Maids" is Melville's last diptych of the 1853-56 creative writing period. It was published in Harper's in April of 1855, five months before the publication of "The Bell-Tower" in Putnam's, and shares with "The Bell-Tower" a noticeable degree of sexual symbolism.

The first sketch, "The Paradise of Bachelors," traces the narrator's visit to the Templars' "Paradise" for a dinner invitation. The scene is a merry, carefree one with a distinct emphasis placed upon "Comfort - fraternal, household comfort" (p.193).[23] The bachelors are all

[23]The "household comfort" which characterizes the Templars' "Paradise" is not unlike Blandmour's situation: sitting on a "comfortable sofa" (p.177), oblivious to the needs of others.

"easy hearted men" (p.193) who ignore the possibility of hardship or, for that matter, any existence which does not mirror their own:

> The thing called pain, the bugbear styled trouble - those two legends seemed preposterous to their bachelor imaginations. How could men of liberal sense, ripe scholarship in the world, and capacious philosophical and convivial understandings - how could they suffer themselves to be imposed upon by such monkish fables? Pain! Trouble! As well talk of Catholic miracles. No such thing. - Pass the sherry, sir. - Pooh, pooh! Can't be - The port, sir, if you please. Nonsense; don't tell me so. - The decanter stops with you, sir, I believe. (pp.193-94)

Their dinner is like that of the kings in "Rich Man's Crumbs" and their attitude is not very different.[24] The various courses and rounds of liqueur are "superintended by a surprising old field-marshal" who has "a head like Socrates" (p.191) and who, thereafter, is called "Socrates" (p.193). These allusions appear to be of a descriptive nature only, although one is tempted to draw a parallel between the alcohol and food responsible for the bachelors' immediate state of euphoria and the Socratic

[24] Richard Harter Fogle, Melville's Shorter Tales (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1960), p.14, points out, "A 'bachelor' in Melville's fiction is a man who has not wedded reality, a man who sees half of life but not the whole."

or Platonic system of thought which ignores the possibility of a primal evil force. The references to Socrates are not sufficiently developed so as to allow any kind of interpretation other than conjecture; they serve, however, as another indication that Socrates was on Melville's mind during this period.

Also of interest, although equally inconclusive, is the womb-like condition of the bachelors. Going to the Temple is "like stealing from a heated plain into some cool, deep glen, shady among harboring hills" (p.185); it is a return to innocence from the reality (din and mud) of Fleet Street - "where the Benedick tradesmen are hurrying by, with ledger-lines ruled along their brows, thinking upon the rise of bread and the fall of babies." The Temple is described as "a honey-comb of offices and domiciles"; "like any cheese it is quite perforated through and through in all directions with the snug cells of bachelors" (p.189). Finally, the narrator's desire for a return to innocence, "Carry me back to old Virginny" (p.189), implies, I think, not only a return to virginity, but also to the shelter of the womb.

The womb-imagery, like the references to Socrates, is not developed into a consistent train of thought. It suggests a tantalizing possibility, but nothing definite. Runden might well be correct in asserting of the imagery

in "The Paradise of Bachelors" that, "Those images having an anticipatory value for the second half of the diptych form in themselves no such pattern of symbol and allegory as that discernible in 'The Tartarus of Maids.'"[25]

"The Tartarus of Maids" is not only an attack on the Industrial Revolution factory, it is an incredibly complex "allegory of the gestation period."[26] Eby, the first to recognize this allegory, Chase, and Runden, all deal thoroughly with the gestation theme, so there is no need here for me to duplicate their work.[27]

Beneath the surface of the story, yet another scene is painted: that of Dante's Inferno.[28] One approaches the gorge of "Devil's Dungeon" through scenery which becomes progressively bleak, until one stands before "a Dantean gateway" (p.195). Descending still deeper into the walled

[25]Runden, p.116.

[26]Hoyle, p.154.

[27]See E.H. Eby, "Herman Melville's 'Tartarus of Maids'," Modern Language Quarterly, I (March, 1940), pp.95-100; Richard Chase, Herman Melville:A Critical Study (New York:MacMillan, 1949), pp.159-163; and Runden, pp.102-112.

[28]Fogle has also pointed out the significance of the Inferno in this story, pp.50-51.

gorge, one arrives at the Dungeon itself, a factory with "a rude tower" (p.199), beside which "redly and demonically boiled Blood River" (p.200), the river Phlegethon. Just as the "Sowers of Discord" are continually attacked "by a Demon with a sword,"[29] the girls in the "rag-room" whet "the very swords that slay them" (p.205). The area of the Dungeon is so cold that it freezes the narrator's cheeks; likewise, the region of Cocytus is eternal frozen cold. The correspondences may be developed further, but it may suffice to say within the confines of this chapter that there is a Dantean allegory in addition to the more overt gestation allegory. Moreover, the Dantean allegory informs the gestation allegory to the extent that the girls employed in the mill appear not as innocent victims, but as sinners suffering for past deeds. Also of interest insofar as the girls are representative of the "Sowers of Discord" is the fact that the narrator, himself, is a seedsman. The narrator is accordingly implicated in the evil implicit in the Devil's Dungeon; this helps to explain why the narrator uses the services of the paper-mill even after he has witnessed the pitiful conditions

[29] Dorothy L. Sayers, trans., The Comedy of Dante Alighiere: Cantica I: Hell (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1949) p.246.

under which its employees are made to work.

"Jimmy Rose," published in Harper's in November of 1855 (the same month that the second installment to "Benito Cereno" appeared in Putnam's), lacks the complexity of "The Paradise of Bachelors and The Tartarus of Maids" but is of interest nevertheless. Jimmy Rose's house, now the property of the narrator, exemplifies the theme of endurance so visible in many of the other short stories: "Nevertheless, in this old house of mine, so strangely spared, some monument of departed days survived" (p.241). Jimmy, himself, is described in a very similar fashion to that of a number of sorrowful characters in Melville's short fiction of this period. He is "lonely" and "abandoned" (p.247) but is able to maintain his rosey cheeks and a Hautboy-like attitude:

> And besides the roses, Jimmy was rich in smiles. He smiled ever. The lordly door which received him to his eleemosynary teas, knew no such smiling guest as Jimmy. In his prosperous days the smile of Jimmy was famous far and wide. It should have been trebly famous now. (p.250)

Also like Hautboy, Jimmy is reduced to anonymity after a relatively brief flash in the public eye. Unable to cope as successfully with this transition as was Hautboy, Jimmy turns to begging instead of a career. He visits those houses which he had visited when he was rich in an attempt to go back in time. Even at death, Jimmy

lives in an illusion, unable to make the adjustment to harsh reality; he says of the girl nursing him:

> 'Why will she bring me this sad old stuff? Does she take me for a pauper? Thinks she to salve a gentleman's heart with Poor Man's Plaster?' (p.253)

"Jimmy Rose" is the tragic story of a casualty of changing fortune. With his former paradisiacal existence punctured as though a dream, Jimmy could not adjust to what was left.

"I and My Chimney" was published a month after "The Piazza" (March 1856, Putnam's) and, although it was too late to be included in The Piazza Tales, it shares with the latter tale a number of interesting similarities. In this regard, most worthy of note is the character of the narrator, as Berthoff points out:

> The speaker in this extended monologue is of the same moral type as those in 'Jimmy Rose' and 'The Lightning-Rod Man': genial and essentially forbearing despite a rather melancholy old man's understanding of the world's incorrigible heartlessness in its dealings with men (and of humankind's corresponsive folly), but increasingly inclined to keep at a safe distance from it and stick fast to certain inoffensive private comforts.[30]

[30] Berthoff, p.327.

Much as the narrator of "I and My Chimney" seeks "to keep at a safe distance" from the "world's incorrigible heartlessness," the narrator of "The Piazza" seeks to keep to his piazza which is "a safe distance" from the reality experienced by Marianna. The narrator of "I and My Chimney" also has in common with the piazza-owner a desire for a comfortable life:

> Judge how to me, who, sitting in the comfortable shadow of my chimney, smoking my comfortable pipe, with ashes not unwelcome at my feet, and ashes not unwelcome all but in my mouth; and who am thus in a comfortable sort of not unwelcome, though, indeed, ashy enough way, reminded of the ultimate exhaustion even of the most fiery life; judge how to me this unwarrantable vitality in my wife must come, sometimes, it's true, with a moral and a calm, but oftener with a breeze and a ruffle. (p.385)

There are other echoes of The Piazza Tales as well. The narrator's light-hearted reference to his wife's schemes cast her, but humourously so, into the role of a Babo: "She is desirous that, domestically, I should abdicate; that renouncing further rule, like the venerable Charles V, I should retire into some sort of monastery" (p.387). The narrator's final determination, after some wavering, to defend his chimney from the onslaughts of his wife directly parallels that of the amiable narrator of "The Lightning-Rod Man," who is called upon to defend both himself and his home from the salesman.

Most of the scholarly debate on "I and My Chimney" surrounds the meaning of the chimney. The short story is generally seen as being autobiographical with the chimney serving as Melville's alter ego[31]; in most interpretations, the chimney is also given phallic significance.[32] There is little doubt that the chimney appears as the narrator's other self as it is repeatedly placed in apposition to the narrator and given a peculiar personification:

> I and my chimney, two grey-headed old smokies, reside in the country. We are, I may say, old settlers here; particularly my chimney, which settles more and more every day. (p.373)

and later,

> But I and my chimney must explain; and, as we are both rather obese, we may have to expatiate. (p.374)

The interpretation of the chimney as having phallic significance is more open to conjecture, but is certainly in keeping with the imagery of this period. In many respects, the chimney is reminiscent of the rod in "The Lightning-Rod Man" and the tower in "The Bell-Tower,"

[31] See Berthoff, p.327; Barrett, P.75; Hoyle, pp.185-191; and Sealts, "Herman Melville's 'I and My Chimney,'" American Literature, XIII (May, 1941), pp.142-154.

[32] For example, see Hoyle, pp.185-191.

although Hoyle claims that in this case it is symbolic of impotence.[33]

There is one other point worthy of mention in the short story, particularly if the tale is autobiographical, and that is the narrator's attitude toward philosophy. On one occasion, philosophy qua philosophy is attacked as a fruitless guest: "The consequence was, almost every room, like a philosophical system, was in itself an entry, or passage-way to other rooms, and systems of rooms... Going through the house, you seem to be forever going somewhere, and getting nowhere" (p.389). But on another occasion, the narrator paradoxically announces:

> The truth is, my wife, like all the rest of the world, cares not a fig for my philosophical jabber. In dearth of other philosophical companionship, I and my chimney have to smoke and philosophize together. And sitting up so late as we do at it, a mighty smoke it is that we two smoky old philosophers make. (p.406)

I think that the apparent confusion in the narrator's attitude toward philosophy can be clarified if one makes the distinction between a fixed system of thought and that brand of open-ended philosophy which takes place between

[33] Hoyle, p.191; Prof. Hoyle also sees the chimney as a "momument to chastity."

two old men sitting before a fireplace. The narrator's sentiments are obviously with the latter, although sadly his only companion is a chimney.

"The 'Gees" appeared in Harper's at the same time as "I and My Chimney" appeared in Putnam's, March of 1856. "The 'Gees" has nothing in common with the latter story, however, being more of a sketch of the Portuguese sailor, his character and descendants. As a work of art, its sole distinction lies in the questionable insight of a biased narrator who attacks bigots but, himself, describes the 'Gees in animal imagery. Consequently, the opinions of the narrator are as misleading as those of most of Melville's narrators in this short fiction period.

"The Apple-Tree Table, Or Original Spiritual Manifestations," published in Putnam's in May of 1856, is Melville's last short story of this creative writing period and, conceivably, the most entertaining. The apple-tree table is taken down from the narrator's attic only to become the source of peculiar noises which the narrator's family (with the noticeable exception of his wife) fear to be of supernatural origin. Like "I and My Chimney" the plot is related tongue-in-cheek with the narrator, himself, often the butt of the humour. Furthermore, he is dominated by his wife in much the same way as is the narrator of "I and My Chimney," with the results being just as humourous.

There is little symbolism in the story apart from the birth/rebirth theme found in the resurrection of the bug, the actual source of the noise, from the table. Rather, like "I and My Chimney," it is more an introspective work insofar as the narrator's thoughts and actions (and often reactions) form the essence of the story as they take shape in response to a rather mock-heroic challenge.

Given, then, that there are numerous similarities between Melville's uncollected short fiction and the microcosm of The Piazza Tales, let us now turn individually to the stories which comprise the Tales and focus in detail upon the universe which is therein presented. Melville's uncollected fiction will once again merit attention in the conclusion of this thesis when I argue the case for "division" in The Piazza Tales.

Chapter III

"The Piazza"

"The Piazza," completed in February of 1856, is the title story of The Piazza Tales and serves as an introduction to the collection in much the same way as Hawthorne's "The Old Manse" introduces his Mosses from an Old Manse. Melville had at first discarded the idea of "some sort of prefatory matter." The fact that he changed his mind is of significance. Ilse S.M. Newbery points out in her doctoral dissertation, "The Unity of Melville's Piazza Tales," that the new introduction resulted in a rearrangement of the stories which suggests "that a common theme might have proposed itself to Melville, which would impose some sort of order on the medley of stories."[1] Bearing this observation in mind, the themes which will be discussed in this chapter are not only interesting in themselves but, when repeated

[1]Newbery, p.54, indicates that the original collection was to be entitled Benito Cereno and Other Stories with the tales in the following order: "Benito Cereno," "Bartleby," "The Bell-Tower," "The Encantadas," and "The Lightning-Rod Man." Upon completing "The Piazza," Melville changed the name of the collection to The Piazza Tales with the stories in the revised order as follows: "The Piazza," "Bartleby," "Benito Cereno," "The Lightning-Rod Man," "The Encantadas," and "The Bell-Tower." Both of these arrangements differ from the order in which the stories were published: "Bartleby," "The Encantadas," "The Lightning-Rod Man," "The Bell-Tower," "Benito Cereno," and "The Piazza."

in the subsequent stories, may be assumed to be of an organizational nature. If the following stories have much in common with "The Piazza," then the collection is strongly unified; but if any of the following tales has little in common with "The Piazza," an argument for unity in The Piazza Tales becomes suspect.

"The Piazza" is a parable-like story with its roots in Plato's The Republic. It begins with the narrator in a state of aesthetic withdrawal, "removed into the country" and occupying an "old-fashioned farm-house" (p.437). The surrounding countryside is described as a "picture" and in the first four paragraphs allusions to this description (e.g. "painting,""picture-gallery") occur nine times. The view, then, from the position of the narrator is tantamount to a work of art; that is, by Plato's definition, it is a deception, telling us nothing about life:

> The artist's representation is therefore a long way removed from truth, and he is able to reproduce everything because he never penetrates beneath the superficial appearance of anything. For example, a painter can paint a portrait of a shoemaker or a carpenter or any other craftsman without knowing anything about their craft at all; yet, if he is skillful enough, his portrait of a carpenter may, at a distance, deceive children or simple people into thinking it is a real carpenter.[2]

[2]Plato, The Republic, trans. by H.D.P. Lee (Harmondsworth:Penguin Books, 1955), p.374.

The narrator of "The Piazza" is vulnerable to just such a deception; he is in "A very paradise of painters" (p.437) within a "monastery of mountains" (p.439) where the beholder is "to feast upon the view" (p.438). The scene parallels that of "The very Paradise of Bachelors" (p.195), discussed in the previous chapter, where the Templars feast in "quiet cloisters" "down a dim, monastic way" (p.185). The narrator of "The Piazza" may be likened, then, to the narrator of "The Paradise of Bachelors." The latter gentleman is distinguished by a certain obtuseness of perception and shares with the Templars a sincere regard for a euphoric existence which ignores the realities of "pain" and "trouble" (p.193). If possessing a similar state of mind were not sufficient deficiency in encountering pictorial deception, the narrator of "The Piazza" finds himself in a euphoric fog which can only cloud his perceptions. Once again, much as the Templars' "Paradise" is "dreamy" (p.185), the narrator of "The Piazza" is in a "poppy-bed" with "sleeping meadow" close at hand, and later in the story is found to be reading A Midsummer-Night's Dream.[3] The chances of either narrator shaking

[3]Bickley, "Literary Influences and Technique in Melville's Short Fiction: 1853-1856," p.225, and The Method of Melville's Short Fiction, p.130, suggests that the

himself free of his illusory paradise are unlikely for one prefers "fraternal, household comfort" (p.193) while the other longs for a piazza which will afford him the "coziness of in-doors" (p.437).

