1966

Herman Melville'S Use Of Nature In The Encantadas And Selected Poems

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HERMAN MELVILLE'S USE OF NATURE IN THE ENCANTADAS AND SELECTED POEMS

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A Thesis

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts in English

The University of New Mexico

1966

This thesis, directed and approved by the candidate's committee, has been accepted by the Graduate Committee of the University of New Mexico in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Harvey Rosenblum
DEAN

DATE June 23, 1966

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CHAPTER I

SURVEY OF NINETEENTH-CENTURY CONCEPTS OF NATURE

The apparent indifference of nature toward man is a characteristic feature of Herman Melville's writings that marks a distinction between Melville and his contemporaries, the romantics. Although Melville writes during the romantic period in American literature and is both a romantic and a transcendentalist in many of his attitudes, he does not fully share the optimism and the worship of nature that was strong in the United States during the pre-Civil War period. In Britain the confidence of romanticism was giving way to the skepticism of the Victorians as Melville began his literary career. Melville's own attitude of question, doubt, and pessimism reflects his acquaintance with Victorian writers and his dissatisfaction with contemporary romanticism. His treatment of nature during a period in which nature was the object of reverence among religious-aesthetic cults and the very source of being within naturalistic theories which almost assumed the proportions of religion among their adherents is an index to many facets of his thought and is certainly one measure of his acceptance of romantic standards of his own time and environment as well as his deviation from them.

The search for a universal dynamic principle not furnished by eighteenth-century mechanistic theories of nature, part of the intellectual heritage of the early nineteenth-century, stimulated men

of literature and philosophy who were aware of a vital force, or spirit, informing man and animating nature. Mechanistic philosophies--denoted as determinism, necessarianism, materialism, or naturalism--were based upon scientific laws operative in the material world; the creation, growth, and activity of all phenomena in the universe, including man, are only links in an infinite chain of causes and effects which motivates and governs the material world. Materialistic interpretations fail to provide an adequate First Cause, or animating principle; hence they violate the sense of human dignity and even human divinity (inasmuch as one may believe that man is created in the image of God) by deriving man from a lower form of life or from unconscious and unintelligent earth. During the first quarter of the nineteenth century, the British romantics, reacting partly against mechanistic philosophies, with great optimism celebrated man's spiritual faculties and man's centrality in the universe. In the 1830s, and more significantly in the 1840s and 1850s, the more skeptical Victorians replaced optimism with doubt, intuition with scientific objectivity, and pantheism with religious faith.

Unlike the romantics in Britain and America, Melville refuses to overlook the sinister aspects of physical nature; he questions the rationality of whatever Universal Intelligence governs life; he often denies the centrality of man in the universe. Newton Arvin[1] and Leon Howard[2] note that Melville had an early acquaintance with the American

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[1]Newton Arvin, Herman Melville: A Critical Biography (New York, 1963).

[2]Leon Howard, Herman Melville: A Biography (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1951).

romantics Cooper and Irving, later reading also Bryant, Emerson, and Hawthorne. He read many British romantics, including Cowper, Byron, Scott, Shelley, Coleridge, and Wordsworth; and he was familiar with major writers later in the century, such as Carlyle, Browning, Matthew Arnold, Meredith, and even Darwin. Beyond these, he also read extensively from the literary and philosophical sources for the romantics and Victorians alike. Consequently, he is like the Victorians in his doubt and questioning; yet he does not sever himself from the romantic tradition.

At the end of his novel-writing career in the early 1850s, Melville turned to the short story. The Encantadas, written in 1854, is a series of descriptive sketches of the "Enchanted Islands," an early Spanish name for the Galápagos Islands lying on the equator about 500 miles west of Ecuador. In this writing Melville's ostensible subject is the island cluster itself. Unencumbered by the necessity of subordinating nature to a consistent plot development as is required in other of his short stories, he has complete freedom to treat nature--supposedly as it is found in the Encantadas--as he desires to reveal his own personal attitude toward the entire concept of nature, which was central to British and American philosophy in the first half of the nineteenth-century. In so doing, he also reveals closely related attitudes toward man and religion. This paper will examine Melville's treatment of nature in The Encantadas in an attempt to define components of Melville's attitude toward nature.

The first chapter, then, will be a very brief survey of concepts of nature current in the first half of the nineteenth-century and will serve as a background for the following study of Melville. The next

four chapters will examine the implications of Melville's treatment of nature in The Encantadas, specifically his idealism, his concept of man, his concept of God, and his total view of nature. The fifth chapter will survey some of his poetry which further establishes the attitudes identified in The Encantadas, and the final chapter will be a summary.

The sources for Chapter I are mainly The Concept of Nature in Nineteenth-Century English Poetry by Joseph Warren Beach,[3] Strange Seas of Thought: Studies in William Wordsworth's Philosophy of Man and Nature by Newton P. Stallknecht,[4] and Emerson's Angle of Vision by Sherman Paul,[5] with supplementary material from Nature in American Literature: Studies in the Modern View of Nature by Norman Foester,[6] and "Charles Kingsley and the Literary Image of the Countryside" by Gillian Beer.[7]

Of these five, Beach gives the most thorough study of the concept of nature throughout the nineteenth-century and the early part of the twentieth among British writers, including the Americans Emerson and Whitman in the discussion of transcendentalism. He probes literary and philosophical sources for individual writers (both romantic and

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[3]Joseph Warren Beach, The Concept of Nature in Nineteenth-Century English Poetry (New York, 1936).

[4]Newton P. Stallknecht, Strange Seas of Thought: Studies in William Wordsworth's Philosophy of Man and Nature (Bloomington, Ind., 1958).

[5]Sherman Paul, Emerson's Angle of Vision (Cambridge, 1952).

[6]Norman Foester, Nature in American Literature: Studies in the Modern View of Nature (New York, 1923).

[7]Gillian Beer, "Charles Kingsley and the Literary Image of the Countryside," Victorian Studies, VIII (Mar., 1965).

Victorian), traces the development of prevalent concepts, and gives a sense of the breadth of concepts associated with the word "nature." Stallknecht studies Wordsworth in depth, giving much attention to the concept of the imagination; he explains Wordsworth's metaphysical concepts of man and nature in more detail than does Beach and deepens the understanding of romantic attitudes but does not attempt the same scope as Beach. Paul, concerned exclusively with Emerson and transcendentalism, complements Beach as he elucidates and interprets Emerson's metaphysics, draws relationships between Emerson and Coleridge, and thus illuminates the transference of romanticism from Britain to America. Foester gives a general survey of the attitudes of American writers toward nature. Lacking the philosopical depth of the former three, he discusses mainly what Beer calls "the aesthetic excellence"[8] of nature and its immediate effect upon the human psyche rather than probing the metaphysical concepts consequent to the mere emotional response. Beer gives insights into the social implications of the Victorian dissatisfaction with romanticism and philosophical conflict.

The romantics sought a dynamic spirit in the universe which would give centrality to man and heighten the importance of emotion, intuition, and man's creative faculties. At the same time, they could not discount science and its reliance upon reason, sense perception, and materialism. To reconcile scientific objectivity with emotional subjectivity, the romantics adopted idealism from Plato and the German idealists. Despite modifications by individual writers, all retained a duality

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[8]Ibid., p. 243.

between objective and subjective or temporal and eternal, a duality whose two sides are unified in man himself; thus, the romantics justified man's centrality. An understanding of the romantic concept of nature requires an understanding of romantic idealism and the romantic view of man and God.

The Victorians rejected romantic emphasis upon the spirit and the centrality of man. They rebelled against the emotional excesses of romanticism but found no reconciliation between the material and spiritual as the romantics had done. The Victorians were pulled in two directions, toward religion and the necessity of faith, and toward science and naturalism. More intent upon social reform and less upon individual perfection, Victorians felt that romanticism ignored the reality of deplorable social conditions or at least oversimplified them. Writers who promoted optimistic nature-worship, as Beer writes about Kingsley's attitudes, hindered men's recognition of actual social conditions of the mid-nineteenth-century and prevented effective social action. "What troubled him, however, was the pantheism and the passivity toward social evils which, he felt, tended to be the results of the fashionable enthusiasm which young men felt for Wordsworth's work. Recognizing a core of good in any unselfish response to natural beauty, he objected to its systematization into a literary and social convention which blinded people to the real situation in the countryside and provided an excuse for their blindness."[9]

Romantic idealism is most readily explained in terms of a material-spiritual duality. The senses, perceivers of objective reality, are

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[9] Ibid., p. 248.

respected as the "link" between the human mind and "the world around it,"[10] as Stallknecht explains, but are regarded as incomplete. Man has, and needs, an intuitive faculty to perceive spiritual truth. The intuitive faculty is commonly explained by one of two opposing theories. That all knowledge, thought, and "higher sentiment" are compounded of sensations is the more nearly mechanistic, a version of which was accepted by Wordsworth and Shelley in their early years,[11] Beach notes. The other is a priorism whereby knowledge and truth are innate, and meaning is imposed upon sense data rather than being derived from sense data, a doctrine espoused by Coleridge, Carlyle, and the American transcendentalists. The climax, the ultimate achievement, of romantic philosophy is the reconciliation of the duality between material and spiritual and, hence, in the romantic view, the unification of the universe.