Finally, the piazza is built and replaces the poppy-bed as the "easy chair" (p.438). The chair is "easy" because the piazza is as a "bower" (p.440), a comfortable retreat from reality. The comparison of the piazza to the pew is most disquieting, although never quite developed. The implication made is that the pew is an "easy chair" before which a deception unfolds, a fair explanation for "these times of failing faith" (p.438).

Seated in his piazza before a "picture-gallery" "with pictures ever fading into pictures ever fresh" (p.438), the narrator is essentially in Plato's cave

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Marianna episode may not be real as the dream imagery would seem to indicate. I am not in sympathy with such an argument, however. Melville uses dream and enchantment imagery to create a mood of mysticism which is then commonly shattered by reality, and to construct an arena where he can record the effects of a euphoric state of mind on perception.

watching images and shadows play on the wall.[4] This is rather graphically underlined by the following passage:

> and the hermit-sun, hutted in an Adullan cave, well towards the south, according to his season, did little else but, by indirect reflection of narrow rays shot down a Simplon pass among the clouds, just steadily paint one small, round, strawberry mole upon the wan cheek of Northwestern hills... One spot of radiance, where all else was shade. (p.442; my italics)

It must be remembered that the narrator has gone to great lengths to inform the reader that his piazza faces the north (pp.439-440). The passage cited above indicates that the sun is in a "cave" directly behind him. The sun is like the fire in Plato's cave; Melville points out that it "kindled a golden sparkle" (p.442) in the mountains. Just as the prisoners in Plato's cave cannot see the fire behind them, the narrator's house stands between him and the sun. In front of the narrator, the mountains "play at hide-and-seek," a game of deception realized through the changing shade. Under "certain witching conditions of light and shadow" (p.441), however, the narrator spies the

[4] Plato, pp.278-286. For a more complete understanding of "The Simile of the Cave," the reader is invited to read "The Good As Ultimate Object of Knowledge," pp.265-274, and "The Divided Line," pp.274-278.

"mole" which is painted by the "hermit-sun." He will later discover that this "spot of radiance" is no more real than the false images which have fooled the prisoners in Plato's cave.

On the morning of his rather Spenserian quest, the narrator finds himself disturbed by the thought of his Chinese creeper. While presenting the healthy appearance (ie. the picture of health) of being in bloom, the plant is being devoured by "millions of strange, cankerous worms" (p.443). Characteristically, and a presentiment of what is to follow, the narrator cannot "bear to look" at the plant. His thoughts take refuge in the Acadian atmosphere of the morning and he determines at once to seek out "the queen of fairies at her fairy window" (p.444). As one might expect of this fantastic, somewhat childish, state of mind, the narrator remains convinced that fairy-land is at the end of the rainbow.

Seduced from his bower by the object in the mountains, the narrator travels through a fairy-tale setting which is peopled by "enchanted" cattle and golden-rods. Before long, he arrives at a curious fork-in-the road. One route is an "astral path" a "milky-way of white weed" down through which he is beckoned by "wigged old Aries" (p.444). This path is suggestive of the spiritual or philosophic, although the internal evidence to substan-

tiate this is sketchy.[5] The narrator chooses the second, more fertile path of the "forbidden ground" (p.445) and moves through a time-tunnel of wintergreen, littered by remnants of mankind, to arrive at a lush, archetypal paradise.[6]

The narrator's inland voyage to fairy-land has thus far been a promenade into the illusory painting. Piazza behind, he bites of the forbidden fruit, one of "Eve's apples" (p.445), and is given a glimpse of truth. What he sees is reality: "fruitless growths," "barren heights," a run-down cottage, and "a lonely girl, sewing at a lonely window" (pp.446-47).[7]

[5]Newbery views it as a sterile path "which would lead away from earthly goals and an earthly path, namely the 'green' path... ," p.76.

[6]Ibid., p.77. Newbery was the first to notice that "the ascent in the forest becomes a descent into time." She sees the orchard "with its connotations of "paradise" as "the heart of creation." The reader, however, must be aware that what is seen is filtered through the narrator's mind.

[7]Bickley, "Literary Influences and Technique in Melville's Short Fiction : 1853-1856," p.221, shows clearly and comprehensively that the "lonely girl" derives from Tennyson's Marianna poems: "Marianna" (1830) and "Marianna in the South" (1833). See also The Method of Melville's Short Fiction, pp.128-129.

Marianna appears to be in a cave of her own, similar to the one which the narrator has left behind. This is exemplified by the illusion under which she suffers that the narrator's house is a happy one: a belief particularly reinforced by sunsets when the sun is positioned behind her (p.449). Her existence is one of shadows, a world in which "shadows are as things" (p.450).[8] Accordingly, she has projected on them a peculiar sense of substance: one is "Tray," "the shaggy dog" (p.450), while another, the shadow of a birch since struck by lightning, is lamented as having been "the friendliest one" (p.451). In a startling echo of The Republic, the narrator notes that "deafness might have forgot itself, or else believed that noiseless shadow spoke" (p.451).[9]

As Merton M. Sealts points out in his doctoral dissertation "Herman Melville's Reading in Ancient Philosophy," perception of shadows is "for Plato the lowest form of

[8]Robert Dorset Graves, "Polarity in the Shorter Fiction of Herman Melville," Doctoral Diss. Duke Univ. 1966, p.59, alludes to this by way of imagery: "From the moment of the narrator's meeting Marianna, the imagery of color is replaced almost wholly by imagery of darkness." Such imagery is apropos for a metaphorical cave.

[9]The setting described in this paragraph would seem to have been drawn from the following passages of The Republic, p.279:

sense-perception."[10] That Marianna would seem to be at such a low ebb is further underscored by the fact that she refuses to break her bonds and increase her awareness of her situation. She confesses to the narrator, "The shadows hereabouts I know - those in the woods are strangers" (p.452).

An overall view of Marianna's position, however, finds it to be surprisingly ambiguous. Perhaps because Marianna's level is higher than that of the narrator's

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"Then if they were able to talk to each other, would they not assume that the shadows they saw were real things?"

"Inevitably."

"And if the wall of their prison opposite them reflected sound, don't you think that they would suppose, whenever one of the passers-by on the road spoke, that the voice belonged to the shadow passing before them?"

"They would be bound to think so."

"And so they would believe that the shadows of the objects we mentioned were in all respects real."

"Yes, inevitably."

[10] Sealts, p.100, helps put what I have said in perspective. "Another instance of Melville's indebtedness to Plato is his use of shadow imagery... According to Socrates, visible objects are but the shadow of reality; the material world of the senses is a realm of shadowy illusion. True reality exists only in the world of ideas, seen by the spiritual eye when illuminated by the sun of reason. 'Oh! how immaterial are all materials!' cries Melville's Ahab. 'What things real are there, but imponderable thoughts?'"

earlier position, she mentions on two occasions that "The sun is a good sun."[11] Her condition is one of "weariness and wakefulness" (p.451), a contrast to the narrator's seemingly perpetual euphoric state and a condition which Warner Berthoff calls "discouragement and stoical endurance."[12] In this light, Marianna is like the "survivor" to which the narrator alludes early in the story, "an elm, lonely through steadfastness" (p.437).

Unlike the dreamy narrator, Marianna is committed to thought: "Thinking, thinking - a wheel I cannot stop" (p.452). Her "knowledge" of shadows appears to the narrator "like a second sight" (p.451), reminiscent of the vision of the mind in the "Intelligible World."[13] Moreover, what are "strange fancies" to the narrator but "reflect the things" to Marianna (p.449), again indicating a second sense of perception. Even Marianna's fixation with the narrator's house is ultimately considered by her to be a "foolish thought." Despite the evidence which

[11] Plato, "The Good As Ultimate Object of Knowledge," pp.265-274, uses the sun as symbolic of "The Good."

[12] Berthoff, p.383.

[13] Plato, p.272.

suggests Marianna is in a cave of her own, one is tempted to view her as one who has surfaced only to be blinded by the sun.[14] Indeed, she is in many senses like the prisoner in Plato's cave who, having looked into the face of the fire, turns to the accustomed shadows:

> 'Then think what would naturally happen to them if they were released from their bonds and cured of their delusions. Suppose one of them were let loose, and suddenly compelled to stand up and turn his head and look and walk towards the fire; all these actions would be painful, and he would be too dazzled to see properly the objects of which he used to see the shadows. So if he was told that what he used to see was mere illusion and that he was now nearer reality and seeing more correctly, because he was turned towards objects that were more real, and if on top of that he were compelled to say what each of the passing objects was when it was pointed out to him, don't you think he would be at a loss, and think that what he used to see was more real than the objects now being pointed out to him?'
>
> 'Much more real.'
>
> 'And if he were made to look directly at the light of the fire, it would hurt his eyes and he would turn back and take refuge in the things which he could see, which he would think really far clearer than the things being shown him.'
>
> 'Yes.'[15]

[14] Ibid., p.280. I think it is of some significance that Marianna announces that the sun "half burns, and nearly blinds me... " (p.449).

[15] Plato, pp.279-280.

As can be seen, Marianna does not lend herself to categorization as easily as does the narrator, nor do I think would Melville appreciate one fitting Marianna comfortably into a slot. She seems, nevertheless, to be moving toward a vision of "The Good" in Platonic symbolism; but until she can look at the sun, she is sentenced to burn in its purgatorial fires.

The narrator learns from Marianna's point of view. He becomes acquainted by first-hand experience with the deceptiveness of shadows and realizes that a picture can be illusory. But the narrator does not like the world of reality, the world in which the orphan Marianna lives. Like William Blake's Thel, he retreats to the world of innocence, sacrificing the vision that Marianna will acquire through perseverance in the realm of experience. Marianna, like the elm, will grow closer to the sun. The narrator prefers the safe route and, in doing so, he descends back in his cave. As he could not bear to look upon the reality of his dying Chinese creeper, he turns his back on Marianna, preferring the theatrical "illusion" of his "box-royal" (p.453). But even this "illusion" gives

way to the truth of darkness, a truth which permeates the following stories.[16]

In essence, "The Piazza" reveals two rather broad themes, one of which concerns the interplay, and sometimes confrontation, of appearance with reality, the second of which examines the terror of human isolation. The appearance theme manifests itself throughout the short story in the guise of a sort of paradise, accessible through a euphoric state of mind, or through faith, although Melville seems to equate the two. The appearance is then contrasted with the reality of a situation with the result that a deception is revealed. In "The Piazza," the "spot of radiance," the scene from the pew, the Chinese creeper, and the narrator's own house, all appear deceptively before the narrator and he is ultimately quite satisfied with these illusions, preferring comfort to truth.

The second theme, that of human isolation, is more obvious although equally important, particularly in view of the stories to follow. Marianna is, of course, the

[16]The narrator's comment that "truth comes in with darkness" (p.453) suggests not only a pause from the trickery of the sun but also, symbolically, that the truth may be of a demonic nature, or source, or bleakly pessimistic.

epitome of loneliness; but the narrator, too, by his detached reserve (symbolized by his piazza), is in a state of solitude. Tragically, they do not bond together in companionship, a fact foreshadowed by the hop-vines symbol (p.452).[17] As the vines "trailed back whence they sprung," so do Marianna and the narrator go their separate ways.

What is worthy of some note in this short story is Melville's attitude toward the sun. Whereas for Plato it is symbolic of "Absolute Goodness," for Melville it is the source of considerable irony. The sun is the painter of the deceptive "spot of radiance" which fools the narrator into believing that a fairy can there be found; it is also the cause of the illusory shadows. Finally, Marianna's comments that the sun is "good" are followed by descriptions of how it "half burns" her and "scorches" and "rots" the roof. What Melville seems to have in mind in "The Piazza" is a supernatural prankster setting "the flies and wasps astir" (p.449) on a populace naive in faith.

[17] Newbery, p.87, states that "the whole cycle (The Piazza Tales) seems to be patterned on the image of the hop-vines.

Chapter IV

"Bartleby, the Scrivener: A Story of Wall-Street"

"Bartleby," which appeared in Putnam's in November and December of 1853, was Melville's first published short story of the 1853-56 period. It is certainly among the more modern of his tales, dealing with the theme of alienation in a capitalistic context, and remains with "Benito Cereno" one of the more controversial. Much of the critical interest is centered upon the as of yet unknown person from whom the enigmatic Bartleby was sketched; that is, if one can assume that there was indeed one mold for Bartleby. Most critics believe that the scrivener is Melville, although ingenious arguments have been made on behalf of Thoreau, Hawthorne and Adler.[1] In this chapter, as in the one previous[2] and the thesis as a whole, I have

[1]Leo Marx, "Melville's Parable of the Walls," Sewanee Review, LXI (Autumn 1953), p.603, Richard Chase, Herman Melville: A Critical Study (New York: MacMillan, 1949), pp.146-48, and Newton Arvin, Herman Melville (New York:William Sloane, 1950), p.242, see Bartleby as at least in part drawn from Melville; Egbert S. Oliver, "A Second Look at 'Bartleby,'" College English, 6 (May 1945), pp.431-439, and Fogle, p.20, see Bartleby as Thoreau; and Leon Howard, Herman Melville: A Biography (Berkeley:Univ. of California Press, 1951), p.208, as Adler.

[2]Newbery, p.64, states emphatically that "the narrator is definitely the author himself," but I remain unconvinced at this reading of "The Piazza." While there can

endeavored to resist the temptation of guessing who the characters may be "in real life." While I find the exercise of identification intriguing, it seems, particularly in the case of Melville's tales, to be a somewhat unproductive avenue. Melville's mastery of irony casts into question the thoughts and words of all of his narrators and most of his characters. Even if one were able to slice through this ambiguity and make a positive identification, which appears unlikely at this point, the discovery despite its obvious biographical significance would have only a peripheral effect upon the work of art under examination.

"The Piazza" and "Bartleby, The Scrivener; A Story of Wall Street" share many curious similarities including those traits which the narrators have in common. They are both "safe" men : the narrator of "The Piazza" sits in "the cool elysium" of a "northern bower"; while the narrator of

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be little doubt that Melville's clothes, ailments and mountainside, are described in the story, to announce that the narrator is ipso facto Melville is still quite a jump. Bits and pieces of Melville are in most of his narrators, "I and My Chimney" and "The 'Gees" serve as examples, but at least to my mind only one narrator comes close enough to the author to merit identification, that of "The Encantadas."

"Bartleby" lives "in the cool tranquility of a snug retreat." This detached "piazza" attitude is further enforced by the former's commitment to an "easy chair" view of life and the latter's conviction that "the easiest way of life is the best" (p.4). Finally, both narrators share one outstanding virtue: prudence. Of what is to be his new piazza, one announces "Upon but one of the four sides would prudence grant one what I wanted" (p.439); while the great John Jacob Astor declares of Bartleby's employer that his "first grand point" is "prudence" (p.4). It is more than coincidence that both narrators are bachelors. Their similarities in character, their want of a feeling of well-being severely hamper their ability to perceive reality for what it is, rather than for what they wish it could be. The narrator of "Bartleby," like the narrator of "The Piazza," is drawn temporarily from his comfortable world to view a mysterious character in a strange situation. Whether he gains from this experience, or whether his return to the hum-drum of Wall Street is simply a retreat to view life at a distance behind protective walls, is a question worthy of some consideration. To evaluate whether or not Bartleby's employer realizes a significant transition, or sense of personal growth, we will view him in his surroundings, paying attention to how he adapts to Bartleby and what is said by the narrator about his experience.

The first and lasting impression of the employer's environment, a world oppressive to Bartleby but almost paradisiacal to the employer, is that it is the world of capitalism. The walls which Bartleby encounters are those of Wall Street, the centre of commerce, and the walls of the Tombs, symbol of society at large. Stein comments on this world in "Bartleby : The Christian Conscience":

> As the narrator observes, and more acutely than he realizes, the perspective from his chambers is "deficient" in what the landscape painters call "life." No wonder: the impersonal machinery of trade and commerce has debased the natural vitality of human existence.[3]

The view from the narrator's chambers signals the fact that Wall Street, unlike the mountainside of "The Piazza," holds no false illusions of fairyland; rather, it is a world where money is made and where prestige is won or lost. Bartleby's employer, projecting an image of benevolence and almost camaraderie with the reader, provides us with the only illusions that exist in this short story: namely, the happy-go-lucky kind of reality which is filtered through his good-natured eyes.

[3]William Bysshe Stein, "Bartleby : The Christian Conscience," Bartleby the Scrivener, ed. Howard P. Vincent (Kent, Ohio:Kent State Univ. Press, 1966), p.106.

An indication of this bias in the narration of the story appears early as the employer paints the scenario of the tale. His description of the office-routine, and particularly of Turkey and Nippers is, as Berthoff phrases it, "Dickensian in its lively vernacular humor."[4] This humor, however, veils the fact that both Turkey and Nippers are simply neurotic individuals who are exploited by an employer. The "fatherly" image, which is what the employer likes to think he represents, is contradicted by the admission that he keeps Turkey and Nippers around because they are "useful" (p.8). Another admission, this time in terms of salary, is made with regard to the sixty-year-old Turkey: "The truth was, I suppose, that a man with so small a salary could not afford to sport such a lustrous face and a lustrous coat at one and the same time" (p.9). This remark is particularly poignant insofar as it comes a short time after the employer has indignantly declared, "I consider the sudden and violent abrogation of the office of Master in Chancery, by the new Constitution, as a - premature act; inasmuch as I had counted upon a life-lease of the profits, whereas I only received those of a few short years" (p.4).

[4]Berthoff, p.39.

Bartleby is hired to help with the extra work which comes with the Master's office.[5] He appears at the employer's door as "a motionless young man" who is "pallidly neat, pitiably respectable" and "incurably forlorn."[6] Sensing a bargain, the employer immediately puts Bartleby to work on his side of the office so, as the employer puts it, "to have this quiet man within easy call, in case any trifling thing was to be done" (p.11). Friedman, in "Bartleby and the Modern Exile," alludes to one of the employer's further improvements:

> To make his enclosure more complete still, the employer puts up a high green folding screen which entirely isolates Bartleby from his sight while not removing him from his commanding voice. Bartleby fits into this "satisfactory arrangement" with machine-like compliance, writing by sunlight and candlelight. The only thing that mars the employer's delight in Bartleby's application is the fact that he is not "cheerfully industrious" but writes on "silently, pallely, mechanically."[7]

[5]No one to date has pointed out the significance of the fact that Bartleby is hired to do work which is in essence apparently not necessary. The Master's office is later retired and not even the employer in his indignation can come up with a good reason for sustaining it. Simply stated: Bartleby has been assigned meaningless work.

[6]Both Runden, pp.18-19, and Graves, p.33, point out that Bartleby is described in imagery of whiteness, isolation, immobility and death.

[7]Maurice Friedman, "Bartleby and the Modern Exile," Bartleby the Scrivener, p.66.

Bartleby at first performs exceedingly well, but on the third day his peculiarity begins to show itself.[8] When summoned into the employer's office to do copying, Bartleby replies with the now quite famous words, "I would prefer not to" (p.13). Robert Dorset Graves follows the course of this negativity throughout the tale and finds, perhaps not surprisingly, "Of the thirty-two speeches assigned to Bartleby, thirteen contain a version of these words, fifteen are otherwise negative, and only three are free of words like 'not' and 'no'."[9] On each occasion of Bartleby's negativity, the employer's weakness of character reveals itself. At first, he thinks that Bartleby has not heard him correctly. When this theory is disproven, the employer postpones dismissing him using pressing business as an excuse. Later, when Bartleby "prefers not to" in front of Turkey and Nippers, the employer makes one of his

[8]Earlier in the story, the narrator mentions "the advent of Bartleby" (p.5). Here we see Bartleby withdrawing into himself "on the third day" before "necessity had arisen" (p.12). This word-play is later developed into a complex religious allegory of Matthew 25 as pointed out by H. Bruce Franklin in "Bartleby : The Ascetic's Advent," The Wake of the Gods : Melville's Mythology (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1966), pp.126-136. On this occasion, it is worthy of note that Bartleby's actions "on the third day" differ dramatically from Christ's: Bartleby begins his descent into the grave, instead of arising from it.

[9]Graves, p.34.

few astute comments: "It is not seldom the case that, when a man is browbeaten in some unprecedented and violently unreasonable way, he begins to stagger in his own plainest faith" (p.15). This is a pivotal point in the tale as it marks the first time that the employer's "faith" has been tested. It is paralled by the scene in "The Piazza" wherein the narrator bites of one of "Eve's apples" and is jarred by reality from his previous state of euphoria. If Bartleby is symbolically Christ, as the imagery has thus far implied,[10] then not only is the employer's faith in his sense of reality being tested, but also his faith in Christ.

The employer once again postpones consideration of the Bartleby phenomenon, continuing the pattern of finding excuses rather than coming to grips with the situation. Later in the tale, he uses "dinner hour" (p.19), superstition (p.26), "nervous resentment" (p.33), benevolence (p.34), and "Priestley on Necessity" (p.35), to procrastinate in dismissing the scrivener. Finally, because he is afraid of losing clients due to Bartleby's preferences, he moves his offices; in effect, the employer finally

[10]See footnote 8 of this chapter.

escapes making the decision as to what to do with the mysterious Bartleby. In doing so he, in an almost Pontius Pilate move, puts Bartleby at the mercy of someone else.

That the employer should act in such a way is characteristic in light of what has been said earlier in this chapter. The employer is not able to perceive reality for what it is. He admits his "blind inveteracy" (p.19) and accordingly can feel his way through "the dark," as it were, only through assumptions. Bartleby's refusals to cooperate serve to prick the employer's blissful state, disturbing his "easiest way of life" philosophy and opening the way for the employer to, metaphorically, see "the light." The following scene, in particular, dramatizes Bartleby's efforts to open the employer's eyes:

> The next day I noticed that Bartleby did nothing but stand at his window in his dead-wall revery. Upon asking him why he did not write, he said that he had decided upon doing no more writing.
>
> "Why, how now? What next?" exclaimed I, "do no more writing?"
>
> "No more."
>
> "And what is the reason?"
>
> "Do you not see the reason for yourself?" he indifferently replied.
>
> I looked steadfastly at him, and perceived that his eyes looked dull and glazed. Instantly it occured to me, that his unexampled diligence in copying by his dim window for the first few weeks of his stay with me might have temporarily impaired his vision. (p.28)

Bartleby's employer never does see "the light." Because he cannot make a realistic appraisal, his assumptions are always in error. He is like the prisoner in Plato's cave. Adept at predicting the future appearances of shadows, the employer discovers that his predictions and assumptions won't work with Bartleby. The latter person is a shadow, not of illusion but of reality. Drawn out of his cave, the employer uses reason to cope with Bartleby, lacking the "intelligence" implicit in the realm of reality.[11] Because of this deficiency in perception, the employer's observations in his dealings with Bartleby are misleading, as exemplified in the passage quoted above.

In answer to a question posed in the beginning of this chapter, Bartleby's employer does not experience any significant change in perception as a result of encountering Bartleby. Whenever on the verge of an insight, he retreats to the defences of reason and forms an assumption

[11] In Plato, p.281, H.D.P. Lee outlines in footnote 2 the states of perception in "The Simile of the Cave:" Illusion, Belief, Reason, Intelligence, and finally, Vision of the Form of Good. These correspondences to progressive states of perception have been most helpful to me in analyzing Melville's tales. Rarely, however, do Melville's characters fall comfortably into one of these slots; rather, they often appear to be in a transition period between two of them.

which is in essence a categorical mistake. Even his final assumption, the dead letter rationalization, serves as no guarantee that light has been shed on the mysterious Bartleby.

There can be little doubt that Bartleby is, as D.E.S. Maxwell phrases it, "a casualty of modern society."[12] He is alienated by the employer's walled-in capitalistic world, a realm wherein business necessities "tyrannize" over any other consideration (p.29).[13] He refuses to do the "trifling" things assigned to him and finally to copy altogether. This latter act is a sign of Bartleby's complete break with the employer's world; had this break not been achieved, Bartleby would have in time become a "copy" of Turkey and Nippers.

According to Friedman, "Bartleby's passive assertion is a demonstration that he exists as a self," a self "which stands without relation to other selves."[14] His passive resistence mirrors that of Thoreau and separates

[12] D.E.S. Maxwell, Herman Melville, "Profiles in Literature" (London:Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968), p.58.

[13] It is interesting to note that Plato, pp.335-365, considers tyranny to be the worst state of an individual, or society.

[14] Friedman, p.66.

him from the impersonal machinery of his environment. Bartleby's preferences, however, do not seem to be strictly the result of a confrontation with this machinery. His "disorder" also points "to a source which is spiritual rather than social or autobiographical."[15] In this sense, he shares with Marianna of "The Piazza" a number of striking similarities.

Both Marianna and Bartleby have been scarred in a brush with reality, the latter being fatally wounded. They are lonely people trapped in confining conditions, with a degree of vision superior to that of their respective narrators. Both are pale-faced and described as spectres: Marianna "haunts" the piazza-owner (p.453), while Bartleby is repeatedly referred to as a "ghost" (pp.19 and 37) and "apparition" (pp.21 and 37). Finally, both Marianna and Bartleby are passive in the face of overwhelming forces.

The prison of Marianna and Bartleby is isolation in the world of experience; it is the terrible acknowledgement of harsh reality. Because of their "intelligence," insight and sensitivity, Marianna and Bartleby appear to have pierced the mask of appearance and realized an

[15] Newbery, p.107.

epiphany equivalent to "looking at real things in the world outside the cave."[16]

Unlike the artist, Bartleby will not "copy" superficial reality, nor will he submit to a fraudulent existence. As a result of this nonconformity, Bartleby is sent to prison. Plato remarks that this is to be expected:

> Nor will you think it strange that anyone who descends from contemplation of the divine to the imperfections of human life should blunder and make a fool of himself, if, while blinded and unaccustomed to the surrounding darkness, he's forcibly put on trial in the law-courts or elsewhere about the images of justice or their shadows, and made to dispute about the conceptions of justice held by men who have never seen absolute justice.[17]

Bartleby's situation in the Tombs, or Halls of Justice, is a microcosm of his situation in the employer's capitalistic world. In effect, it is a descent into the cave after having seen "the light," as it were. His temporary blindness is a result of this transition.[18] Rather than "blunder and make a fool of himself," Bartleby

[16] H.D.P. Lee, The Republic, p.282.

[17] Plato, p.282.

[18] Newbery, p.125, feels that Bartleby has been blinded by the "white shroud" which blinds the visiters to Lapland in Chapter XLII of Moby Dick. In my Platonic

"prefers" silence. Even then, the grub-man offers him one last chance to view life from the piazza:

> 'Hope you find it pleasant here, sir, nice grounds - cool apartments - hope you'll stay with us some time - try to make it agreeable. What will you have for dinner today?' (p.44)

Bartleby rejects this invitation back to "step one," as he rejected doing the copying in the employer's office. He "prefers not to" take the easy route back to comfort, as did the narrator in "The Piazza." Plato explains this attitude in The Republic:

> "There was probably a certain amount of honour and glory to be won among the prisoners, and prizes for keen-sightedness for anyone who could remember the order of sequence among the passing shadows and so be best able to predict their future appearances. Will our released prisoners hanker after these prizes or envy this power or honour? Won't he be more likely to feel, as Homer says, that he would far rather be 'a serf in the house of some landless man,' or indeed anything else in the world, than live and

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approach, "the light" which Bartleby has seen is very much the equivalent of the "white shroud" and is suggestive of some primal evil force.

> and think as they do?"
> "Yes," he replied, "he would prefer anything to a life like theirs."[19] (my italics)

There are, indeed, honours and prizes in the world of capitalism, and we have seen through the late John Jacob Astor that glory can be won. This life does not interest Bartleby, however; he would far rather be "anything else in the world, than live and think as they do." Ultimately, Bartleby chooses death rather than living and thinking "as they do." In the meanwhile, he "would prefer anything to a life like theirs."

In The Wake of the Gods, H. Bruce Franklin suggests quite convincingly that upon one level "Bartleby" is an allegory of Mathew 25 and that the protagonist is a Christ-figure.[20] Added to this, Stein says, "Symbolically, the failure of the letters to reach the addresses parallels the failure of New Testament Epistles... to define the meaning and purpose of life."[21]

[19] Plato, p.281.

[20] Franklin, pp.126-136.

[21] Stein, p.111.

Franklin's interpretation of Bartleby as a Christ-figure fits extremely well into the "Simile of the Cave" approach to this tale. Bartleby has seen what others have not. This superior vision has the potential to lead others from the cave and, in this sense, he is their Saviour. But Bartleby rejects this responsibility, preferring not to lead others from their state of ignorance. He is a Christ who abandons his sheep, and this is why the narrator-employer declares, "Ah, Bartleby!, Ah, humanity" (p.47).[22]

[22] Chase confirms this interpretation viewing the narrator-employer as "unredeemed," pp.148-49.

Chapter V

"Benito Cereno"

"Benito Cereno" was published in Putnam's in October, November, and December, of 1855. It is based upon the Narrative of Voyages and Travels in the Northern and Southern Hemispheres (1817), which was written by "an actual Amasa Delano of Duxbury, Massachusetts."[1] In creating from the Narrative an exciting drama and an eerie mystery, Melville succeeds in utilizing the omnipresent third-person narrator for the first time in the tales of the 1853-56 period.[2] The narrator is used to bring Delano's second-hand fact to a plateau of suspense which is without equal in Melville's short fiction. The source of the Narrative also provides for Melville a foothold, or anchor, in reality. These elements combined result, I think, in a short story that rivals "Bartleby" for the distinction of being Melville's best tale. Indeed, Hoyle claims it is "regarded as Melville's magazine masterpiece."[3]

[1] Berthoff, p.238.

[2] Of the sixteen short stories that Melville wrote in this period, only two use the third-person narrator technique: "The Bell-Tower" and "Benito Cereno."

[3] Hoyle, p.160.

The meaning of "Benito Cereno" on a less superficial plane is still a matter of some debate. Ilse Newbery feels that the historical background is set during the reign of Ferdinand the Fifth, whereas Stein views the setting as that of Ferdinand the First.[4] On yet another level, H. Bruce Franklin maintains that "Benito Cereno" is the story of Charles V's Spain. As Delano first sees the San Dominick, it appears as a "white-washed monastery" (p.257), with the blacks, at a distance, looking like monks. According to Franklin, the "Black Friars were the Dominicans, who, unbridled by Charles V, became the principal sponsors of the Inquisition."[5] Melville even draws a direct comparison between Don Benito and Charles V:

> His manner on such occasions was, in its degree, not unlike that which may be supposed to have been his imperial countryman's, Charles V, just previous to the anchoritisk retirement of that monarch from the throne. (p.264)

When Don Benito later retires to a monastery, as did Charles V, the monk replaces Babo as the representative of the Church. In effect, the whiteness of the monastery, or ship, is a deceptive cover, or mask, for the blackness of

[4] Newbery, p.168.

[5] Franklin, pp.136-150.

the Church. Franklin's contention is particularly ingenious and one which may be valid. His theory, however, does not discount other possibilities for interpretation. In this chapter, I will be relying more on internal analysis in approaching "Benito Cereno" than perhaps does Franklin, and I will be relating what is uncovered to the preceding tales and, to a lesser extent, Plato's The Republic. In doing so, I think that the threads which most of the tales share become more visible.