The Victorians abandoned the romantic idealism in which material and spiritual cooperate to produce universal unity. Instead, writers emphasize one above, or to the exclusion of, the other. Tennyson rejects materialism, believing in "the superficiality and deceptiveness of the knowledge brought us through our senses. To get at the reality we must dive below the surface of sense-experience and rational knowledge,"[12] as Beach observes. The distinction between objective and subjective remains, but the subjective nature of reality is necessary for Tennyson's theological, rather than pantheistic, emphasis,[13] since he also assumes "the necessity of the absolute mind

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[10]Stallknecht, p. 110.

[11]Beach, p. 129.

[12]Ibid., p. 425.

[13]Ibid., p. 429.

of God,"[14] Beach writes.

On the other hand, such writers as Swinburne and Meredith, recognizing the duality of spirit and sense, espouse evolutionary naturalism in which man's physical nature is the basis of his life, the spirit being a culminating development of the senses; that is, the spirit (including emotion, intuition, and intelligence) is derived from senses, the material world. Spirit is an extension of sense. Romantic dualism and reconciliation are definitely discounted.

The concept of man is central to romantic philosophy; for unification of the duality is achieved within the human mind. Reconciling the facts of scientific objectivity with religious or spiritual claims, the romantics infuse optimism and a sense of human dignity into the concept of man. Man is, as Stallknecht explains, "a metaphysical amphibian,"[15] at home in both the spiritual and material worlds. He is subject to the mechanistic laws of cause and effect, but he is "autonomous" as a "member of the intelligible world,"[16] believing himself to have been created in the image of God and thus having claims to divinity. In the faculty variously called "mind," "imagination," or "reason," man brings together sense data of the material world with the intuitive perception of spiritual truth and an awareness of a dynamic principle believed to inform the human soul and all of nature. Hence, central points in romantic philosophies are the theory of imagination for Wordsworth and Coleridge and the doctrine of correspondences for Emerson and the American transcendentalists.

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[14] Ibid., p. 426. [15] Stallknecht, p. 208. [16] Ibid., p. 208.

"Imagination" in its most common use is a native spiritual faculty in man originating outside of, or beyond, the mechanistic world; that is, it is of spiritual origin. At times identified with the soul itself, the imagination is, at the very least, the source of creativity and morality, imposing meaning upon the forms and events of nature, the objective world. Coleridge and Wordsworth distinguish two phases of the imagination which they call the "Eolian influence" and the "sentiment of Being."[17] The first is a "suprapersonal inspiration,"[18] Stallknecht explains, the passive reception of "inspiration" from nature or from the spirit in nature which is external to the human mind. The second is the active or creative process by which man imaginatively perceives unity between the material and spiritual worlds, the temporal and eternal realms. Coleridge further refines the theory of imagination with his belief that "God is a source of eternal creation, whereby he 'images' or shapes the world."[19] The imagination, or spirit, is "creative" and hence "an echo of divinity."[20] Thus the "human imagination is the temporal repetition of an eternal process."[21] Coleridge suggests a parallel between the processes of the material and spiritual worlds which Carlyle echoes and which Emerson uses as a basis for the doctrine of correspondences.

Emerson develops the doctrine that the material world is both symbolic of the spiritual world and is the physical enactment of the designs and purposes of the spiritual world, a doctrine which Melville suggests slightly in The Encantadas. Man may study the material for

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[17] Ibid., p. 33. [18] Ibid., p. 33. [19] Ibid., p. 45.
[20] Ibid., p. 45. [21] Ibid., p. 45.

insights into the spiritual. Man has an active life in both realms. "Within man, the bipolarity of the universe was duplicated in the prudential self, acting after the needs of the senses, and the spiritual self, acting after the intuitions from its own infinite depth,"[22] writes Paul. Man is the point of connection between spirit and physical nature, the pivotal point of correspondence, which unites the two aspects in "the experience of the self."[23]

The theories of human psychology culminate in the notion that the material world provides the environment and the sense data necessary as a framework for the occurrence of temporal experiences and as the "raw material" to be "spiritualized" or "transcendentalized" into moral, ethical, religious, and aesthetic significances. Ultimately, the significance of life resides in the moral, aesthetic, and religious value and in the sense of universal unity that the imagination imposes upon the events of life as, or after, man experiences them.

Individualism and democratic humanism are two important constituents of the romantic theory of man, both based upon the optimistic belief that man is innately good. Man's nobility includes his innate sense of morality, brotherhood, beneficence, and optimism. Although these virtues are overshadowed by the vices of social, urban life (such as greed, hatred, and worldly ambition), they are evoked by close association with nature unmodified by man, nature itself being benevolent and moral. Thus arises the concept of the "noble savage," the belief that those who live a rural or even uncivilized life are living in conformity to "natural" laws; their lives are simple and

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[22]Paul, p. 151. [23]Ibid., p. 35.

wholesome, uncomplicated by the ambitions and vices of a life in society. Although the romantics do not advocate a rejection of civilization or city life for rural or uncivilized living, they do believe that a greater awareness of nature will strengthen the innate virtues of man and simplify the complexities and worldliness of his life to allow for a more "strenuous intellectual and purified spiritual life,"[24] writes Beach. Having recognized human dignity, "the inner nobility of man as man,"[25] and the provocative force of nature, the romantics base individualism and humanism upon the capacity of the human mind, or spirit, to perceive spiritual truth intuitively and to act according to that knowledge. "Give the human mind the opportunity of an awakening, allow Nature quietly to stimulate the imagination and education humbly to further this development--in short, let the essential power of the mind be released--then moral excellence, happiness, and a profound wisdom will follow of themselves. For the 'human soul is good and graciously composed' and wants only the enlightenment of its own imagination,"[26] Stallknecht explains. In his early years Wordsworth seeks for man an independence from social conformity and a freedom to abide by the decisions of his (enlightened) intuitive faculty; he would have the individual man be the "supreme arbiter of right and wrong."[27] Emerson calls his individualism self-reliance, a doctrine designed to "nullify circumstances,"[28] or, in other words, to allow the individual to control and give significance to circumstances himself rather than to be governed by them. Humanism stems from confidence in the

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[24]Beach, p. 38. [25]Stallknecht, p. 224. [26]Ibid., p. 224.

[27]Ibid., p. 197. [28]Paul, p. 189.

individual's ability to be "morally awakened."[29] Stallknecht writes that the "potentialities of human nature had seemed unlimited,"[30] and the romantics envision a "new order" freed from "artificial and traditional restraint."[31] Hence, a "philosophy of self-confidence and of enlightened self-assertion," a "noble humanism,"[32] emerges from the belief that "human beings are worthy of self-government and once truly awakened, quite capable of it."[33] American romantics, Emerson and Whitman especially, carry this democratic humanism through the entire first half of the century while the concept weakens in Britain.