Indirectly, the first sighting of the San Dominick occurs in "The Piazza" from the vantage-point of the narrator sitting in his new piazza:

> In summer, too, Canute-like; sitting here, one is often reminded of the sea. For not only do long ground-swells roll the slanting grain, and little wavelets of the grass ripple over upon the low piazza, as their beach, and the blown down of dandelions is wafted like the spray, and the purple of the mountains is just like the purple of the billows, and a still August moon broods upon the deep meadows, as a calm upon the line; but the vastness and the lonesomeness are so oceanic, and the silence and the sameness, too, that the first peep of a strange house, rising beyond the trees, is for all the world like spying, on the Barbary Coast, an unknown sail. (p.440)

The San Dominick is as Marianna's house, a mysterious illusion at a distance which changes appearance upon approach. Originally, the San Dominick is a "strange sail" (p.255). It then becomes a "white-washed monastery"

before the "appearance" is finally "modified" (p.257), revealing it to be a Spanish merchantman carrying negro slaves. Delano must enter still further into the picture before him to discover who, in fact, is in slavery. The people in the picture are acting in a play of deception. Delano, alone, is maskless, as he is but an intruder on stage: a member of the audience who does not know the plot.

As Delano's mate informs him of the sighting, Melville notes, "Shadows present, foreshadowing deeper shadows to come" (p.255). When Delano quits his ship, he is like the piazza-owner leaving his piazza to discover what the shadows mean; he is walking into a moving-picture in an attempt to discover what truth lies beyond it. This quest will be made difficult by the fact that Delano does not wish to think of the evil in men; in effect, he will be viewing the picture with one eye closed. The other eye will be accordingly called upon to make assumptions and rationalizations to make up for what it cannot see.

In this respect, Delano is remarkably like the narrator of "The Piazza" and "Bartleby." Not surprising is the fact that Delano's ship is called the "Bachelor's Delight" (p.273).[6] Delano is described as being good-natured and

[6]Hoyle, p.169, points out that Melville changed the original name of Delano's ship from Perseverance to

not quickly moved to "uneasiness" (p.256). Like the narrator of "The Piazza," who cannot "bear" to think of his Chinese creeper being eaten by worms, Delano "strove, by ignoring the symptoms, to get rid of the malady" (p.297). Like the narrator of "Bartleby," he congratulates himself on helping a stranger:

> During this interval, a sort of saddened satisfaction stole over Captain Delano, at thinking of the kindly offices he had that day discharged for a stranger. Ah, thought he, after good actions one's conscience is never ungrateful, however much so the benefited party may be. (p.324)[7]

Not only is Delano hampered from seeing into the reality of things by the "bachelor" mentality, but Melville strongly hints that he is marked by a certain obtuseness. Accordingly, Delano is presented to the reader as "a man of such native simplicity as to be incapable of

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Bachelor's Delight; Hoyle also claims that Delano's well-run ship is a veritable "paradise of bachelors." I find both of these observations to be of considerable significance and supportive of this discussion (i.e. the relationship of Delano to the piazza-owner and Bartleby's employer). "Perseverance" is a name better applied to Marianna, Bartleby, Don Benito and, later, Hunilla.

[7]Bartleby's employer says of his new employee, "Here I can cheaply purchase a delicious self-approval" (p.17).

satire or irony" (p.278). Thus equipped, Delano will find the illusion offered by the San Dominick to be more than confusing and will need more provocation than would most men to act.

Just as Delano has much in common with the narrators of "The Piazza" and "Bartleby," Don Benito shares a number of characteristics with Marianna and Bartleby. Don Benito is "pale" (p.273), as are Marianna (p.447) and Bartleby (p.12). All three are described with ghost imagery: Don Benito (p.285), Marianna (p.453) and Bartleby (pp.19 and 37). Finally, Don Benito, Marianna, and Bartleby, are all terribly alone in the sense of not being able to reach out and communicate.

In particular, Don Benito and Bartleby are alike. Don Benito's mind is "unstrung" (pp.263 and 310) off the port of Santa Maria, whereas Bartleby is described as "a bit of wreck in the mid-Atlantic" (p.29). Don Benito is referred to as both a "half-lunatic" (pp.264 and 273) and a "lunatic" (p.280); Bartleby is "moon-struck" (p.13) and "luny" (p.16). Their identification is with the moon which serves to remind us of the piazza-owner's warning that "truth comes in with darkness."

Both Bartleby and Don Benito stare "vacantly" into space, and the former's "dead-wall reveries" (pp.20 and

28) are almost identical to those of the latter (pp.267 and 315). Finally, just as Bartleby attempts to open his employer's eyes (p.28), Don Benito challenges Delano on a more subtle plane: "When the two captains met, the Spaniard fervently took the hand of the American, at the same time casting an earnest glance into his eyes, but, as before, too much overcome to speak" (p.325).[8] Both Bartleby and Don Benito are helpless creatures with a vision into the reality of things, which is superior to that of the good-intentioned people attempting to befriend them. Both ultimately choose withdrawal from the world of experience (in contrast to the narrators' world of innocence) and, in Don Benito's case at least, it should be clear that there is an evil in the reality of things which is too horrible to bear.

Having viewed, somewhat, the characters in what I have chosen to call "a play of deception," let us now turn to the plot. In doing so, it will be of particular interest to note Melville's use of theatre imagery.[9] Also of

[8]Don Benito does not speak because he is overcome by Babo, not emotion as the cliché suggests.

[9]I interpret the theatre imagery as being a very functional aspect of the tale as it describes realistically what is taking place on the ship. Rundell, p.174,

significance is Melville's utilization of the pun as a consistent source for irony; as Delano must pierce "appearance" for truth, the reader is called upon to distinguish meanings which may be either superficial, or disguised. In this sense, the reader is given as much opportunity as Delano to discover the reality beneath the surface of what transpires.

"Benito Cereno" begins on a curious note: Delano drops anchor off a "desert" isle in search of "water" (p.255). This is the first indication that an appearance can be deceptive. The scene is painted in an ambiguous gray,[10] a presentiment of the ambiguity to follow. When Delano takes first sight of the San Dominick, the narrator describes its companion, the sun, as "one sinister eye" (p.256). Again, this remark is left ambiguous and so it is impossible to ascertain if the sun has Platonic connotations. The "sinister eye" comment, however, is successful as a counterpart to the "gray" scene in establishing an atmosphere which is pregnant with foreboding of evil.

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sees its use more in terms of atmosphere "by establishing a sense of the unreality of appearances."

[10] "Everything," "the sky," "fowl," and "vapours" are gray (p.255).

As Delano approaches the San Dominick in the whale-boat, Melville strikes an ominous note in alluding to certain old Spanish ships which "under a decline of masters, preserved signs of former state." He continues by referring to the turret as being "long ago taken by assault" (p.258). These rather enticing hints of what lies ahead pave the way for what Runden calls the "master symbol" of "Benito Cereno"[11]: "But the principal relic of faded grandeur was the ample oval of the shield-like stern-piece, intricately carved with the arms of Castile and Leon, medallioned about by groups of mythological or symbolical devices; uppermost and central of which was a dark satyr in a mask, holding his foot on the prostrate neck of a writhing figure, likewise masked" (pp.258-59). This symbol will appear at various points in the story with different persons in the role of satyr, thus adding to the ambiguity of the tale. At this time, Delano also sees the figure-head wrapped in canvas and the sentence, "Follow your leader" (p.259), chalked beneath. The slogan, "Follow your leader," will be shown to have a significance equal to that of the "master symbol."

[11] Runden, p.169.

Boarding the ship, Delano takes in the "strange costumes, gestures, and faces" (p.260) and is told by all aboard the terrible hardship which the San Dominick has suffered. He meets Don Benito and is taken aback by the latter's reserve. The ship is in a general state of disorder, but Delano takes heart in "the good conduct of Babo" (p.264). His observation of Don Benito, that he "seemed the involuntary victim of mental disorder" (p.265), is weighted with more truth than Delano is aware. The Spanish captain is the involuntary victim not only of "mental disorder" but of the scene before Delano's eyes. Melville remarks of Delano, "the noisy confusion of the San Dominick's suffering host repeatedly challenged his eye" (p.266), yet characteristically Delano closes that eye and forms excuses for the behavior of the blacks.

Coached by Babo, Don Benito relates a detailed version of what befell the San Dominick to Delano. The story is punctuated by discrepancies, but in compassion Delano overlooks them. At one point, Delano ironically notes of Babo: "slave I cannot call him" (p.270). This is immediately followed by a bit of irony on Melville's part: "As master and man stood before him, the black upholding the white, Captain Delano could not but bethink him of the beauty of that relationship which could present such a spectacle of fidelity on the one hand and confidence on the other"

(p.270). Just who is master and who is man is taken for granted by the naive reader, despite the juxtaposition of "master" with "black" and "man" with "white." Also of interest is Melville's selection of the word "spectacle," implying an almost theatrical display, and the fact that it is followed by a description of the actors' costumes (pp.270-71). Because Delano is still oblivious to the grand deception taking place before him, Melville refers to his perceptiveness as "blunt-thinking American's eyes" (p.271).

Later, when Don Benito and Babo huddle together for another conference, the "master and man" description is repeated (p.279).[12] Likewise, the theatre imagery is maintained until the end of the deception. Delano asks himself if a gentleman would "act the part now acted by his host" (p.280). He notes, "If Don Benito's story was, throughout, an invention, then every soul on board, down to the youngest negress, was his carefully drilled recruit in the plot" (p.286). Like the narrator of "The Piazza" sitting on his "box-royal," Melville makes note of Delano's "eye falling continually, as from a stage-box into the pit" (p.299). Tongue-in-cheek, surely, Melville states that

[12] The "master and man" allusion occurs again during the "juggling play" scene, and, shortly thereafter, subsequent to what Delano considers to be a "love quarrel" (p.313).

Delano is amused by "the African love of bright colors and fine shows" (p.307). Finally, with the tale more than half-finished, "the idea flashed across" Delano "that possibly, master and man, for some unknown purpose, were acting out, both in word and deed, nay, to the very tremor of Don Benito's limbs, some juggling play before him" (p.311).

The first appearance of the "master symbol" with humans as the figures occurs when Babo kneels at Don Benito's feet to adjust a loose shoe-buckle (p.282); it appears once again, according to Runden, during the shaving scene when the role of satyr is reversed (p.308).[13] Finally, it occurs twice toward the conclusion of the tale with, curiously enough, Delano in the role of satyr. First, Don Benito lunges overboard "falling at the feet of Captain Delano" (p.326); and then Babo follows suit: "Glancing down at his feet, Captain Delano saw the freed hand of the servant aiming with a second dagger - a small one, before concealed in his wool - with this he was snakishly writhing up from the boat's bottom..." (p.327).[14] By ultimately

[13] Runden, P.169.

[14] Newbery, p.171, and Kermit Vanderbilt, " 'Benito Cereno': Melville's Fable of Black Complicity," The Southern Review, XII, No.2 (Spring 1976), p.317, also point out the appearance of Delano in the role of the satyr in this scene.

casting Delano as the satyr, Melville would seem to be passing judgement as to the moral implications of one's maintaining a "piazza attitude": a state of mind unproductive in terms of establishing a real sense of communication between fellows.[15]

Another significant and recurrent symbol appears to be that of the "padlock and key:" Babo remarks of Atufal's and Don Benito's relationship that, "The slave there carries the padlock, but master here carries the key" (p.278). The pun on key is obvious on second reading. As far as Delano is concerned, Don Benito does in fact hold the secret of the ship's actual condition. At the tale's conclusion, this is made quite clear for Don Benito's "Deposition" is referred to as "the key to fit into the lock of the complications which precede it..." (p.349). The "padlock and key" symbol, along with the satyr symbol, the "master and man" allusions, and the theatrical imagery, serves as a unifying device in the story; it is also another example of Melville's baiting the reader with words

[15]Charles E. Nnolim, Melville's "Benito Cereno": A Study in Meaning of Name Symbolism (New York:New Voices, 1974), p.22, argues even further that Delano perpetuates "old world injustices" being "an accomplice" to slavery; Nnolim sees Delano as "not the speaker of a new world but, like his biblical counterpart... an arch traitor in the cause of social injustice."

in a way very similar to which Delano is taken in by the scene that surrounds him. In short, the reader's natural identification with Delano's perplexity is underscored by the fact that the reader has had as many, and perhaps more, clues to the mystery as Delano, himself.

Throughout his visit on the San Dominick, Delano has refused to see evil, and has been protected from that evil albeit with some reluctance, by Don Benito. At one point, however, Delano comes very close to realizing an epiphany. Inside the San Dominick and preparing to disembark, he walks through a narrow corridor, "dim as a tunnel" and described as a "subterranean vault" (p.323). For the time, he gives into the suggestion of evil, viewing Atufal as a sentry "lying in wait"; in doing so, he significantly betrays "an atheist doubt" of Providence (p.324). This is significant because he is close to seeing the reality of the situation more so than at any other time on the ship. The implication of Delano's atheist doubt is that a belief in Providence is, as seen in the previous tales, a state of euphoria quite divorced from reality - a condition identical to that of the prisoners in Plato's cave.

In this scene, then, Delano is effectively surfacing from his own cave. Melville's comment, "to rush from darkness to light was the involuntary choice" (p.324) is a common metaphor given life in Platonic symbolism. When

Delano finally does stand in the "light," however, he immediately closes his eye to evil. This is either because the "light" as "white shroud" is too strong, or because Delano is, in effect, once again "safe." Delano's "charmed eye" (p.324) surveys the scene and is comforted by familiar images. Having failed the test, Delano begins his descent again, but is arrested by Don Benito. This is the point of no return which was referred to previously in this chapter. Don Benito casts "an earnest glance into his eyes, but, as before, too much overcome to speak" (p.325). This scene mirrors the one in "Bartleby" wherein Bartleby asks his employer, "Do you not see the reason for yourself?" (p.28). Neither Bartleby's employer, nor Delano, can see for himself. They have to be shown; they have to be saved: an idea which Bartleby rejects, but one which Don Benito attempts to realize.

The harsh reality of evil is so overpowering that Don Benito finds himself with no alternative but to act, to save Delano's ship as well as his own. He dives dramatically from what has been a picture of appearance, "a long way removed from truth" as Plato puts it,[16] into

[16]Plato, p.374.

Delano's world of innocence.[17] He enters Delano's personal cave in order to show him what the shadows mean. Delano, confused by this invader's entrance into his conception of reality, responds typically by way of assumption. He does it again when Babo dives into the boat. Ironically, Delano has black and white before him, but still he does not know the difference. Insight comes at the last second, the moment of truth, as it were, when at last he distinguishes what the shadows represent.

The subsequent battle begins as a match between good and evil, white and black. As though sharing his earlier confusion, Delano's sailors frequently make mistakes with the result that Spaniards are killed. The battle then moves into the gray realm of ambiguity foreshadowed in the opening passages of the tale. White becomes evil. Delano's mate adopts the blacks' slogan, "Follow your leader!" (p.331); and, when the battle is won, the whites attempt atrocities on the blacks. Whether good or evil has won is left totally ambiguous.

The scene then changes to the law-courts where, as in Bartleby's case, "men who have never seen absolute

[17]This act is prefigured earlier in the tale by the following passage: "The Spaniard turned, in a sort of

justice" rule on "the images of justice or their shadows."[18] This absurd scene ironically takes place in Lima, the city of light. The white tribunal, sensing no ambiguity whatsoever, identifies the white side of the story as that of the truth. Newbery correctly draws the distinction here between fact and truth:

> Fortified by the legalistic style and its deposition character it cannot be explained away as a delusion of Don Benito's possibly diseased mind. But this does not mean that the story leaves us with the "truth" of Don Benito's view of reality and all its aspects. I should like to explain this by applying to this story Cawelti's previously mentioned analysis of The Confidence Man, where he points out that the counter-idea, which in itself might be strong enough to destroy the usefulness of the first clue, is insufficient to provide the basis for a new interpretation. In other words, the facts might be true insofar as they describe the dark background reality of the revolt, but as a factual account throwing light on "the negro" they penetrate as little below the surface as Delano's imperceptive adherence to surface appearances. Both skim the surface - the one of facts, the other

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stooping posture, pausing an instant, as one about to make a plunging exchange of elements, as from air to water" (p.303).

[18] Plato, p.282.