Stallknecht finds that a doctrine of stoicism supplants Wordsworth's extreme individualism during his middle years (during the writing of "The Excursion") and is followed by a movement toward orthodox Christianity. Although stoicism is not prominent among the romantics, it is mentioned because Beach finds a kind of stoicism in the Victorian acceptance of all experiences as a direct confrontation of reality and because Melville admires and advocates stoical resignation in the face of uncontrollable circumstances as the only possible method of living in the material situation and maintaining one's sanity. Stallknecht explains Wordsworth's stoicism. "The individual insures himself against despair by substituting resignation, by renouncing personal ambition and refusing to allow himself the privilege of criticizing the great traditions. In such a scheme an impersonal conscience quite overrules the imagination of the individual."[34] Beach draws Victorian stoicism from Swinburne. "He takes a position

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[29] Stallknecht, p. 225. [30] Ibid., p. 225. [31] Ibid., p. 25.
[32] Ibid., p. 25. [33] Ibid., p. 225. [34] Ibid., p. 244.

less merely enduring than the Stoics and less showily 'noble.' It is with something like enthusiasm that he embraces the world of actuality."[35]

Among the Victorians two distinct concepts of man are prominent--the religious and the naturalistic--although man generally loses his centrality in the universe. In the religious concept, man's soul is viewed as an entity independent of material conditions, soul and body interacting for mutual benefit (at times, aggravation), a belief opposing the interdependence recognized by romantic duality and the evolutionary continuity of naturalism. Furthermore, man's worldly imperfection is evidence of his divinity and ultimate "divine destiny."[36] Beach explains, "Our spiritual failures are the gauge of our spiritual aspirations . . . the capacity for doubt is the proof of our superiority to the brutes, perhaps the gauge of our infinite destiny."[37]

The second comes from evolutionary naturalism, most fully developed in Swinburne and Meredith. Not only is the soul's independence denied, but the soul is seen as being "naturally derived from Earth,"[38] Beach notes. Man is first a product of physical processes, himself having a physical or material nature, from which then evolves intelligence, or "brain,"[39] and from thence spirit (including emotion, morality, and all "higher sentiments"). Beach writes that "it is from earth, from nature, that man derives his being, his mind, his aspirations, his morality."[40] Man is the culmination of evolution.

Although religionists incorporate a modified evolution into the

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[35]Beach, p. 456. [36]Ibid., p. 451. [37]Ibid., p. 452.
[38]Ibid., p. 470. [39]Ibid., p. 497. [40]Ibid., p. 459.

belief that man's spirit is evolving toward God, the naturalists deny man's progress toward divinity. They acknowledge the soul as the "least temporal"[41] aspect of man's being although it is dependent upon his material condition and is not under supernatural influence. Man's spirit evolves from nature, but nature has no "spirit" before man. Therefore, "'spirit' or 'soul' is man's contribution to the natural process."[42] The only universal spirit is man's spirit evolved from the elements of nature but not residing full-blown in nature, a view opposed by romanticism and by Melville. Nevertheless, man's soul has great potential strength; and with that alone man must confront the realities of his existence, the problems and evils of his mortality, "without borrowing comfort from any supernatural illusions."[43] This confrontation is "the dawn of man's hopes"[44]--the potential perfection of man. One must remember, however, that even in man's rebellion against nature, man uses a power derived from nature and acts according to the "nature" given him by Earth. Melville suggests the same notion: man cannot escape being a part of nature.

Beach mentions a "democratic and humanitarian cast" in the concept that man must subdue individuality and identify himself with the race as a whole; for, unlike Melville, many Victorians recognize man's significance only in the totality of mankind and not as an individual. In Beach's summary, "nature is concerned not for the individual but for the race (or even for life) as a whole, and in order to have significance in nature's order a man must tame and subject that old worm, Self or Egoism."[45] Man must devote himself to those causes which will further,

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[41] Ibid., p. 457. [42] Ibid., p. 477. [43] Ibid., p. 455.

[44] Ibid., p. 469. [45] Ibid., p. 496.

or at least not hinder, the progress of mankind. "The individual soul has its definition by reference to the cause of humanity."[46] Melville defines his individuals by their knowledge of themselves and their relationship to the external and spiritual universe; at no time does he negate the importance of the individual.

The Victorians, then, reduce romantic optimism and individualism. Religious faith creates a conflict between man's spirit and his material conditions, debasing the latter. Reversing the emphasis, evolutionary naturalism makes spirit a creation of the material conditions. The significance of man moves from the individual to identification with collective humanity.

The awareness among the romantics of a non-mechanistic spirit in man and the assumption of a suprapersonal origin for that spirit requires a consideration of its source, which is usually discussed in religious or quasi-religious terms. The suprapersonal dimension of spirit is described in three ways: as God, an approximation of the Christian Deity; as a pantheistic spirit, God or a Universal Spirit residing in nature; and as a mystical experience, an awareness of one (vaguely defined) spirit in both man and nature.

Coleridge and Emerson openly acknowledge and defend the existence and omniscience of a somewhat traditional God, although they mix theology with pantheism in trying to explain God's relation to the apparent spirit of nature and the human soul. God is the ultimate spiritual force of the universe. He is revealed or "materialized," as Paul explains,[47] in the processes of nature and through the

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[46] Ibid., p. 458.

[47] Paul, p. 109.

activities of man. Nature itself "never explains anything," Beach elaborates. "To explain anything in the universe we must have recourse to the fundamental and ultimate idea of God,"[48] upon Whom man is dependent for his spiritual nature.

Other writers only suggest that God is the universal spirit, come to accept orthodoxy in later writings, or simply use Christian religious terminology figuratively. Wordsworth's early mysticism and pantheism are resolved into more nearly orthodox views by 1850.[49] In Shelley's early period of strong necessarianism, he credits nature with all the usual attributes of God but rejects God Himself as an arbitrary power inconsistent with natural law. Among the romantics the concept of God is always slightly, and sometimes strongly, tinged with pantheism.

Pantheism, as Beach explains it, is "a desire to substitute the natural for the supernatural, or to identify the two, or to lay the main stress on the natural. The divine, or supernatural, is conceived of as working invariably through the laws of nature, so that everything in the universe, both physical and moral, is explainable in terms of nature."[50] Stallknecht calls Wordsworth's pantheism an "almost pantheistic Christianity."[51] "Nature is God's imagination [which blends well with Emerson's doctrine of correspondence]. God creates the world in his image, and his creative power enters not only the forms of Nature but the spirit of man, who is capable of participation in such creation"[52]; thus Wordsworth tends "to unite

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[48]Beach, p. 50. [49]Ibid., p. 116. [50]Ibid., p. 116.

[51]Stallknecht, p. 123. [52]Ibid., p. 43.

God and his creatures"[53]--part of the reconciliation of the material-spiritual duality. The British romantics and American transcendentalists generally acknowledge the universal spirit as God but infuse Him or His activity into the forms of nature. Melville works toward establishing this unity but stumbles on his own constant doubting. Shelley remains aloof from God, however, as he accepts platonic idealism and speaks of the universal spirit (not God) which has created both the subjective and objective worlds.[54]

Romantic mysticism is an intuitive vision of the unity of all things in the universe and is described as a religious experience--and for Wordsworth as a deeply aesthetic experience also. Mysticism, Stallknecht observes, is an "intuitive consciousness whose object may be described as the unity of Being. This state of awareness allows the fringes or depths of consciousness to manifest themselves."[55] In his mystical experience Wordsworth is aware that nothing exists in isolation. "The finite objects of our everyday life are not illusions, but their mutual independence is."[56] Coleridge's mysticism is his vision of "unity in multeity," which is the "result of the opposition of positive and negative forces, or 'polarity,'"[57] Beach writes. Emerson's mysticism, likewise, rests upon the consciousness of polarity; but he insists upon a controlled insight, not totally subjective, which will reconcile the spiritual to the material. "One could no more free himself from his reliance on matter than from his need for society; power required form, thought required objects, and the forms

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[53] Ibid., p. 123. [54] Beach, p. 253. [55] Stallknecht, p. 421.

[56] Ibid., p. 14. [57] Beach, p. 332.

or objects, whether of expression or action, were at the prudential pole. Emerson's mysticism, then, could not be lawless, or, as he put it, subjective. Its control was in seeking the objective,"[58] Paul explains. A relationship between Melville and Emerson emerges here; for Melville, with perhaps more vehemence and consistency than Emerson, insists upon proper emphasis of material conditions, a "prudential" balance between material and spiritual.

Among the Victorians pantheism lessens, and men move toward faith devoid of pantheistic reconciliation with science or toward naturalism. Such writers as Browning and Tennyson emphasize the need for faith which is not derived from objective perception. Faith is "the gift of some mysterious faculty or inner vision."[59] The essence of this return to faith is in the belief in what cannot be ascertained objectively or even "felt" as Wordsworth's aesthetic experience within the material world is; it is the belief in a personal God, in the purposiveness of life, and in the perfection of man in an afterlife. "Here is the idea of human progress fused with that of individual immortality, with God, and even with good and evil spirits inspiring our will--the full panoply of religion,"[60] Beach notes.