> of appearances - but in order to understand the issue of "the negro" and his nature and with it the significance of the revolt one must probe more deeply.[19]

Plato discusses the mind and vision of such as Babo in "Book Seven" of The Republic: "Their intelligence is limited, but their sight is sharp enough in matters that concern them; it's not that their sight is weak, but that they put it to bad use, so that the keener it is the worse its effects."[20] Babo is effective even in death. In the retreat of the monastery, Don Benito is figuratively held captive by Babo's agents, the monks (by Infelez, in particular) and is haunted by the presence of Babo, still, whose skull is turned toward the monastery.

If James E. Miller, Jr., is correct in his contention that Babo appears symbolically as Don Benito's double, sharing the same age and characteristics,[21] then evil has successfully triumphed over good. Hoyle suggests essentially the same thing in his unpublished doctoral dissertation, "Melville As A Magazinist":

[19] Newbery, pp.187-188.

[20] Plato, p.284.

[21] James E. Miller, Jr., A Reader's Guide to Herman Melville (New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 1969), p.157.

> When we recall Benito Cereno's statement that the "negro" cast the dark shadow on him it becomes apparent, I think, that the reference is to more, much more, than Babo. It is his own blackness reflected in Babo that causes Don Benito to faint.[22]

If Babo is interpreted strictly as a person, the result is one of total ambiguity: he is a revolutionary who has overthrown the masters responsible for the enslavement of his race (Aranda and Don Benito),[23] and he is a tyrant who tortures and kills mercilessly.[24] When Babo is interpreted as a symbol, ambiguity begins to give way to clarity. Babo moves from "hero" as a leader in the revolt to being an instrument of evil (eg. the torture and the killings). By the end of the story, perhaps as a consequence of Lord Acton's maxim, Babo is the personification of evil, his skull haunting Don Benito.

[22] Hoyle, p.174.

[23] Nnoli, pp.33-47, Carolyn L. Karcher, "Melville and Racial Prejudice: A Re-evaluation," The Southern Review, XII, No.2 (Spring 1976), pp.287-297, and E.F. Carlisle, "Captain Amasa Delano: Melville's American Fool," Criticism, VII (Fall 1965), pp.358-61, support this reading.

[24] I think it is of interest that the sentence awarded to Babo for being a tyrant by the white tribunal is the same which the blacks had bestowed on Aranda: namely, a skeleton on a pole. The whites, however, first exercise the ritual of the trial and then kill Babo, as contrasted by the spontaneity of the blacks.

Don Benito moves from a position of "naive mercenary," in that he was ignorant of the moral implications of being paid to transport slaves, to "intelligent victim," a complete role-reversal but certainly one which would facilitate his recognizing "his own blackness reflected in Babo." Delano, perhaps not surprisingly in view of his "safe," piazza-attitude, does not move at all in the sense of a transition or personal growth. By the end of the tale, he is still thanking "Providence" (p.351). Don Benito's comment of Delano, "God charmed your life" reminds one of an earlier passage in which Delano's "charmed eye" is fooled by an illusion (p.324); Benito's comment suggests that God is in fact responsible for Delano's euphoric state.

Chapter VI

"The Lightning-Rod Man"

"The Lightning-Rod Man" was published in Putnam's in August of 1854. In contrast to the other Piazza tales, it is a relatively light satire, written in the same sort of amiable vein as that which characterizes "I and My Chimney." Berthoff claims that this satire is directed against "the new breed of huckstering salvation-salesman spawned by the breakup of the old religious consensus, and more generally against all those who would make their living by preying on the natural fears of others."[1] The salesman of "The Lightning-Rod Man" can also be viewed as an agent of Calvinism, "a hell-fire preacher," or, as Martin Leonard Pops puts it, "a conventional religionist, a believer in a wrathful, but mollifiable, Deity."[2] Lastly, "The Lightning-Rod Man" may be seen as "a kind of parable about the absurdity of placing one's faith in technology and acquisitiveness."[3] Whichever way one views "The Lightning-Rod Man," the religious allegory is

[1] Berthoff, p.187.

[2] Martin Leonard Pops, The Melville Archetype (Ohio: Kent State Univ. Press, 1970), p.145.

[3] Hoyle, p.147.

difficult to deny. Because of the unobtrusiveness of this allegory, the overall effect of "The Lightning-Rod Man" is one of delight. Indeed, it is among the most polished of The Piazza Tales, although in spite of the religious allegory, the most superficial in terms of content.

The tale begins with the narrator standing by his fireplace and praising the thunderstorm which is raging all about him. His thoughts are interrupted with the visit of the lightning-rod man who is carrying one of his products: "It was a polished copper rod, four feet long, lengthwise attached to a neat wooden staff, by insertion into two balls of greenish glass, ringed with copper bands" (p.214). The phallic connotations suggested through this description of a lightning-rod are of significance and will merit close attention as the theme is developed throughout the course of the tale.

The salesman immediately attempts to take control of the situation and meets with partial success before the narrator responds with an assertion of his own manhood: "I stepped back upon the hearth, and threw myself into the erectest, proudest posture I could command" (p.215). This move produces a stalemate of sorts between the narrator and the salesman and sets the stage for a dialogue between the two.

The salesman explains the nature of his business and, in doing so, refers to the rather inferior Canadian rods. Since the location in question is Montreal, there can be little doubt that what the salesman has in mind on an allegorical plane is Catholicism. This is emphasized by the salesman's insistence that "Mine is the only true rod" (p.216). When he adds, "Look at it," one is once again reminded of the phallic theme, although it is now no longer a thread by itself but is becoming interwoven with the religious allegory.

The narrator is shocked to hear that the lightning-rod man avoids "tall men" (p.220) as he, himself, places great value in togetherness, or camaraderie, in times of danger.[4] Not satisfied with the salesman's explanation, the narrator effectively reveals the nature of his counterfeit claims:

> "You pretended envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary to and from Jupiter Tonans," laughed I; "you mere man who come here to put you and your pipestem between clay and sky, do you think that because you can strike a bit of green light from the

[4]Newbery, pp.199 and 215, places more significance than I on this pivotal point in the story. While I will not dispute that the narrator's "hearth values" are "humanitarian values" (brotherhood, sociality, etc.), I think that to draw a parallel accordingly to the other

> Leyden jar, that you can thoroughly avert the supernal bolt? Your rod rusts, or breaks, and where are you? Who has empowered you, you Tetzel, to peddle round your indulgences from divine ordinations? The hairs of our heads are numbered, and the days of our lives. In thunder as in sunshine, I stand at ease in the hands of my God. False negotiator, away! See, the scroll of the storm is rolled back; the house is unharmed; and in the blue heavens I read in the rainbow, that the Deity will not, of purpose, make war on man's earth." (p.221)

The narrator's comments make the religious allegory quite clear. Religion, specifically that brand epitomised by the indignant salesman, is attacked as a "False negotiator" between man and God; the institution is ridiculed for its phoney "indulgences" and its pretensions to being able to avert "the supernal bolt." The sexual theme also crystalizes: the phallic significance of "pipestem between clay and sky" is Melville's way of depicting the boast of beings who are human (clay) with aspirations to deity (sky) and with claims of being able to bridge the two worlds (ie. the claims of religion). The juxtaposition of the sexual allegory with the religious is certainly a source

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Piazza tales is to place too much importance on a scene which is, as far as I am concerned, essentially comical.

of considerable irony for both Melville and the reader.

The satire, then, in "The Lightning-Rod Man" is direct. The salesman, who offers safety, lives in terror of the apocalyptic potential of thunder and lightning, the Jehovah God, and serves as the only real threat of violence to the narrator. He is first introduced as "that illustrious god, Jupiter Tonans" (p.214). With each failure to seduce the narrator from a position of acceptance, the salesman slowly reveals his true, satanic essence. At the conclusion of the tale, the "dark lightning-king" attacks the narrator with his "tri-forked thing," is foiled, and tossed out the door (p.221).

Throughout the course of the tale, the narrator assumes a position of resistence, from timidity to passivity to physical response, and triumph.[5] As the lightning-rod man's character degenerates, the narrator's is on the upswing - hence, the balance of the short story, and the power of the climactic ending wherein their roles have been reversed from the opening paragraphs.

[5]The narrator's ultimate physical response is to snap the salesman's lightning-rod leaving it "elbowed" (p.221); bearing in mind the sexual allegory, the salesman has not only lost a good lightning-rod but his erection as well. The narrator's manhood has triumphed.

A closer look at the narrator's position, however, reveals it to be as questionable as that of the lightning-rod man. The narrator's absolute trust in the benevolence of God "in thunder as in sunshine" is both reactionary and naive in tone. His comment that "the Deity will not, of purpose, make war on man's earth" (p.221) is contrasted by the "booms" of thunder which approach like exploding shells and by the rain's attack on his own home, "like a charge of spear-points" (p.213). Indeed, the narrator is like Delano in this respect. Good-natured and given to trust, he encounters an evil which is masked. Throughout the course of the tale he comes to recognize this evil for what it is, and then acts. The narrator's action defeats evil in a specific situation but is not successful in ultimately destroying it. As Babo's head continues to plague Don Benito, "the lightning-rod man still dwells in the land; still travels in storm-time, and drives a brave trade with the fears of man" (p.221). Finally, like Delano, the narrator's attitude before and after the confrontation with evil remains substantially the same: an absolute trust in the goodness of Providence.

Apart from this, however, "The Lightning-Rod Man" deals only superficially with the themes prevalent throughout the preceding stories of The Piazza Tales. The narrator is a symbol of passive acceptance of the ways of

God, and of passive resistence to the ways of man - in this case, organized religion. The salesman, like Babo, is described with lizard imagery connotative of the devil.[6] When "The Lightning-Rod Man" is analyzed further, however, comparisons become trite, or tenuous. For instance, Newbery asserts that the story "contains significant Piazza tale features:"

> There is above all the dialectic pattern of two juxtaposed antipodal viewpoints - in other words, the so-called "piazza attitude" which creates its effects not by author identification but solely by contrast. We have found the pattern in "The Piazza" in the confrontation of the "day" and "night" view, in "Bartleby" in the contrast between Delano and the Don, and we also find it here with juxtaposition of the cottager's trust with the salesman's fear.[7]

I believe that Newbery's point concerning "the dialectic pattern of two juxtaposed antipodal viewpoints" can be made with regard to a great number of short stories and, in itself, does not distinguish "The Lightning-Rod Man" as being a Piazza tale. Likewise, her reference to other features "which make this story distinctly a Piazza

[6]The salesman is described as a "worm," a "dark lightning-king" with a "tri-forked thing" (p.221).

[7]Newbery, p.197.

tale" seem to me to be questionable in terms of substance, and appear to be the result of a premise that The Piazza Tales is strongly unified:

> There is for instance the presentation of the underlying outside/reality as dark and threatening. We are never allowed to forget that the story action takes place during a savage thunderstorm, which is described in metaphors taken from warfare. And against this undeniable aggressive threat by what is understood to be some supernal power, the responses of both protagonists are, like those in other Piazza tales, inadequate, both that which attempts to "mediate between day and sky" through advocating "abject submission" and "self-insulation" and that which trusts so implicitly as to reject a genuine safety device.[8]

Unlike Newbery, I do not hold that The Piazza Tales is a collection which is strongly unified. To begin with, the operating criterion for the selection of the tales to be included in the collection was simply that they be tales which were published in Putnam's. As it works out, and I think this is apparent, four of the tales are indeed strongly unified ("The Piazza," "Bartleby," "Benito Cereno," and "The Encantadas") by what were consistent concerns for Melville in the 1853-56 period. Another tale,

[8]Newbery, pp.197-198.

"The Bell-Tower," fits well into the pattern offered by an analysis of the aforementioned tales, but "The Lightning-Rod Man" does not. The latter tale can be tied into the unity of The Piazza Tales, but one must pull hard on very few strings to accomplish such a feat. Even then, as I think is evident by Newbery's arguments, the tension is great, causing one to question the validity of such an attempt. "The Lightning-Rod Man" lacks intensity, tragedy, and mystery, and continues in only the most superficial sense the symbols and themes abundant in the other Piazza tales. It is a complete and successful tale unto its own; in truth, offering itself to fruitful comparison with only "The Bell-Tower."[9] Beyond this, one dives deeply into shallow water.

[9] This comparison will merit attention in the "Bell-Tower" chapter.

Chapter VII

"The Encantadas Or Enchanted Isles"

"The Encantadas Or Enchanted Isles" appeared in Putnam's in March, April, and May, of 1854, under the pseudonym of "Salvator R. Tarnmoor." In that period of America's literary life, it was not unusual for a writer to publish under another name. In the case of "The Encantadas," however, Melville may have had better reason than most for wishing to be anonymous.

In December of 1853, Melville informed Harper's that he would be finished a work on "Tortoises" or "Tortoise Hunting" by January of 1854; in return, for the rights to this work, Harper's advanced him $300. A few days after Melville received his advance, a fire destroyed the Harper and Bros. establishment. Melville then gave four sketches of "The Encantadas" to Putnam's in January, or early February. Understandably, the Harper's publishers became worried when they first viewed in March of 1854 material which appeared to be the same for which they had advanced Melville such a healthy retainer. Curiously enough, although Melville assured the publishers at Harper's that there was no problem other than delay, and that they would forthwith receive the "Tortoises" work, they never

did - and Melville retained possession of the advance.[1]

The "Enchanted Isles" are the Galapagos Islands which Melville had viewed in person "sometime between November of 1841 and February of 1842" while on board the Acushnet.[2] His description of these in "The Encantadas Or Enchanted Isles" is in the form of ten sketches which abound in either personal anecdotes or legends peculiar to particular islands. Newbery makes a strong and ingenious case that these sketches have a definite structure,[3] but I tend to agree with Hoyle that, although superb in quality, they lack unity: a point of view which suggests

[1] I am indebted to Hoyle, pp.107-108, for his pointing out of this interesting episode.

[2] Ibid., p.110.

[3] Newbery, P.249, divides the ten sketches into three sections. The first section, Sketches 1-4, deals with the islands proper; the second section, 5-6, focuses upon the visitors who appear on the fringes of the isles; the final section, 7-10, deals with "some of those who lack the protection of belonging," p.253. She reinforces this hypothesis with one of Melville's own divisions: namely, that quotations from the Faerie Queene preface all sketches but those of the second section, which is prefaced by quotations from Spenser's satires, pp.235-236. I find Newbery's sections to be worthwhile divisions in approaching "The Encantadas," but I remain unconvinced that these divisions therefore account for some form of unity.

that Melville might have had something larger in mind."[4] The "something larger" which Melville had in mind was in all probability the "Tortoise Book" for which Harper's had advanced him the $300, but which Melville never completed due to the fire.[5]

"The Encantadas" is of particular importance as far as this thesis is concerned in that it sheds further light upon the incidents and characters of the preceding tales. At the same time, we gain more insight into Melville's curiously ambiguous philosophy.

In the opening paragraph of "Sketch First : The Isles at Large," the Encantadas are introduced by somber comparisons to "heaps of cinders" and the world "after a penal conflagration" (p.49). They are further described

[4]Hoyle suggests the possibility of "an allegory of patience" given the Spenser influence on "The Encantadas" p.113; I think that "an allegory of despair" is more what Melville had in mind.

[5]Newbery, p.52, argues that since Melville offered the tortoise book again to Harper's on May 25th, 1854 (and then again on June 22nd, 1854), it is unlikely that the tortoise book and "The Encantadas" are one and the same. I disagree with this viewpoint; insofar as Harper's never received the infamous tortoise book, it seems to me that Melville was only bluffing when he made these latter offers to Harper's.

in terms of "desolateness" (p.49) and "solitariness" (p.50); the same sort of imagery which characterizes Marianna, Bartleby, and Don Benito. "Like all else which has but once been associated with humanity, they still awaken in us some thoughts of sympathy, however sad" (p.50); and this is indeed how the reader reacts to both the isles and the "Isolatoes."[6] Melville later notes, "there is a mysterious indraft, which irresistibly draws a passing vessel among the isles, though not bound to them" (p.52); in this passage, not only can the reader be considered to be the "passing vessel" but so can the piazza-owner, Bartleby's employer, and Delano, in the sense that that is how they are drawn to their respective isolatoes. This identification of the reader's position with the "piazza attitude" of the aforementioned characters should come as no great surprise: whatever the reader sees is filtered through their eyes, with the consequence that the reader often reacts as they do in encountering

[6] R.E. Watters, "Melville's 'Isolatoes,'" PMLA, LX (December, 1945), p.1138, uses the term "isolato" to describe characters who are exiles, "either by accident or volition." In this thesis, I use the term to describe Marianna, Bartleby, Don Benito, and Hunilla, in that they are tortoise-like characters isolated in the world of experience.

mysterious characters or puzzling situations.

Melville also observes, "Another feature of these isles is their emphatic uninhabitableness" (p.50); and this is what Bartleby and Don Benito appear to discover the hard way. The "chief sound of life... is a hiss" (p.51). The vegetation is fruitless. The isles are painted in the imagery of hell:

> In many places the coast is rock-bound, or, more properly, clinker-bound; tumbled masses of blackish or greenish stuff like the dross of an iron furnace, forming dark clefts and caves here and there, into which a ceaseless sea pours a fury of foam; overhanging them with a swirl of gray, haggard mist, amidst which sail screaming flights of unearthly birds heightening the dismal din. However calm the sea without, there is no rest for these swells and those rocks; they lash and are lashed, even when the outer ocean is most at peace with itself. On the oppressive, clouded days, such as are peculiar to this part of the watery Equator, the dark, vitrified masses, many of which raise themselves among white whirlpools and breakers in detached and perilous places off the shore, present a most Plutonian sight. In no world but a fallen one could such lands exist. (p.51)

When the narrator of "The Piazza" bites of the forbidden fruit, he plummets from a state of paradisiacal illusion to the plain facts of reality. The Encantadas are symbolic of this reality; they are a portrait of the hell of experience, life outside the cave, as it were,

and stand in contrast to those perceptions which are filtered through innocence.[7] This is the reality that Marianna and Bartleby exist in, and which Don Benito visits for too long; and this is the reality which the piazza-owner, Bartleby's employer, and Delano, perhaps understandably, wish to avoid.

What is interesting about this reality, this "other and darker world" (p.51), is that it is "evilly enchanted ground" (p.54), a fact which is repeatedly alluded to throughout the ten sketches. The implication of this allusion is, of course, the existence of an "evil enchanter" who has cast a "special curse" (p.50) on the isles and, by association, the isolatoes.[8] This association, established in the preceding paragraphs, is reinforced by the following

[7] The Typee - like palm isles westward and southward of the Encantadas are significantly described as "charming" and referred to as a "Paradise" (p.51); the reader should remember Delano's "charmed eye" and euphoric state from "Benito Cereno." The Encantadas, in contrast, are referred to as "Tartarus" (p.51). The difference between innocence and experience would therefore seem to be the difference between "The Paradise of Bachelors" and "The Tartarus of Maids."

[8] Melville suggests this existence more explicitly in "Sketch Second," p.58.

passage in which Melville describes the isles: "Like split Syrian gourds left withering in the sun, they are cracked by an everlasting drought beneath a torrid sky." I think that this description is highly suggestive of Marianna's condition in "The Piazza"; similarly, the gourd symbol is quite comparable to the hop-vine symbol. This being the case, I suggest that the sun which "burns" Marianna and which I have referred to as a "supernatural prankster"[9] is the same symbolic sun which burns the Encantadas: " 'Have mercy on me,' the wailing spirit of the Encantadas seems to cry, 'and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame' " (p.50).

Suitably enough in this hell created by an evil enchanter, the principal occupants of the isles are reptiles. Tortoises and lizards top this list, with the former described as being "strangely self-condemned" with "lasting sorrow and penal hopelessness" (p.53). With this description of the tortoise, the isolatoes again come to mind - particularly Marianna - plodding through the world of experience. The lizard is reminiscent of Babo in "Benito Cereno."

[9]See Chapter III of this thesis, p.53.

Melville, having landed on the isles, has seen this world of experience. As a result, he can no longer enjoy living in the cave of innocence:

> For, often in scenes of social merriment, and especially at revels held by candle-light in the old-fashioned mansions, so that shadows are thrown into the further recesses of an angular and spacious room, making them put on a look of haunted undergrowth of lonely woods, I have drawn the attention of my comrades by my fixed gaze and sudden change of air, as I have seemed to see, slowly emerging from those imagined solitudes, and heavily crawling along the floor, the ghost of a gigantic tortoise, with "Memento*****" burning in live letters upon his back. (p.54)

What Melville sees appears to be the perspective offered by Plato's cave: shadows playing on the wall. To the other members of the party, the shadows have no significance, a phenomenon to be expected in that they have never left the cave. But Melville has, and as a consequence can see through the shadows — through the picture described in "The Piazza" - to the tortoise, Marianna. "Memento" is the singeing memory of a reality that one can never escape.

In "Sketch Second: Two Sides to a Tortoise," Melville further elaborates on the tortoise, which becomes a microcosm of the Encantadas, or reality. Melville states rather matter-of-factly, "The tortoise is both black and

bright" (p.56); in effect, Melville is declaring that there is a bright side to reality, as well as the harsh, or evil side.

The tortoise also becomes a symbol of how to view reality:

> Moreover, every one knows that tortoises as well as turtles are of such a make, that if you put them on their backs you thereby expose their bright sides without the possibility of their recovering themselves and turning into view the other. But after you have done this, and because you have done this, you should not swear that the tortoise has no dark side. Enjoy the bright, keep it turned up perpetually if you can, but be honest and don't deny the black. Neither should he, who cannot turn the tortoise from its natural position so as to hide the darker and expose his livelier aspect, like a great October pumpkin in the sun, for that cause declare the creature to be one total inky blot. (pp.55-56)

With reference to the excerpt above, the piazza-owner, Bartleby's employer, and Delano, are the kind of characters who "swear that the tortoise has no dark side," effectively denying the black. Marianna, Bartleby, and Don Benito, by contrast, "declare the creature to be one total inky blot." Although Melville admits the bright side of reality, his emphasis in the preceding tales and the sketches to follow is on the black. So are his sympathies, I believe. Despite this talk of a "bright side,"

he is careful to point out that the "natural position" of the tortoise is black.

In "Sketch Second," Melville also continues to use the tortoise as a symbol of the isolato. As Marianna, Bartleby, and Don Benito, are described with ghost, or spectre, imagery, so the tortoise is referred to as a "spectre-tortoise." Confirming what I have suggested in the analysis of "Sketch First," Melville states: "That these tortoises are the victims of a penal, or malignant, or perhaps a downright diabolical enchanter, seems in nothing more likely than in that strange infatuation of hopeless toil which so often possesses them" (p.58); this passage is very much a pivotal point in the context of the entire Piazza Tales as it is the first time that Melville openly points to the distinct possibility of a "diabolical enchanter," or as Newbery suggests, "a primal supra-human force" of evil.[10]

What is quite clear in "Sketch Second" is Melville's profound respect for the tortoise. He refers to tortoises as "mystic creatures" (p.57) and associates them with

[10]Newbery, p.223.

Brahmins (p.58). He considers their origin to be comparable with that of the beginning of time and, in this sense, the tortoises appear to be emblematic of the history of mankind. What most inspires Melville about the creatures is their "dateless, indefinite endurance" (p.57), an endurance not unlike that which characterizes Marianna, Bartleby, and Don Benito. "Sketch Second" is concluded with a nice ironic touch when Melville announces of the three captured tortoises on ship that he sat down to "a merry repast," a cannibalistic act similar to Holy Communion in that the tortoises have been described in terms of "worshipful venerableness."

In "Sketch Third: Rock Rodondo," Melville describes the huge rock which becomes a point of observation in the following sketch. The time is the "gray of the morning" (p.61), twilight, with "gray" suggesting at once ambiguity ("All nature seemed supine with the long night watch, and half-suspended in the jaded expectation of the sun" [p.61]) and clarity of vision as a fusion of the polarized black-white aspects of reality ("The twilight was just enough to reveal every striking point, without tearing away the dim investiture of wonder"). The sun which scorches the Encantadas during the day is again given symbolic connotations suggestive of God, or Christ: "While along the entire

east the invisible sun sent pallid intimations of his coming" (p.61).

Rodondo, itself, is described as a "high stone tower" and compared to others which are "solitary and alone," and to a "sole survivor of some perished castle." These descriptions are strikingly reminiscent of the elm in "The Piazza," although, in keeping with the landscape of the Encantadas, Rodondo is sterile. Again echoing a theme prominent in "The Piazza," "Bartleby," and "Benito Cereno," Rodondo is described as a source of illusion when spied at a distance:

> It is visible at the distance of thirty miles; and, fully participating in that enchantment which pervades the group, when first seen afar invariably is mistaken for a sail. Four leagues away, of a golden hazy noon, it seems some Spanish Admiral's ship, stacked up with glittering canvas... But coming nigh, the enchanted frigate is transformed apace into a craggy keep. (p.61)

The life which is drawn to Rodondo falls into two groups: birds and fish. The birds are described with spectre imagery similar to that which characterizes the tortoise. Birdlime streaks are "ghostly white" and the albatross is labelled the "snow-white ghost." The perceptive reader might then expect some comparison to be made between the birds and the isolatoes, and this expectation

is rewarded handsomely. Melville's statement of the penguin could as well apply to Marianna: "As if ashamed of her failure, Nature keeps this ungainly child hidden away at the ends of the earth..." (p.63). Similarly, the reveries of Bartleby appear in the portrayal of the pelican: "A pensive race, they stand for hours together without motion." The comparisons are apropos for as the birds inhabit the Encantadas, the isolatoes inhabit "reality."

The fish of Rodondo are vehicles only for a Melvillian indictment of fellow man: "Poor fish of Rodondo! in your victimized confidence, you are of the number of those who inconsiderately trust, while they do not understand, human nature" (p.65). This condemnation of human nature is continued and emphasized with notable exceptions in the subsequent sketches, thereby indicating that the "diabolical enchanter" is not the only villain of the Encantadas.

The next four sketches are not as substantial in terms of symbolic content as the previous three. "Sketch Fourth: A Pisgah View from the Rock" continues the theme of illusion at a distance. The isle Mas-a-Fuera appears like "a vast iceberg drifting in tremendous poise" (p.67). Cowley's Enchanted Isle was so named by Cowley for, in his own words, the following reason: "My fancy led me to call

it Cowley's Enchanted Isle, for, we having had a Sight of it upon several Points of the Compass, it appear'd always in as many different Forms; sometimes like a ruined Fortification, upon another Point, like a great City, etc." (pp.72-73). Narborough is the most imposing of the isles surveyed, however, being marked by a volcano which is inhabited by "demons of fire" (p.71), a description strongly supportive of the atmosphere of evil enchantment.

Newbery compares the view offered by Rodondo to Dante's Inferno, with Narborough and Albemarle as the center of evil, Barrington, Charles, Norfolk and Hood's Isle, as the second circle, and the outside world, which is least influenced by the "demons of fire," as the outer ring.[11] I think that there is merit in this hypothesis insofar as the Encantadas as a whole, and specifically "Sketch First," is pecularly Dantesque in conception.

Of course, the irony which is implicit in "Sketch Fourth : A Pisgah View from the Rock" is that "the promised land" is none other than the Encantadas : Melville's portrait of reality - a sterile hell.

[11]Newbery, p.250. For a further discussion of Dante's influence on "The Encantadas," see Newbery's " 'The Encantadas' : Melville's Inferno," American Literature, XXXVIII

"Sketch Fifth : The Frigate, and Ship Flyaway" is only two pages in length, a matter which suggests the incompleteness, or uneveness in terms of structure, of "The Encantadas" as a finished work. The "strange sail" which the U.S. Frigate Essex encounters is reminiscent of the appearance of the San Dominick, another "enchanted ship"; but unlike the San Dominick, the stranger's mystery is never solved.

"Sketch Sixth : Barrington Isle and the Buccaneers" describes the one-time refuge of cut-throats and others "whom persecution, or adversity, or secret and unavengeable wrongs, had driven... from Christian society to seek the melancholy solitude or the guilty adventures of the sea" (p.78). Not much longer than "Sketch Fifth," it is a little more interesting in that both the "black" and the "white" side of the Buccaneer is portrayed. For the most part, however, the reader has to rely on the perceptions of a "sentimental voyager" and so it is not surprising that

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(March, 1966), pp.49-68, and Robert C. Albrecht's "The Thematic Unity of Melville's 'The Encantadas,'" Texas Studies in Language and Literature, XIV (1972-73), pp.463-71.

the "white" side is emphasized. As Delano is not given to indulging in alarms "any way involving the imputation of malign evil in man" (p.256), so the sentimental narrator concludes, "Still, strange as it may seem, I must also abide by the more charitable thought; namely, that among these adventurers were some gentlemanly, companionable souls, capable of genuine tranquility and virtue" (p.79). The temptation to declare that Marianna, Bartleby, and Don Benito, are among those who have been "driven from Christian society to seek the melancholy solitude" is therefore negated because of the unreliable narration. Indeed, the conclusion sounds like the romantic indulgence of a Bostonian Brahmin fantasizing of the sea.

"Sketch Seventh: Charles's Isle and the Dog-King" is also short in length and consists of a tale about a tyrant who rules his own island with an army of dogs. After a fierce battle, the tyrant is overthrown with the result that the isle becomes a "Riotocracy," "the unassailed lurking-place of all sorts of desperadoes, who in the name of liberty did just what they pleased" (p.84). Martin Leonard Pops suggests that the sketch is a parody of the Revolutionary War with the island, Anathema, being

America.[12] While this might very well be the case, it seems to me that the sketch is more universal in tone, a pessimistic comment on Melville's part about mankind and the role of revolution, in particular.

The climactic sketch of "The Encantadas" is "Sketch Eighth : Norfolk Isle and the Chola Widow," which describes the tragic plight of Hunilla, and which appears to be the result of Melville's fascination with the Agatha story.

Hunilla, her husband, and brother, are ferried to Norfolk Isle by a French whaler which is to return in four months time to pick up both the party and its tortoise oil. The French captain fails to keep his promise, and Hunilla's husband and brother die before her very eyes. The death of her loved ones is described from Hunilla's perspective by way of three illusions, all suggestive of the "piazza-position." Firstly, the gestures of the two men make them appear to be singing. Secondly, the event is a "sham tragedy on the stage" with Hunilla in a "bower" seated on "a high balcony" (p.90). Thirdly, the scene is depicted as a "picture," or painting, viewed through an "oval frame"

[12] Pops, p.208.

with the "painted" sea as background (pp.90-91). Both the theatrical and the painting imagery are utilized to a large extent in "The Piazza" and "Benito Cereno." What is particularly interesting about the painting imagery here is that Melville suggests the presence of "the invisible painter" which seems connative of a supernatural force. In "The Piazza," the sun which torments Marianna is the painter; in this sketch, the "painter" is as cruel to Hunilla.[13]

The terrifying scene of her loved ones dying effectively shocks Hunilla from her piazza-attitude and results in her becoming the most representative isolato. She is "enchanted" (p.91) like both Marianna and Don Benito, and cannot relate her past to her rescuers as Bartleby cannot reveal his history. She is more than any other isolato the "tortoise," brought from "unutterable solitudes" (p.57) to persevere in the world of experience. As Melville investigates the "ciphers" on the tortoise's back, he views in the case of Hunilla "her soul's lid, and the strange ciphers thereon engraved" (p.91). Hunilla is last seen,

[13]Other allusions to this demonic source occur in this sketch: Hunilla's husband and brother are described as "persevering" under "that burning sun" (p.90); Hunilla struggles "as against the writhed coilings of a snake" (p.92); and, finally, Melville announces that "often ill comes from the good... " (p.93).

Christ-like, riding "upon a small grey ass" (p.101); that the ass is grey is worthy of note: it becomes the ideal way to view, and go through, reality - a fusion of black and white.

In "Sketch Ninth : Hood's Isle and the Hermit Oberlus," the reader is given another portrait of the lizard. As Bartleby is figuratively described as a hermit, Oberlus is so painted literally; the difference is that Oberlus's life is dedicated to evil. He is a "devil" (p.108) with qualities which are "diabolical" (p.102). Melville leaves little doubt about this satanic essence; Oberlus is "a volcanic creature" with "sinister" gestures and a nature which is "warped and crooked" (pp.103-104). He is not only a tyrant, which Plato considered to be the ultimate deterioration of human nature, but "the most incredible of tyrants" (p.108).