Naturalism, of course, is accepted in varying degrees, according to the individual, and is often mixed with elements of religious faith. Swinburne and Meredith are at the opposite extreme from the religionists, evolutionary naturalism becoming almost a religion with them. These Victorians are largely questioning both traditional religion and romantic emotionalism, as Melville does, although Melville's

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[58]Paul, p. 157. [59]Beach, p. 420. [60]Ibid., p. 424.

conclusions are quite different from evolutionary naturalism. They deny, or at least question, the existence of God. Arnold calls Him an invention of man[61]; Swinburne declares that a First Cause is unknowable and he therefore refuses to posit an anthropomorphic God. If there is a God, he speculates, He is not a personal one but rather a god of mankind without absolute power to enslave man's spirit. Since the naturalists emphasize group, not individual, humanity, their god is the "growing spiritual ideals of humanity,"[62] Beach explains. Since ideals grow from man's mind and since man's mind comes from his physical body, God also is derived from the Earth. "God is thus not the origin but the culmination of the world-process. He is in process of growth, subject to the principle of evolution, having his roots in earth."[63] The word "God" is used figuratively to describe a phase of man's spiritual development, there being no spirit transcendent to man. Beach explains that "our religious impulses, both those approved by nature, and those upon which she frowns, are an outgrowth of our natural instincts. There is nowhere any separate source of religious inspiration, transcending nature and giving the lie to her. There is not even in man a faculty for supplementing the teaching of nature which is not itself derived from nature--that is, originally from the impulsions of sense."[64] Thus Victorian naturalism incorporates a religious sense into (but subordinate to) natural order and evolution.

Hardy completes the movement away from confidence in the beneficence, purposiveness, and order of a universal controlling spirit

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[61] Ibid., p. 404.

[62] Ibid., p. 464.

[63] Ibid., pp. 464-465.

[64] Ibid., p. 476.

or process. Accepting neither religion nor naturalism, he rejects the nineteenth-century notions of God and of a universal spirit. He represents God as incompetent, unfeeling, and unconscious of the existence of man and earth.

The Victorians as a whole do not totally reject an awareness of God or a universal spirit among men, be it of God or of nature. Rather, they feel, with Swinburne, that there are questions that man cannot answer and for which he need not make up rationalizations. "These problems [the ultimate philosophical questions (Whence and Whither)] are insoluble, and they lead to the invention of legends that, as Swinburne says, 'give not aid.'"[65] Melville echoes some of these Victorian notions. He certainly does not reject God, but he questions and speculates about the nature of God in view of the kind of existence man is forced to lead in his material condition.

The concept of nature embodies many characteristics resulting from, or implied by, idealism, the concept of man, and the awareness of a Universal Spirit. Existing simultaneously, these characteristics are frequently inconsistent with one another and reflect many levels of understanding.

The most common understanding of nature throughout the century involves a simple emotional response to the beauty of the physical forms of nature. "Nature" simply means the "'beauteous forms' of the external world," excluding man, as Beach observes[66]; the response is sheer emotional delight in "whatever charms the fancy and distracts the mind." Beach notes that all major British romantic poets indulge

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[65] Ibid., p. 495.

[66] Ibid., p. 32.

this delight sometimes; and Norman Foester attributes the same attitude to many American writers, thus explaining (in part) the pictorial accuracy of Lanier representing the South, of Bryant describing frontier America, of Thoreau as an amateur naturalist portraying Massachusetts, of Melville appreciating the beauty of the sea and the Pacific islands.

This elemental attitude affects the mind, releasing "sheer animal reactions,"[67] in Beach's description, and lulling the poetic mind into an imaginative mood that provokes the fancy and stimulates emotion. As the point of view is changed to include man as part of physical nature, the romantic passion for the wild elements of nature emerges in an exaltation of elemental passions. Nature, uncivilized and solitary, is an escape from social pressures, corruptions of man-made institutions, artificiality, pettiness, greed, and worldly ambitions. Men may "find the types of, the match for, their own passions in the elemental forces of nature."[68] Melville portrays an "elemental passion" in men and nature alike but often severs identification of the two.

Nature assumes ethical and religious connotations, also, among the romantics. As the realm of God unmodified and consequently uncorrupted by man, nature is implicitly moral and sympathetic toward man. "An antidote to worldliness,"[69] it educates man by provoking his innate noble qualities, stimulating intellectual contemplation, and simplifying social life. This view is unrealistic to the Victorians when they become severely aware of the depressed conditions in the

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[67] Ibid., p. 33. [68] Ibid., p. 36. [69] Ibid., p. 36.

countryside and of the necessity of their accepting responsibility for improvements. They condemn nature as cruel, "pagan and immoral."[70] The romantics view design in nature as evidence of the existence of God and a universal plan. All of nature is "designed, in the whole and in detail, to bring about the effect envisaged by divine wisdom."[71] Being divine, it is, of course, good, God working through the laws of nature. The religionists hold similar views, but the naturalists see the unconscious movement of the evolutionary spirit; and Melville acknowledges the apparent whimsy of natural forces. Among the romantics nature is the "norm of conduct for man"[72]; the material world implies not only amorality but the "baser" instincts, the "animalistic" qualities, to Victorian religionists--the physical world is a "dreadful" but "necessary condition of man's mortal existence."[73]

Among the transcendentalists, physical nature and mechanistic laws are the bridge between man and God, the "tool" for discovering the character of God and His design,[74] as Paul explains in discussing Emerson's doctrine of correspondences. Physical nature "corresponds" to spiritual nature symbolically or analogically and reveals God as God uses the material forms of nature to effect His own designs. Thus a close study of nature should be a close study of God also.

Among the more mystical writers, in particular Walt Whitman, an optimistic faith in progress is derived (in part) from a "quasi-scientific evolutionism" which sees life as "an eternal process of creation,"[75] man being a part of the "universal process" which "is

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[70] Ibid., p. 405. [71] Ibid., p. 166. [72] Ibid., p. 187.
[73] Ibid., p. 430. [74] Paul, p. 30. [75] Ibid., p. 380.

in essence good."[76] God is the "creative principle of the universe, immanent in all," and "if the divine principle is immanent in all things, there is nothing that is not holy."[77] This notion is united with the ideal of democracy so that everything, concrete and spiritual, human and non-human, is celebrated as equally important and equally miraculous.

In this divine plan of nature, all things work for universal good. Apparent evil and destruction are justified by the romantics as contributing to a goodness that far outweighs the tragedy and injustice of isolated events. Therefore, benevolence must be taken on faith because man's limited perspective prevents knowledge of the universal plan. "During the great periods of nature-poetry, the writers seem in a conspiracy to ignore her [nature's] more sinister aspects and assume, without much question, that her plan is a holy one."[78] Unlike the romantics, Melville identifies sinister aspects of nature and questions their long-range effect; and Hardy identifies natural malevolence in the vicious forces of nature.

In the metaphysical concept of nature, nature is the totality--the unity--of phenomena and experience, of material and spiritual. It involves the animating principle of the universe either as a self-activating principle or a spirit that diffuses itself through material forms to direct their individual activities. To some men the dynamic principle may merely reside in the human intuition. The mind, provoked by its own emotional response to nature, interprets its internal disturbance as a response to what seems to be the action of an external

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[76] Ibid., p. 383. [77] Ibid., p. 385. [78] Ibid., p. 185.

spirit. Or it may be that, although man's intuition may impose the sense of a spirit upon material nature, man's intuition is derived from a universal dynamic spirit which is God; therefore, "nature is both the universal and the human spirit." Generally, romantic "nature" means the entire universe, material and spiritual, with emphasis upon the spiritual or upon the unity of material and spiritual.

The major difference in the meaning of "nature" after 1830 is a change in emphasis from a transcendent spirit to an evolutionary earth-spirit. The word "earth" becomes prominent, denoting, Beach suggests, the preoccupation with man's relation to the planet rather than the heavens.[79] "The spirit of earth is an evolutionary force, whose essential property it is to grow, to evolve. It cannot be stopped, and the evil things that threaten to stop it are themselves a part of it."[80] A kind of unity is implied: man is evolutionary nature's "culmination, her glory."[81] Man embodies the physical processes of nature, the only spirit or soul in nature (which has evolved from the physical processes), and the only conscious intelligence in nature through which the basic evolutionary force may be recognized. Since objective and subjective have the same origin and are embodied in their highest forms within the same phenomenon (man), the antagonistic duality of religionists is avoided and something like romantic reconciliation is achieved again.

Against this background of conflicting and changing attitudes, Melville forms his own theories and infuses them into his stories, The Encantadas in particular. Acknowledging nobility in man and beauty

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[79] Ibid., p. 459. [80] Ibid., p. 459. [81] Ibid., p. 462.

in nature, he also presents and examines, without bitterness, the ugly immorality and savagery of man and the vicious indifference of nature--the complexity and ambiguity which make absolute knowledge of life and the systematization of nature impossible.

CHAPTER II

THE FORMS OF NATURE

Herman Melville's long short story The Encantadas is a collection of short sketches giving descriptions of the Galápagos Islands and narrations of tales associated with them. A "long and powerful piece,"[1] as Newton Arvin writes, The Encantadas were written in 1854 during the period immediately following Pierre in which Melville turned to short stories--"work achieved after the making of Moby Dick had brought him complete artistic courage and assurance for the first time in his career,"[2] observes Jay Leyda in the introduction to The Complete Stories of Herman Melville. The sketches are drawn in part from Melville's own experiences[3] and in part from contemporary sources.[4] Published serially in Putnam's Monthly Magazine in March, April, and

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[1]Arvin, p. 211.

[2]Herman Melville, The Complete Stories of Herman Melville, edited by Jay Leyda (New York, 1949), p. ix.

[3]Leyda suggests that the stories of Charles's Island and of the Chola Widow come from Melville's experiences in the Pacific; Howard further suggests that the Chola Widow's tale incorporates features of the Agatha story which Melville had wanted to write at one time. See Howard, p. 210.

[4]For observations and descriptions of the Galápagos Islands, Melville drew heavily from the journals and histories of Captain David Porter, James Colnet, James Burney, and Captain Cowley. See Howard, p. 209. Charles Darwin's Diary of the Voyage of H.M.S. "Beagle" is suggested by Charles Anderson, Melville in the South Seas (Morningside Heights, New York, 1939), p. 50.

May of 1854, The Encantadas were later included in the 1856 volume of short stories entitled Piazza Tales.

The main concern of this study is Melville's use of nature. The first five sketches of The Encantadas--which are descriptions of the islands themselves, their forms of life, their general history--are distinct from the remaining five,[5] which are primarily narrations of tales concerning isolated human contacts with the islands. Plot offering little continuity among the sketches, the most obvious relationship is the common setting. However, a more subtle factor unites the sketches. Moods, attitudes, and philosophic speculations, evoked by physical aspects of the islands (forms of nature), are developed in--and are actually the subjects of--the first sketches; embodied in action and character, they pervade the second group also. Hence, the forms of nature, the physical aspects of the islands, are not used for descriptive purposes alone but serve to establish Melville's attitudes toward nature as that term includes man and human society.

Melville explicitly states the attitudes he wishes his readers to associate with the islands, supporting those attitudes both with concrete imagery and with abstract observations designed to heighten the emotional intensity of the designated associations.

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[5]I have included Sketch Fifth in the first grouping because it is presented as a continuation of the description of the islands from Rock Rodondo. "Ere quitting Rodondo, it must not be omitted that here, in 1813, the U. S. frigate Essex, Captain David Porter, came near leaving her bones." Sketches Seventh, Eighth, and Ninth are fully developed tales; Sketches Sixth and Tenth are narrated outside the context of the travelogue perspective that gives the ostensible continuity to the first five sketches. Therefore, I have felt that Sketch Fifth is more closely related to the first rather than the last sketches.

The sense of "emphatic uninhabitableness,"[6] of extreme desolation and desertedness, distinguishes these islands from every other geographical point in the world. "The Encantadas refuse to harbor even the outcasts of the beasts" (p. 231). Melville severs the islands from all connection with human compassion; he makes them intrinsically devoid of any feature that may provoke human sympathy, understanding, identification, or enjoyment. "It is to be doubted whether any spot of earth can, in desolateness, furnish a parallel to this group. Abandoned cemetaries of long ago, old cities by piecemeal tumbling to their ruin, these are melancholy enough; but, like all else which has but once been associated with humanity, they still awaken in us some thoughts of sympathy, however sad" (pp. 230-231). The islands are so totally devoid of association with humanity that they do not provoke even the little sympathy of the "abandoned cemetaries" and "old cities."

As the islands are the most extreme example of uninhabitableness, so are they most extreme in solitude. Selecting points of comparison from wide geographical ranges, Melville argues that no place on this earth equals the isolation and solitude of the Encantadas. The isles were "immemorial solitudes" (p. 246) when discovered, and they remain so now as we see by Abington Isle, "so solitary, remote, and blank, it looks like No-Man's Land . . . so far as Abington Isle is concerned, Adam and his billions of posterity remain uncreated" (p. 249). Individual forms of nature within the island cluster are also characterized by solitude. Cliffs are rendered "grim" by their "unimpaired . . .

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[6]Herman Melville, "The Encantadas, or Enchanted Isles," Herman Melville: Selected Tales and Poems, edited by Richard Chase (New York, 1961), p. 231. Further citations, enclosed in parentheses in the text, will refer to this edition of The Encantadas.

silence and solitude" (p. 245). Rock Rodondo is a solitary peak "rising straight from the sea ten miles from land" (p. 240). And living in unfathomable solitudes are the tortoises, "these mystic creatures, suddenly translated by night from unutterable solitudes to our peopled deck" (p. 237).

Mixed with solitude and desolation is a dreary, oppressive atmosphere, provoked by an unchanging volcanic environment, unrelieved aridity, and equatorial heat. "Behold the grim and charred Enchanted Isles" (p. 247), typified by Narborough, "no soil whatever; one seamed clinker from top to bottom; abounding in black caves like smithies; its metallic shore ringing under foot like plates of iron" (p. 247). Changelessness enforces the oppression of the atmosphere. "But the special curse, as one may call it, of the Encantadas . . . is, that to them change never comes; neither the change of seasons nor of sorrows. Cut by the Equator, they know not autumn, and they know not spring; while already reduced to the lees of fire, ruin itself can work little more upon them" (p. 231).

The sense of death and decay emerges as Melville notices "wide level beaches of multitudinous dead shells, with here and there decayed bits of sugar-cane, bamboos, and cocoanuts, washed upon this other darker world" (p. 232). The tortoise evokes an image of decay--"I seemed to see three Roman Coliseums in magnificient decay" (p. 237)--and the isles themselves are the barest remains of something once living--"that air of spell-bound desertedness which so significantly invests the isles. Nothing can better suggest the aspect of once living things malignly crumbled from ruddiness into ashes. Apples of Sodom, after touching, seem these isles" (p. 233).

The quality of vastness is constructed by compounding geographical images from far-distant and extended regions--"the great forests of the north, the expanses of unnavigated waters, the Greenland ice-fields . . . the wastes of weedy Babylon" (p. 231), by imaginatively fixing the location of the Encantadas in relation to points beyond the visible horizon, and even by the incredible size, weight, and age of the tortoise--"what other bodily being possesses such a citadel wherein to resist the assaults of Time" (p. 237). There is the feeling of reaching toward ultimate spatial limits and temporal bonds. "Does any balloonist, does the outlooking man in the moon, take a broader view of space? Much thus, one fancies, looks the universe from Milton's celestial battlements. A boundless watery Kentucky. Here Daniel Boone would have dwelt content" (p. 244). Furthermore, the vastness is qualified by a solidity, stability. The vastness is not terrifying, nor does it approach chaos, but maintains a regal poise, a firmness, characterized by the image, "the air of a vast iceberg drifting in tremendous poise" (p. 245). A grandeur and majesty is implied in the quality of vastness.

The extensively developed penitential motif, the "smouldering penal image of the clinkered Galápagos"[7] as Jay Leyda describes it, lends more to the total mood of the initial sketches than any other single tonal motif except that of deception. Melville begins the sketches with the suggestion that the islands look "much as the world at large might, after a penal conflagration" (p. 230) and follows that introduction with a multitude of images conveying notions of condemnation,

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[7]Leyda, p. 116.

chastisement, and relegation to hell. The pelican is "a penitential bird, indeed, fitly haunting the shores of the clinkered Encantadas, whereon tormented Job himself might have well sat down and scraped himself with potsherds" (p. 242). By the sense of ceaseless motion, constant noise, strange shapes, and dark colors, Melville pictures a situation much like Dante's hell here midst the "Isles at Large" (p. 230).

> 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; 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 of the shore, present a most Plutonian sight. In no world but a fallen one could such lands exist. (p. 232)

Melville injects the sense of demoniac forces at work--"these tortoises are the victims of a penal, or malignant, or perhaps a downright diabolical enchanter" (p. 238)--and unites them with an image of volcanic action to produce an almost anthropomorphic creature. "There is dire mischief going on in that upper dark. There toil the demons of fire, who, at intervals, irradiate the nights with a strange spectral illumination for miles and miles around . . . or else, suddenly announce themselves by terrific concussions, and the full drama of a volcanic eruption" (p. 249).