Babo-like, Oberlus is a ruler in a black world. He turns his slaves into "garter-snakes" (p.108), the equivalent of the Dog-King's dogs. Yet one senses that Oberlus, himself, is a slave to a larger evil which is responsible for his becoming a snake, "coiled asleep in his lonely lava den among the mountains" (p.103). Melville suggests that he is "the victim of some malignant sorceress" (p.103),

the same enchanter who torments the tortoise.[14] Oberlus has also been dealt his own brand of justice by his fellow man, as evidenced in the treatment given him by the smuggler. This is not to make excuses for Oberlus's satanic essence, or to suggest he is yet another tortoise but indoctrinated with evil. Melville states very clearly that "the sole superiority of Oberlus over the tortoises was his possession of a larger capacity of degradation" (p.104). Oberlus's identification is with evil; the isolatoes' identification is with endurance.

Close to the end of "Sketch Ninth," Melville alludes to a further history of Oberlus:

> From Guayaquil Oberlus proceeded to Payta; and there, with that nameless witchery peculiar to some of the ugliest animals, wound himself into the affections of a tawny damsel; prevailing upon her to accompany him back to his Enchanted Isle; which doubtless he painted as a Paradise of flowers, not a Tartarus of clinkers. (p.111)

This excerpt is worthy of attention for two reasons. Firstly, the snake imagery ("wound himself") is suggestive

[14] It is earlier asserted: "That these tortoises are the victims of a penal, or malignant, or perhaps a downright diabolical enchanter... " (p.58).

of Satan tempting Eve; and, secondly, as a painter of an illusion, significantly "Paradise," Oberlus in all of his satanic being is identified with the sun of "The Piazza" and the "invisible painter" of "Sketch Eighth." Melville notes that "it is religion to detest" Oberlus (p.112), and so it is to detest the devil; the question is, in Melville's symbology, is God that devil?

"Sketch Tenth: Runaways, Castaways, Solitaries, Grave-stones, etc." is largely a discussion of what is alluded to in the title, and does not hold much by way of symbolic content save for the conclusion. Significantly, "Sketch Tenth" and, as a consequence, the whole of "The Encantadas," is ended on a pessimistic, indeed almost nihilistic, note. Melville refers to the world as "the great general monastery of earth" (p.16). Throughout The Piazza Tales, the monastery, as a symbol, is given negative connotations: sometimes it is a prison, other times a source of evil (eg. "Benito Cereno"). The reader has seen the effect of a monastery on Don Benito; by labelling earth as a monastery, Melville suggests a similar influence on its inhabitants, and then immediately confirms it through a case-example.

Continuing the monastic symbolism, Melville changes Porter's "Gentle reader" to "Oh, Brother Jack" in the epitaph.[15] He leaves the second line alone, with the exception of a change in the spelling of "once". The rest of the epitaph is altered radically, so much so that it bears no resemblance to the original version. Two matters are worthy of note in Melville's new version: one, there is no suggested hope of resurrection[16]; and two, Melville's

[15] Russell Thomas, "Melville's Use of Some Sources in 'The Encantadas,'" American Literature, III (January, 1942), pp.442-43, reveals Porter's version of the epitaph as compared to Melville's:

Porter	Melville
Gentle reader as you pass by As you are now, so wonce was I; As now my body is in the dust, I hope in heaven my soul to rest.	Oh, Brother Jack, as you pass me by As you are now, so once was I Just so game, and just so gay But now, alack, they've stopped my pay. No more I peep out of my blinkers, Here I be - tucked in with clinkers!

[16] Newbery sees considerable significance in this fact; she adds, "Thus, by closing with an image of death which allows no hope from beyond and which confirms the despair mottoes from Spenser, 'The Encantadas' take on a meaning which could be described a 'Melville's inverted Theodicee,' one in which the ways of God in relation to evil cannot be justified anymore. The only ascertainable reality - apart from man's humanizing and ordering achievements - is evil" p.264.

selection and use of the term "blinkers." In regard to the latter point, I suggest that Melville's amended version of the original epitaph is a statement on the transition from innocence to experience, the piazza-attitude to the vision and condition of the isolato. "Blinkers" is a symbol of how reality is viewed in Plato's cave. "Blinkers off," the fellow is no longer "game" and "gay," he is buried in the Encantadas, stuck in reality, "tucked in with clinkers" (p.117).

There is much in "The Encantadas" which suggests that the larger work intended for Harper's was to be epic in nature. Melville uses the Encantadas as not only emblematic of his nineteenth-century wasteland, but also as a condition which has existed since the beginning of time.[17] As Runden points out, "Occasionally, through imagery, he can create the sense of all times past being evoked and brought to bear upon a present moment."[18] James Joyce uses this same technique in Ulysses: and, as

[17] In this respect, it should be remembered that there is no "change" ("Sketch One") on the isles and that they are described in imagery of immobility and death connotative of purgatory and hell (Runden, p.23).

[18] Ibid., p.129.

Joyce uses The Odyssey to demonstrate that there is nothing heroic in modern life, Melville uses the Faerie Queene as a contrast between the idyllic past and the realistic present.

"The Encantadas Or Enchanted Isles" contains some of Melville's most powerful prose, despite the fact that the sketches are uneven in quality (with Sketches 4 to 7 particularly weak). In "The Encantadas," Melville offers the reader a close-up view of the reality which permeates the whole of The Piazza Tales, as well as additional insight into characters who find themselves isolated in that reality. Not only an integral part of The Piazza Tales, "The Encantadas" is the master-piece of Melville's puzzling philosophical conception of the universe.

Chapter VIII

"The Bell-Tower"

"The Bell-Tower," which appeared in Putnam's in August of 1855, is Melville artistically at his weakest in The Piazza Tales. Tyrus Hillway says of it in Herman Melville:

> "The Bell-Tower," a somewhat melodramatic tale of a clockmaker killed by his own invention, suggests the dangers implicit in the scientific and mechanical progress of the nineteenth century - a movement just then entering its heyday. This kind of writing, representing a point of view that was rapidly becoming outdated, could add little or nothing to his popularity. It made the editors of Putnam's, in which the story appeared, begin to insist that he put his talents to better use by producing, instead of such deep-diving intellectual stuff, another "good" narrative of adventure.[1]

Although few people today regret Melville's "deep-diving intellectual stuff," most twentieth-century critics would agree that in the case of "The Bell-Tower" Melville's talents could have been put to better use. In his introduction to the tale in Great Short Works of Herman Melville, Warner Berthoff justifiably states:

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[1] Tyrus Hillway, Herman Melville (New York:Twayne Pub., 1963), p.137.

> "The Bell-Tower"... is in conception the most Hawthornesque of Melville's stories and in performance the most inept. The writing is arthritically clumsy; the Faustian (or Frankensteinian) parable is both labored and erratic in its progression; and the moralizing last paragraph makes you wish it might be proved that somebody else was the real author.[2]

Nevertheless, "The Bell-Tower" lived up to the expectations that Melville personally had of it by being anthologized twice in his lifetime: in Volume III of Johnson's Little Classics (Boston 1874-1881), as well as in Stedman's A Library of American Literature (New York 1889-1890).[3] It also fits reasonably well into the unity established by "The Piazza," "Bartleby," "Benito Cereno," and "The Encantadas," echoing many of the themes which appear in these tales.

Bannadonna is introduced as a "mechanician" (p.335), but portrayed more as a "magician" (At one point, he is compared to Albert Magus). His intentions are announced as follows:

[2]Berthoff, p.223.

[3]Bickley, "Literary Influences and Technique in Melville's Short Fiction," p.51.

> In short, to solve nature, to steal into her, to intrigue beyond her, to procure some one else to bind her to his hand; these -, one and all, had not been his objects; but, asking no favors of any element or any being, of himself, to rival her, outstrip her, and rule her. He stooped to conquer. With him, common sense was theurgy; machinery, miracle; Prometheus, the heroic name for machinist; man, the true God. (pp.369-70)

Described much like Chillingworth, Bannadonna is modern man armed with the scientific method and artist's chisel on a quest to challenge God as sole creator in the universe. "A practical materialist" (p.369), Bannadonna nearly achieves this feat.

The bell-tower is "like Babel's" (p.355); it is an attempt to bridge human being with supernatural. This "bridge" becomes cleverly clear by way of sexual imagery - imagery not unlike that which marks the salesman's rod in "The Lightning-Rod Man." Melville states that "the climax-stone slowly rose in air" with the consequence that, "In the one erection, bell-tower and clock-tower were united" (pp.356-57). Melville also notes that the belfry is "groined" (p.372).[4]

[4] Chase, pp.124-25, and H. Bruce Franklin, Future Perfect: American Science Fiction of the Nineteenth Century (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1966), p.147, also point out the sexual allegory.

The creator is equally as pretentious. A human being, Bannadonna has aspirations to godhood: "mounting it, he stood erect" (p.356). His work is considered to be "nothing less than a supplement to the Six Day's Work; stocking the earth with a new serf, more useful than the ox, swifter than the dolphin, stronger than the lion, more cunning than the ape, for industry an ant, more fiery than serpents, and yet, in patience, another ass" (p.368). As rival to the throne, he is "God's vain foe" (p.364) with a face which is, to pardon the pun, "Vulcanic" (p.361). With "magic metal" (p.371), Bannadonna, the magician, creates life out of machinery; and then, like the employer's treatment of Bartleby, seeks to rule that life with a mechanic exactitude:

> Bannadonna had unpacked the belfry-image, adjusted it, and placed it in the retreat provided - a sort of sentry box in one corner of the belfry; in short, through-out the night, and for some part of the ensuing morning, he had been engaged in arranging everything connected with the domino; the issuing from the sentry-box each sixty minutes, sliding along a grooved way, like a railway; advancing to the clock-shell, with uplifted manacles; striking it at one of the twelve junctions of the four-and-twenty hands; then wheeling, circling the bell and retiring to its post, there to abide for another sixty minutes, when the same process was to be repeated; (p.370)

"Una," symbolic of Truth, Unity, and Perfection, looks on: her "fatal" smile a presentiment of what is to come. Jealous Jehovah fumes from His pedestal ("Hark! is that - a football above?" [p.363]), eventually to get His way: Bannadonna's fate is rumoured to be caused by "supernatural agency" (p.367). Finally, the "stone-pine" (p.355), symbol of anti-nature, progress, and phallic aspirations, tumbles Humpty Dumptyward to the ground - never to have reached perfection, "the figure 1."

Such is the story in brief, a rather elaborate cliché causing one to wince when the master is "ironically" killed by his own invention. Nevertheless, despite its artistic drawbacks, "The Bell-Tower" touches upon many of Melville's favourite themes in The Piazza Tales.

The magazine version of "The Bell-Tower" began with the following three epigraphs:

> Like negroes, these powers own man sullenly; mindful of their higher master; while serving, plot revenge.
>
> The world is apoplectic with high-living of ambition; and apoplexy has its fall.
>
> Seeking to conquer a larger liberty, man but extends the empire of necessity.
>
> from a private MS. (p.355)

The epigraphs are quite simple and indicate, as Bickley puts it, "that the story will deal with pride, ambition,

the overthrow of a master, and a fall."[5] The epigraphs were dropped in the Piazza Tales version of "The Bell-Tower," probably because Melville "saw them as revealing too much of the plot."[6] Whatever Melville's rationale, the omission is an improvement in what is already a melodramatic tale. For the purposes of this thesis, however, the first epigraph is of significance in three respects: 1) As indicated, it serves as a presentiment of what is to follow; 2) It establishes an atmosphere which is pregnant with the suggestion of evil; and 3) It creates a parallel between the tale and "Benito Cereno," the only other third-person narrated short story of this period. I find this last respect to be particularly worthy of attention.[7]

Talus, the iron slave, fills the role of Babo in "Benito Cereno" with an important twist. Talus is not the embodiment of evil, rather he becomes the agent of God in dealing with that evil, Bannadonna. It would appear that

[5]Bickley, "Literary Influences and Technique in Melville's Short Fiction," pp.204-05.

[6]Ibid., The Method of Melville's Short Fiction, p.99.

[7]Fogle, p.63, and Franklin, Future Perfect, p.148, also indicate this "Benito Cereno" connection.

Melville's Talus is modeled after a character in Book V of The Faerie Queene; as Bickley astutely notes, "Spenser's Talus was a half-human creature with remarkable powers: he could defeat entire armies of brigands with his iron flail, could swim rivers, and, most importantly, could almost automatically recognize (and would quickly punish) false and evil men."[8] As Babo's skull torments Don Benito after death, Talus stands over Bannadonna in a replay of the "master symbol" of "Benito Cereno," "as if whispering some post-mortem terror" (p.371).

The bell-tower, like the San Dominick, becomes an arena in which a man is depicted as being evil; the audience sits on the scaffolding "like sailors on yards" (p.356) watching the events unfold.[9] The magistrates, in particular, share Delano's preference for ignoring "malign evil" in man, as well as possessing the commercial

[8]"Literary Influences and Technique in Melville's Short Fiction," p.209. See also, The Method of Melville's Short Fiction, p.98.

[9]Of peculiar interest is a remark, never developed, made by the narrator of "Benito Cereno" in describing the San Dominick's bell, "At this moment, with a dreary grave-yard toll, betokening a flaw, the ship's forecastle bell, smote by one of the grizzled oakum-pickers, proclaimed ten o'clock,.. " (p.276; my italics).

instinct of Bartleby's employer. For both of these reasons, Bannadonna escapes prosecution for killing a worker:

> The homicide was overlooked. By the charitable that deed was but imputed to sudden transports of esthetic passion, not to any flagitious quality. A kick from an Arabian charger; not sign of vice, but blood. (p.358)

Despite their "charitable" attitude, Bannadonna makes the magistrates feel "uneasy" and "stirred" with apprehensiveness (p.359): reactions identical to those experienced by the piazza-owner, Bartleby's employer, and Delano. But, whereas in the case of the latter two characters a suggestion is implied subtly that they are partners in evil (the employer as an exploiter; Delano as the satyr in the "master symbol"), in the case of the magistrates the association with evil is made blatantly. Indeed, the magistrates, through their refusal to punish Bannadonna for murder, are accessories to that crime.

There are also noticeable similarities between "Sketch Third : Rock Rodondo" of "The Encantadas Or Enchanted Isles" and "The Bell-Tower." The interpretation of the bell-tower, or "stone-pine," as a symbol of anti-nature works well particularly in the light that it is eventually overthrown by nature (an earthquake); on another level, however, the "stone-pine" is solidly entrenched in

Melville's conception of reality. Rodondo is compared to a "Bell Tower" in "Sketch Third", a place upon which "hermit-birds, which ever fly alone" (p.62) land. Bannadonna's creation is a bell-tower with the belfry described as a "metallic choir of birds" (p.372). The "high stone tower" (p.60) of Rodondo offers a panoramic view of the Encantadas; Bannadonna's bell-tower offers "sights invisible from the plain" (p.356). The bell-tower, then, is also a symbol of reality, life outside the cave, the evil implicit in the real world.

The god of "The Bell-Tower" appears to be very much like the god of "The Lightning-Rod Man," the Old Testament Jehovah. As the salesman seeks to put his "pipestem between clay and sky" in "The Lightning-Rod Man," Bannadonna's object is to create a tower between earth and heaven. In both cases, pipestem and tower, the article concerned is given phallic significance only to be snapped to pieces by the tale's conclusion. In both "The Lightning Rod-Man" and "The Bell-Tower," Jehovah remains supreme despite contesters to his throne. Finally, as Martin Leonard Pops points out in The Melville Archetype, both tales constitute "attempts of man to impose himself on nature."[10] The lightning-rod man and Bannadonna are

[10]Pops, p.145.

usurpers to the Crown, whose human attempts at godlikeness cast them into the roles of demonic beings who fail in a quest to dominate the natural and supernatural realm.