Illusion, or deception, richly interwoven with related motifs, first appears in the capriciousness of natural elements--shifting winds and ocean currents. "The apparent fleetingness and unreality

of the locality of the isles was most probably one reason for the Spaniards calling them the Encantada, or Enchanted Group" (p. 233). Thus, deception is merely a function of distance. "[Rock Rodondo] 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 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. 240). However different the islands may appear at sea, they remain, at a close distance, unchanging, "invariably the same" (p. 234). Then ocular deception blends into the author's mental confusion of time and space. Temporal reality gives way to imaginative reminiscence; spatial reality succumbs before the fanciful intrusion of past experience. "Often in scenes of social merriment, and especially at revels held by candle-light in 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 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" (pp. 234-235). Melville clothes the imaginative transcendence of time and space in mystical overtones of romanticism, in terms of emotion recollected in the tranquillity of idealized nature. "Among the Adirondack Mountains, far from the influences of towns and proportionally nigh to the mysterious ones of nature . . . [I] recall, as in a dream, my other and far-distant rovings in the baked heart of the charmed isles; and remember the

sudden glimpses of dusky shells, and long languid necks protruded from the leafless thickets . . . I can hardly resist the feeling that in my time I have indeed slept upon evilly enchanted ground" (p. 234). Accompanying illusiveness is a complex of romantic attitudes--the sense of enchantment and mysticism, the delight and beauty in nature, wistfulness and reminiscence--in contrast to harsher representations of sinister nature.

Melville's use of nature must be considered, finally, in the context of the qualities he associates with the islands. Such considerations belong to later chapters; the concern of this one is to determine what forms of nature Melville chooses to use in the sketches. The observations which immediately follow are confined to the first five sketches; the remaining five are discussed at the end of the chapter.

Melville emphasizes the islands' volcanic origin and nature. He notices the prevalence of rock and the lack of soil on the islands except along a few stretches of sandy beach. The rock is "charred" and "dark," "vitreous" or "vitrified"--"blackish or greenish masses" (p. 247). Land formations are limited to a few variations. The rocks are honey-combed with "crevices," "cracks," and "fissures" that form a dangerously confusing "labyrinth." Along the coast lines are high cliffs and volcanic promontories with rugged lines of rocks at their bases. Rock Rodondo is the only formation of great height, rising from the sea like a solitary tower. "Tortuous capes and headlands, shoals, and reefs" (pp. 245-246) endanger ships which would approach. The islands offer few harbors; only two are described. Having "scanty water" (p. 286) and more often than not lying beneath a cloud covering

by day, the islands endure insufferable heat and aridity. "But in these isles, rain never falls. Like split Syrian gourds left withering in the sun, they are cracked by an everlasting drought beneath a torrid sky" (p. 231).

The sea exhibits its ever-shifting currents and its constant violent breaking against the cliffs and rocks. Wind, much like the sea, alternates between unpredictable currents and calms. "The capriciousness of the tides of air sympathizes with those of the sea. Nowhere is the wind so light, baffling, and every way unreliable, and so given to perplexing calms, as at the Encantadas" (p. 232).

Vegetation is scrawny, misshapen, unproductive, and "treacherous," only one plant, the "cactus tree" (p. 232), being designated by name. "On most of the isles where vegetation is found at all, it is more ungrateful than the blankness of Aracama. Tangled thickets of wiry bushes, without fruit and without a name, springing up among deep fissures of calcined rock, and treacherously masking them; or a parched growth of distorted cactus trees" (pp. 231-232). The vegetation can barely sustain its own life; without fruit it certainly cannot provide food for other life. The native vegetation is contrasted to cocoanut palms, suger-cane, and bamboo washed upon the shore from Polynesian islands, to pines and forests from the north regions of the continents.

Birds, reptiles, tortoises, and fish comprise the animal life of the Encantadas. Rock Rodondo is the "resort of aquatic birds" (p. 241). Melville contrasts the Rock's company to the swallow, red-robin, and canary--small, gentle, often romantically treated birds common to the temperate zone--finding the aquatic birds "strange sea-fowl" (p. 241), unknown in most civilized areas. Together, they make a

"dissonant" (p. 242), even a "demoniac" (p. 241), din. In detail Melville describes three grotesque, misshapen creatures. "Truly neither fish, flesh, nor fowl is the penguin . . . the most ambiguous and least lovely creature yet discovered by man" (p. 241). This bird, significantly, occupies the lowest level of the Rock. Immediately above perches a bird only slightly less ridiculed for its appearance. The pelicans are "a pensive . . . wobegone regiment" with "the most lugubrious expression" (p. 242). Above them is the albatross, "an unsightly, unpoetic bird" (p. 242). Thus the ascent of the Rock finds "the tenants of the tower serially disposed in order of their magnitude" (p. 242)--and their beauty. At the top, above all the birds, is the most pleasing one, "a snow-white angelic thing" of "clear, silver bugle-like notes . . . fitly styled the 'Boatswain's Mate'" (p. 243).

Reptiles are so much the prevalent land inhabitants that Melville says the "chief sound of life here is a hiss" (p. 231). He conveys the barrenness of animal life poignantly, humorously, and a bit caustically in the population statistics of Sketch Fourth.

> Men, ... none
> Ant-eaters, ... unknown
> Man-haters, ... unknown
> Lizards, ... 500,000
> Snakes, ... 500,000
> Spiders, ... 10,000,000
> Salamanders, ... unknown
> Devils, ... do.
>
> Making a clean total of . . 11,000,000
> exclusive of an incomputable host of fiends,
> ant-eaters, man-haters, and salamanders.
> (pp. 247-248)

The tortoise escapes the derogation and ridicule of other creatures but is fitted into the scheme of affliction and oppression by his

"strangely self-condemned" (p. 234) appearance. Rather few factual details of description are given for a creature that figures so often into this short novel. Melville describes the tortoise's coloring, noting that "the tortoise, dark and meloncholy as it is up the back, still possesses a bright side; its calipee or breast-plate being sometimes of a faint yellowish or golden tinge" (p. 236). He observes the large shells, "vast shells medallioned and orbed like shields" (p. 237), which are covered with "dark green moss, and [are] slimy with the spray of the sea" (p. 237), shells marked by "scars strangely widened, swollen, half obliterated and . . . distorted" (p. 237). He particularly discusses less tangible qualities: the tortoises' capacity for age and endurance--"The great feeling inspired by these creatures was that of age:--dateless, indefinite endurance" (p. 237)--and their steadfastness--"Their stupidity or their resolution was so great, that they never went aside for any impediment" (p. 238). Furthermore, the tortoise is linked with superstitious folklore. The belief that "all wicked sea-officers . . . are at death . . . transformed into tortoises: thenceforth dwelling upon these hot aridities, sole solitary lords of Asphaltum" (p. 234) appears in the narrator's fanciful reminiscences. The tortoise is carried beyond mere folklore into mythology as it is transformed into the mythical tortoise "whereon the Hindoo plants his total sphere" (p. 237). Thus Melville raises the animal from a drudging, ageless, stupid creature of primitive origin to an object of imagination and supernatural associations which then becomes the stimulus for philosophical speculation.

"Swarms of fairy fish" (p. 243) gather at the base of Rock Rodondo in a multitude of shapes and colors wonderful to witness. "All were

strange; many exceedingly beautiful . . . Here hues were seen as yet unpainted, and figures which were unengraved" (p. 243). Their unquestioning trust distinguishes them. Melville mentions whales only once, explaining their congregation in the Albemarle harbors during calving season.

In romantically conceived descriptions, Melville plays with variations of light: twilight, moon-light, twinkling stars, and the early streaks of dawn. Occasionally he sees the smooth and gentle aspects of nature. "The wind was light; the waves languid; the stars twinkled with a faint effulgence" (p. 240). But far more often dark colors and darkness prevail.

A few isolated images suggest Melville's native country of New York and Massachusetts: "a great October pumpkin in the sun" (p. 236), "a deep-wooded gorge" (p. 234), and "the Adirondack Mountains" (p. 234).

Insofar as man is a creature of nature and must struggle with and against the elements of nature during his life, man will be considered in Melville's use of nature. In the first five sketches, man is incidental to the main emphases, exerting little influence upon the forces and forms of nature. Man simply lives within the larger context of natural elements, adapting himself as best he can. The first man encountered in these sketches is the narrator, who appears to be an experienced and agile sailor at the time of the events which he is recounting by way of illustration. (Although these personal incidents are not central to the main lines of thought, the narrator also indulges freely in fanciful, philosophical speculations which do have bearing upon the last five sketches.) Historical notes in Sketches

Fourth and Fifth briefly mention the exploits of the Spanish explorer Juan Fernandez, the English Buccaneers, and the American naval captain David Porter--an introduction to the particular kinds of human personalities and activities to be found in the vicinity.

Emphases shift in the last five sketches. The attitudes which were explicitly stated and fairly obviously developed in the first half are no longer the subjects. Plot and its thematic elements receive emphasis, the attitudes being subtly interwoven with narration and giving support to theme, thus providing continuity with the first half of the novel. Forms of nature become less important as man becomes more important. Four of the five sketches are short stories complete in themselves, the main characters of which represent different kinds of men, or, at least, different perspectives of man.

In "Barrington Isle and the Buccaneers" Melville presents two kinds of humanity: the sentimental voyager who chooses an idealized, romantic perspective from which to view the Buccaneers; and the Buccaneers themselves, whom the reader may accept as actually romantic figures or whom he may choose to view somewhat as rogues since he is also given evidences of their piracy. "Charles's Isle and the Dog-King" presents a different view of man in a set of characters who suffer from lack of human compassion, from extremes of ambition and self-exaltation, and from a desire for irresponsible liberty. The most extreme distortion of man in the sketches is the eccentric, malformed hermit Oberlus who resides in isolation on one side of Hood's Isle until his "selfish ambition" (p. 276) leads him to enslave other men. He is man without mind and without moral nature--as ugly and misshapen as the birds who reside on the lowest level of Rock Rodondo. The Chola woman in Sketch

Eighth emerges from her tragedy as heroine. Despite her afflictions, she retains love, trust, faith, and a pride that enforces patience and endurance of grief.

Harsh geographical features are mitigated somewhat in the last sketches. Barrington, "the least unproductive isle of the group," exhibits "long grass" and "'groves of trees--not very lofty'" but "'very beautiful to walk under, even though they supplied no fruit'" (p. 253). Vegetation provides fuel but still no food. Colonizers on Charles's Isle and Oberlus on Hood's Isle manage to cultivate meager crops, "a sort of degenerate potatoes and pumpkins" (p. 275). Fish are now mentioned as a food source; they were not so described in the preceding sketches.

The tortoise, no longer the creature of mystery that it was to the narrator earlier, is also a source of food. Furthermore, since tortoise oil is highly valued on the market, that creature serves as the enticement which brings Hunilla, the sailors who rescue her, and many of the other "solitaries" (p. 284) to these islands.

A few domestic animals appear. The Creole relies upon an army of vicious fighting dogs, and Hunilla has with her a litter of beautiful Peruvian pups who are almost human-like in their expression of emotion. The Creole brings cattle and goats; and Oberlus, a "starveling rooster" (p. 282). Returned to Peru, Hunilla is seen riding a "small gray ass" (p. 274).

Melville injects a new sound, so to speak, into these sketches, more poignant than the "hiss" (p. 231) of the reptiles or the "ear-splitting cries" (p. 242) of the birds: it is silence. He makes silence a prominent feature in the death of Felipe and Truxill,

Hunilla's family, and weaves it into the remaining action and philosophical statements of the tale.

Melville has carefully selected the forms of nature used in the sketches, each form included to contribute to the desired mood or attitude. His actual attitude toward nature in this writing must be viewed in the context of the attitudes he creates and the views of man which he gives in The Encantadas.

CHAPTER III

IDEALISM AND AMBIGUITY OF PERSPECTIVE

Melville's romantic idealism--the belief in a reconcilable duality of the material and spiritual--is accompanied by a fascination with the ambiguity of the human perspective and the impossibility of man's perceiving absolute truth (echoes of the Victorian awareness that "The ultimate philosophical questions . . . are insoluble"[1]). Melville equally emphasizes both components of his duality, unlike either of the main schools of Victorian thought. Each is necessary and each bears a close relationship to the other. And ultimately both material and immaterial belong to a single "underlying reality,"[2] as Arvin writes; all things, subjective and objective, form reality in the totality of their relationships with all other things. Arvin describes Melville's idealism as "the awareness that action and condition, movement and stasis, object and idea, are but surface aspects of one underlying reality."[3] The two interests--in universal duality and ambiguity of human perspective--merge as Melville approaches the question, "what is reality"; and Melville places himself within elements of both romantic and post-romantic thought.

Like the American transcendentalists, Melville recognizes a parallel between the material world and the mind, or spiritual nature; and,

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[1]Beach, p. 495. [2]Arvin, p. 165. [3]Ibid., p. 165.

like British romantics, he allows spiritual nature to reside largely in the human mind. Yet he removes himself from both by giving stronger emphasis than they to the reality and necessity of the physical world. "He was a romantic idealist with a passion for actuality, for precise knowledge, for facts," according to Arvin. "He was an intuitionalist who wished, in his essential reliance on the nonrational and the superrational, not to fall a victim to mindlessness; not to forswear the sanctions of the intellect."[4] In a total view, however, he joins the two in a necessary unity. They are not two worlds brought together at specified points; they are two sides to one world, one reality. He intertwines the objective and subjective in such a manner in his writings that he almost always speaks in concrete terms but in concrete terms that carry an abstract, or philosophical, meaning. Thus, even by style, by the very mechanics of literary art, he shows the unity of material and immaterial.

The idealism of The Encantadas enters early in Sketch First as Melville draws the poignant reality of the narrator's memories and imaginative visions of the islands. He claims an existence for the reminiscences apart from the objective world. "No spectator can deny [the islands'] claims to a most solemn and superstitious consideration, no more than my firmest resolutions can decline to behold the spectre-tortoise when emerging from its shadowy recess . . ." (p. 236).

The mind imposes characteristics and draws relationships that the physical senses do not perceive, and reality from the human point of view embodies mental as well as sensual perception. Arvin writes that

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[4] Ibid., p. 169.

images in Melville's writing are symbols "in the sense that their primal origins are in the unconscious, however consciously they have been organized and controlled; that on this account they transcend the personal and local and become archetypal in their range and depth; they are inexplicit, polysemantic, and never quite exhaustible in their meaning."[5] Both consciously and unconsciously Melville accepts the reality of the immaterial world.

The tortoise is an example of correspondence between the material and immaterial as well as of the symbolic nature of Melville's images. In the "visible" realm, the tortoise is only a large, slow-moving creature with a dark, scarred, and moss-covered shell. But the mind forms analogies between the tortoise and many things outside the islands--different geographical locations, periods in history, and numerous metaphysical concepts--translating the tortoise into a symbolic and even mythological creature. The mind sees the tortoise as the expression of "Lasting sorrow and penal hopelessness" (p. 236), a parallel between the physical appearance and metaphysical realities residing in the mind. These "huge antediluvian-looking tortoises" (p. 236) are, like "Roman Coliseums in magnificent decay," the embodiment of age and endurance, "dateless, indefinite endurance" (p. 237). They become mythological Oriental figures, "the identical tortoises whereon the Hindoo plants this total sphere" (p. 237). Because the tortoise is "both black and bright" (p. 236), it symbolizes the organic unity of joy and tragedy, or, more generally, positive and negative values. And yet this nobleness must suffer the "crowning curse" of a "drudging

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[5] Ibid., p. 167.

impulse to straight-forwardness in a belittered world" (p. 238). Despite the wide range traversed by the mind in these relationships and analogies, Melville returns the tortoise to material reality, finally, where the creature is transformed into dinner and dinner utensils by the sailors. "But next evening, strange to say, I sat down with my shipmates, and made a merry repast from tortoise steaks and tortoise stews; and supper over our knife, and helped convert the three mighty concave shells into three fanciful soup-tureens, and polished the three flat yellowish calipees into three gorgeous salvers" (p. 239). The tortoise has a reality in the objective world among physical phenomena independent of the subjective realm. His subjective wanderings, directed by man's fancy alone, are equally valid but are imposed by the mind entirely. Expressed in action and situation rather than philosophic terminology, the romantic "Eolian influence" and "sentiment of Being" emerge as the material forms of the tortoise, and later in the chapter the physical setting of the Adirondacks, stimulate the subjective fancy to its diverse wanderings and its elevation of the tortoise beyond temporal and spatial limitations.

The kindly and meditative Buccaneers in Sketch Sixth are primarily products of the mind, also. The entire sketch is pervaded by a double vision of the pirates, which recognizes their ruthlessness but insists upon a gentle side, even a philosophical bent. The "sentimental voyager" (p. 253) suggests the transcendental scheme--that nature does imbue man with emotional tranquillity and does stimulate his moral and intellectual life. "I cannot avoid the thought, that it is hard to impute the construction of these romantic seats to any other motive than one of pure peacefulness and kindly fellowship with nature. . . .

all of the Buccaneers were not unmitigated monsters" (p. 254). The voyager's interpretation is a romantically optimistic belief in the goodness of man and in the nobility of his mind, despite evidences of violent activities among them.