Continuing yet another Piazza Tale theme, there is an allusion to the sun as a source of illusion in "The Bell-Tower," Melville states:

> As all along where the pine tree falls, its dissolution leaves a mossy mound - last-flung shadow of the perished trunk; never lengthening, never lessening; unsubject to the fleet falsities of the sun; shade immutable and true gauge which cometh by prostration - so westward from what seems the stump, one steadfast spear of lichened ruin veins the plain. (p.355)

In other tales, it will be remembered, the sun was a symbol of a supernatural prankster. "Fleet falsities of the sun" implies a similar sort of enchantment, or trickery, here. The noises that the magistrates hear in the belfry and question whether they come from a "football" (p.363) are like the thunderbolts in "The Lightning-Rod Man": the source is an angry Jehovah. In this light, it is significant that the sun in "The Bell-Tower" is also referred to as a "football" (p.365). In comparison to the other tales, however, the allusion is not very well developed as Melville is content upon focusing on an evil isolated - Bannadonna.

The second half of the excerpt quoted above ("shade immutable... veins the plain") provides yet another state-

ment of Melville's personal philosophy. "True gauge which cometh by prostration" is the Melvillian theory of vision through endurance, the grey which unites the black and white polarized views of the universe. In "The Bell-Tower," Talus triumphs through perseverance, at least temporarily vanquishing a form of evil. In this sense, he may be grouped with the isolatoes - all of whom find themselves compelled to endure. But, as Bartleby is locked up by the authorities who know nothing about absolute justice, Talus is sunk to the bottom of the sea by the so-called "magistrates."

Chapter IX

Conclusion

While The Piazza Tales lacks unity in action, being composed of six rather distinct plots, it achieves a much contiguous unity by way of the individual tales being interwoven by common threads, or themes. By far, the most visible thread is that of endurance in life-destroying conditions. This merits attention in all of the tales, although to a much lesser extent in "The Lightning-Rod Man."

The motif of endurance is commonly presented through a character who is distinguished by imagery indicative of solitude and perserverance (Marianna, Bartleby, Don Benito, the narrator of "The Lightning-Rod Man," Hunilla and Talus). In most cases, the character is viewed as suffering a sort of penal existence and is described as being gray, pale, ghost-like, and enchanted (Marianna, Bartleby, Don Benito, and Hunilla). The character in whom endurance is personified is seen as having a superior vision which allows him to cut through the deception of appearance to the reality of things (Marianna, Bartleby, Don Benito, to a limited extent - the narrator of "The Lightning-Rod Man," Hunilla and Talus). As a consequence of the epiphany offered by this reality, the character recognizes

his condition to be that of a victim at the hands of a diabolical enchanter or his fellow man. Nevertheless, the character endures, plodding his way through life as the tortoise inches his way across the inferno of the Encantadas.

Opposite the character who endures in this inferno is a twin, although polarized opposite, character who is emblematic of evil. This is best exemplified in the cases of Don Benito and Babo (same age and characteristics), and Hunilla and the Dog-King (white dogs and black dogs, respectively). Also described in imagery connotative of the devil are Oberlus, Bannadonna, and the lightning-rod salesman. The characters in this group may be categorized under the heading of "lizard." Not only cognizant of evil, they dwell in it: finding some peculiar satisfaction in the act of tormenting others. Like the tortoise, the lizard exists as a hermit; but unlike the former creature, it is ever ready to strike.

Taking all of this in is the happy-go-lucky character who, like the proverbial monkeys, hears no evil, sees no evil, and speaks no evil. His is the "piazza attitude": a detached observer, rather than a participant, whose ironic blindness is a result of a commitment to a safe, comfortable, easy course through life. Unlike the

tortoise and the lizard, who are in a very real sense slugging it out in hell, this character dwells in a paradisiacal fog which is quite divorced from reality. He is Plato's man of reason, whose assumptions and conclusions rarely pierce the truth: a consequence of the categories of the rational man being inadequate for solving problems such as the effect of evil on the universe. This character trusts Providence and desires a feeling of well-being at the expense of vision. He is the piazza-owner, Bartleby's employer, Delano, the viewer of the Encantadas, both of the magistrates in "The Bell-Tower" and, once again, to some extent the narrator of "The Lightning-Rod Man." There is some indication that Melville blames the blind observer for clinging to his paradise. Bartleby's employer is seen as an exploiter, Delano as a black satyr, and the magistrates as accomplices in a murder. This is because the "piazza attitude" of the blind observer is like a brick wall against which the tortoise-like character stands alone, incommunicado, and alienated.

Another theme prominent throughout the whole of The Piazza Tales is that of appearance and reality. The blind observer is identified with the former condition, while the tortoise and the lizard are associated with the latter. Appearance implies illusion in The Piazza Tales. The blind observers accept illusion as reality because its

paradisiacal qualities are conducive to their philosophy of contentment. The illusion is caused by the sun, which in that context becomes the diabolical enchanter of the universe of The Piazza Tales. As the sun is a Platonic symbol of a higher monism, it would seem that God is the diabolical enchanter of The Piazza Tales. In "The Encantadas," however, Melville suggests that there is a bright side to reality: insinuating the presence of the Platonic "good." This apparent contradiction may be clarified if the higher monism of God is seen as having a Manichean duality of good and evil, as though Zoroaster's Ormazd and Ahriman were Siamese twins. Unlike Zoroaster, Melville stresses the superiority of Ahriman (darkness and evil) over Ormazd (light and fire). Melville draws this doctrine from the nature of the tortoise, a monism with a duality of color in which black dominates white.

Despite this rather Manichean conception of God and the universe, the reality portrayed in The Piazza Tales is an inferno in which only evil and suffering can be found. The pain implicit in this reality is so acute that life becomes intolerable causing some to choose death as escape, and preventing others from revealing the horror of their past. In this sense, there exists a strong sense of nihilism in The Piazza Tales, from the godless "Bartleby" to the progressively bleak aspect of "The

Encantadas." One gets the feeling that Melville's mind has sketched an incredibly complex universe in which good and evil vie for control, but that his heart negates the possibility of good ever winning. That Melville's stance on the nature of God is ultimately ambiguous in The Piazza Tales is a reflection of the intrusion of his unconscious into his more rational, although not necessarily correct, state of mind.

The influence which Barrett and, particularly, Sealts claim Plato exerted on Melville has been verified in the context of The Piazza Tales. As a rule, Melville is in agreement with Plato in the latter's analyses of the problems of perception, the condition of the state, and the role of art. Melville uses the symbolism of "The Simile of the Cave," "The Divided Line" and "Art and Illusion" frequently to describe these problems, but as Sealts points out, Melville arrives at different conclusions. At this stage in his life, not only did Melville feel that Plato avoided the problem of evil, but he used Plato's own symbolism in an attempt to expose that evil for others.

Melville's other short fiction of the 1853-56 period echoes many of the themes which may be found in the microcosm of The Piazza Tales. Merrymusk, Martha, and Hautboy, are all tortoise-like characters. The "piazza attitude"

is found in "Cock-A-Doodle-Do!," "Poor Man's Pudding and Rich Man's Crumbs," "The Paradise of Bachelors and The Tartarus of Maids," and "I and My Chimney." The theme of appearance (illusion) and reality is most prominent in "Cock-A-Doodle-Do!" and "The Paradise of Bachelors and The Tartarus of Maids"; and Socrates, Plato's spokesman, appears in both of these tales. Likewise, sexual punning, attacks on transcendentalism, and questionable narrators characterize many of the stories. With all these similarities, a case for unity can be made for any six stories of the 1853-56 period. In this light, and only in this light, does The Piazza Tales find its unity.

Given these similarities, unity becomes a question of degree; for example, "Bartleby" has more in common with "Benito Cereno" than it does with "The 'Gees," although the narrators of both "Bartleby" and "The 'Gees" are unreliable. Using degree of similarity both in theme and technique as a means for establishing unity, it is my opinion, that of all of Melville's short fiction in this period, the following stories would achieve most unity if brought together in a cluster of six: "The Piazza," "Bartleby," "Benito Cereno," "The Encantadas," "Cock-A-Doodle-Do!," and "The Paradise of Bachelors and The Tartarus of Maids." As far as The Piazza Tales is concerned, this leaves "The Bell-Tower" and "The Lightning-Rod Man" in the position

of having much in common with each other, but comparatively less with the other tales.

"The Bell-Tower," nevertheless, does blend smoothly into the unity established by "The Piazza," "Bartleby," "Benito Cereno," and "The Encantadas." It features both a lizard (Bannadonna) and a tortoise (Talus), as well as blind observers in the magistrates. There is an allusion to "the fleet falsities of the sun," as well as a distinct echo of "Sketch Third" from "The Encantadas." Most importantly, it offers a serious treatment of the problem of evil.

"The Lightning-Rod Man," in contrast, lacks tragedy and at no point is distinguished by an intensity of emotion. It is primarily a light-hearted sketch in which the lizard is a comic figure and the narrator a cross-between a tortoise (living the hermit life) and a blind observer (who rejects a genuine safety device because he believes in God's providence). "The Lightning-Rod Man" would be better grouped with "I and My Chimney," and "The Apple-Tree Table": two stories in which the narrator is portrayed as an amiable old man, and in which no evidence of suffering may be found.

In the introduction to this thesis I alluded to a perceptual hierarchy that could be deduced from the

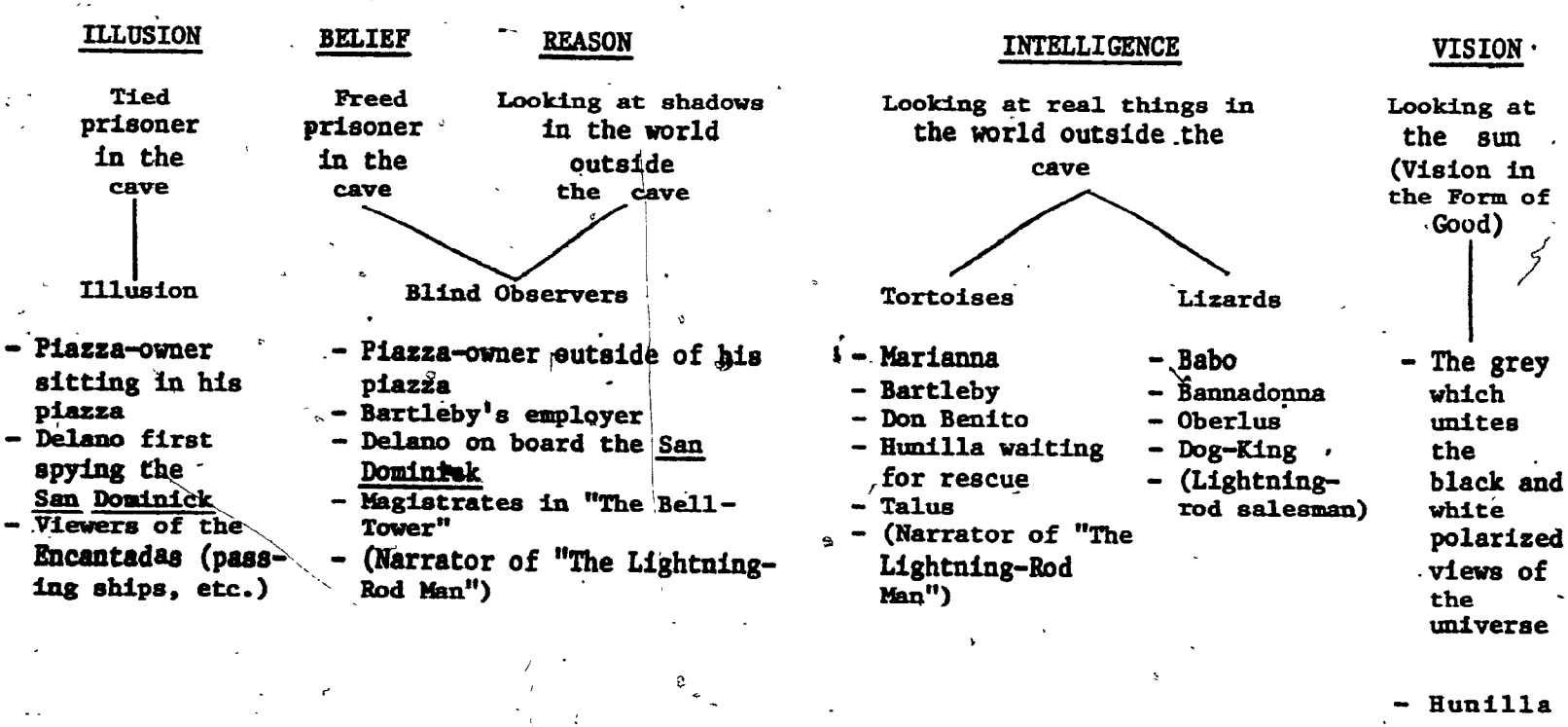
microcosm of The Piazza Tales, irrespective of unity, in order to shed light upon Melville's philosophical conception of the universe. This appears on the subsequent page in the convenient form of a diagram.

As may be seen the characters are grouped under two headings: the first of which is H.D.P. Lee's categories of perception in the cave[1]; and the second of which is Melville's corresponding categories in The Piazza Tales. For further clarification a comparison with Blake may be helpful. Melville's state of "Illusion" is comparable to the child-like bliss found in Blake's Songs of Innocence. His "Blind Observers" are comparable to the character of Thel, who retreats into innocence rather than live in reality; they are on the periphery of perception, but prefer the comfort of the easy chair. Melville's "Tortoises" and "Lizards" live in a reality more terrible than the one depicted in Songs of Experience; it is Melville's version of "the promised land" ("A Pisgah View from the Rock"), a realm of darkness and pain where the apparent existence of good is negated by the overwhelming force of evil. Finally, Melville's "Vision" is the ability to perceive

[1]Lee, The Republic, pp.281-82.

The Design of THE PIAZZA TALES:

A Perceptual Hierarchy



both good and evil without becoming obsessed by either: it is the grey which unites the white and black polarized views of the universe. Hunilla, alone, achieves it in The Piazza Tales; she is seen, Christ-like, on a small grey ass at the end of "Sketch Eighth" - the apparent result of being able to endure long enough in a totallying bleak setting. As I have stated, however, Melville's conception of "Vision" seems to me to be more of an intellectual rationalization than a true feeling. I believe that if Melville had given in to his subconscious fears, what is "Vision in the Form of Good" for Plato would have been "Vision in the Form of Evil" for Melville. Instead, one finds in The Piazza Tales an implied "Vision in the Form of Good and Evil." This tension between Melville's heart and mind interferes with whatever unity there is in The Piazza Tales, resulting in a degree of confusion and a number of contradictions.

One more note on the perceptual hierarchy is necessary. Because some of Melville's characters are in a state of transition from one category to the next, I have listed them in both categories; I think that this works out well insofar as such characters have traits which are common to more than one category. One problem still exists in the diagram and that is what to do with the narrator of "The Lightning-Rod Man." He is listed under two categories in

parenthesis to indicate that though he enjoys some of the characteristics of both blind observer and the tortoise, he is neither, nor in a state of transition. The fact that he is the problematic character in this perceptual hierarchy suggests once more the "The Lightning-Rod Man" does not fit as comfortably into the so-called "unity" of The Piazza Tales as it has come to be accepted.

In The Piazza Tales, Melville juggles appearance with reality, representation with the original. He is experimenting with approaches to art, attempting to realize "the best of two worlds." At the same time, The Piazza Tales marks another step in Melville's well-known "progress into silence." It has been one of the premises of this thesis that Melville was strongly influenced by The Republic throughout the writing of The Piazza Tales. Conceivably, then, Melville's movement to silence is in part due to the influence of Plato's theory of art. In this respect, the following passages from The Republic may be of considerable significance:

> 'Suppose,' then, a man could produce both the original and the representation. Do you think he would devote himself to the manufacture of representations and make it the highest object in life?'

'No, I don't.'

'Of course not. If he really knew about the things he represented, he would devote himself to them and not to their representations; he would try to leave behind him the memory of things well done, and be more anxious to be praised for his actions than to write poems in praise of others.'[2]

Having experimented with appearance and reality, Melville moved to a position of artist as con-man, and then to silence: the recognition of art's inadequacy as a vehicle for reaching truth.

[2]Plato, p.375.

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