The world of mind and spirit influences the perception and understanding of the material world. Oberlus's self-image and understanding of his relationship with the rest of the world--neither of which correspond to other men's observations--are the guides to his actions in Sketch Nineth. "It seems incredible that such a being should possess such vanity; a misanthrope be conceited; but he really had his notion; and upon the strength of it, often gave himself amusing airs to captains" (p. 276). Fundamentally, man's life is directed by both his physical environment and, more importantly, the subjective vision of self and the universe which is immaterial reality for each individual. Together, both form "reality." For Oberlus, the subjective is more influential; for the Dog-King in Sketch Seventh the material situation modifies the subjective vision. His visions of himself as "Supreme Lord of the Island, one of the princes of the powers of earth" (p. 256), despite all his efforts to achieve the position, are frustrated by his rebellious subjects who banish him to Peru. The Creole's material position does not allow his imagination to hold a subjective view which does not conform to the physical reality.

Idealism is most fully developed in the tale of the Chola Widow, which describes the subjective realities of Hunilla's life on the island, realities that surpass material bounds. Death of the two men is a physical separation, an end to material existence. "Both adventurers perished before Hunilla's eyes" (p. 264). Subjective reality

resides largely in the Indian couple's love that transcends physical death. Again using situation rather than philosophic statement, Melville impresses the reader with the endurance of Hunilla's husband's love even in the moment of death. "But Felipe's body floated to the marge, with one arm encirclingly outstretched. Lockjawed in grim death, the lover-husband softly clasped his bride, true to her even in death's dream" (p. 265). Hunilla, likewise, retains a strong love for Felipe, evidencing it in her return to his grave as she prepares to leave the island and in her care of the gravesite during her stay there.

Having established the validity of subjective reality in the dreams and reminiscences of Sketch First, Melville clothes death in the same dream-like quality to impress the reader with the strictly material nature of death; for from Hunilla's view death is primarily the physical removal of Felipe. "Hunilla had withdrawn the branches to one side, and held them so. They formed an oval frame, through which the bluely boundless sea rolled like a painted one. And there, the invisible painter painted to her view the wave-tossed and disjointed raft, its once level logs slantingly upheaved, as raking masts, and the four struggling arms undistinguishable among them; and then all subsided into smooth-flowing creamy waters, slowly drifting the splintered wreck; while first and last, no sound of any sort was heard. Death in a silent picture; a dream of the eye; such vanishing shapes as the mirage shows" (p. 264). Hunilla must make some psychological adjustments; her subjective reactions are intensified in her loneliness. But she makes transcendent spiritual values overcome the grief of death and hence makes the subjective more influential than the objective. Death

puts an end to nothing significant for Hunilla except the presence of her husband.

The death and isolation in the widow's situation allow Melville to consider the nature of time and space, the two concepts which traditionally mark the difference between objective and subjective. Existence in time is a condition of man's mortality: time is an organizational principle by which, even in isolation, man maintains his mental orientation and stability. "What present day or month it was she could not say. Time was her labyrinth, in which Hunilla was entirely lost" (p. 266). So necessary is time that Hunilla imposes a temporal framework upon herself, measuring time by recording the accumulation of arbitrarily selected phenomena. She lives primarily in the spiritual world--among her thoughts and feelings; and time is a mental concept. Although necessary, it cannot change her physical situation or alleviate the deeper reality of her anguish. "Ten thousand times the longing widow had traced her finger over the bamboo [notched to measure time]--dull flute, which played on, gave no sound--as if counting birds flown by in air would hasten tortoises creeping through the woods" (p. 268). Melville does not treat time as an absolute; its significance lies in its capacity to serve the mind of man. Space is a more forceful limitation upon man, yet not an absolute one either. Hunilla cannot remove herself from the island; she is restricted by spatial limitations. However, she gives relatively little attention to the physical situation, centering her life of isolation around her thoughts, her hopes, her sorrow, and her faith. Although spatial bonds cannot be ignored, Hunilla makes them secondary to immaterial reality and thus reduces the sense of despair and inadequacy

otherwise felt in the face of superior physical forces.

Melville represents the ambiguity of man's perspective of the world and of himself in the world by manipulating point of view in The Encantadas. He interchanges the narrator perspective, the subject of narration, and the time context in an endless variety of combinations which create the sense of the many-sidedness of the world. He believes, as Fogle says, that "the world is one, and all is relationship, but the relationship is too vast and too difficult for the eye to unravel it."[6] Any particular view can be only partial; several views can reveal different aspects of the same subject, of the same world. "At the end of vision is indeterminacy, as the horizon fades; also the most perfect strategy cannot arrange affairs so well that all relevant objects will be simultaneously visible,"[7] Fogle writes. Melville believes that at best man's view will be incomplete and the circumstances of his limited view will determine his understanding of any given situation. As Rosenberry says of Melville's writings, "Circumstance and point of view are the only determinants with meaning."[8]

The point of view is relative to Rock Rodondo in three sketches; yet the view in each is different. The first is a close inspection of the rock itself, which reveals the hierarchy of life lodged upon its circular layers, the narrator supposedly being beside the rock. The

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[6]Richard Harter Fogle, Melville's Shorter Tales (Norman, 1960), p. 114.

[7]Ibid., p. 94.

[8]E. H. Rosenberry, Melville and the Comic Spirit (Cambridge, Mass., 1955), p. 116.

second treats the geographical relationship of the islands to Rock Rodondo and the group as a whole to other parts of the world as far distant as the Antarctic Pole, the narrator theoretically being situated on top of the rock. Both of these views are outside time, in a sense, because the subjects of observation have not changed through centuries; the narrator is viewing the phenomena for which the passing of time does not bring change. The third moves into the historical past, relating an incident encompassed by definite time boundaries (characterized by change)--an episode involving Captain David Porter and his ship, the Essex, during the War of 1812. The narrator's point of view and the subject of the narrative both change in the three sketches.

Manipulation of the narrative point of view gives a kaleidoscopic view of the islands. For the most part, the narrator alternates between the first and third person. The effect is to contrast timeless and time-bound incidents in the first sketches. The initial descriptions in the third person give the effect of changelessness upon the islands themselves as though their attributes are timeless, but these are interrupted first by the narrator's dreamy reminiscences as an old man, giving the reader the sense of much time having passed, and then by illustrative personal experiences as a young man, which inject a sense of life, of activity, of moving time that is more stimulating than the eternal drudging impulses of the tortoise or the senseless constant lashing of the waves. As an example, Sketch Fourth begins with a sense of the immensity of the universe in which the islands have been placed--"Does any balloonist, does the outlooking man in the moon, take a broader view of space?" (p. 244)--and relates the geographical location of the islands to South America, other Pacific Islands, and

the Equator. The fixing of the relative position is intermingled with first person experiences on the islands--"On fishing parties from ships, at various times, I have chanced to visit each of these groups" (p. 245)--and with historical events--"Prior to the year 1563, the voyages made by Spanish ships from Peru to Chili, were full of difficulty" (p. 245).

The story of the Buccaneers illustrates the effect of one's mental orientation upon an individual's view of reality--the influence of the subjective upon one's understanding of the objective and at the same time the ambiguity of one's view. Since the subjective colors the understanding of the objective and since human perception is incomplete, man cannot arrive at absolute knowledge. The tale of the Buccaneers begins with the narrator's assuming the third person pose, relating historical material. The "facts" are interfused with a sympathetic tone and a romantic view, found in the way the narrator calls the Buccaneers "those old marauders," sees them "snugly out of all harm's reach" (p. 253) in a "harbor of safety, and a bower of ease" (p. 253), and watches them return both "to say their prayers" and "enjoy their free-and-easies" (p. 252). Romanticism is intensified in the long quotation from the "sentimental voyager," who is strongly inclined to find noble qualities in those Buccaneers and to exalt nobility above the more brutal characteristics.

Melville is explaining that absolute reality does not exist--at least man cannot perceive it. Melville gives no indication of identifying himself with the narrator; he is seeing this as one possible, but not the only, view. The narrator points out the nature of the Buccaneers' ruthless activities on the seas and their quieter moments

on the island, sympathizing with them slightly, yet refraining from passing judgment on them. But the "sentimental voyager" gives the reader a highly romantic interpretation of the character of some of the Buccaneers. Three points of view are mixed: Melville's, the narrator's and the sentimental voyager's--all equally valid but equally personal and speculative. Melville allows the reader to determine what interpretation to assign ultimately to the pirates. Withholding his own approval here, in other sketches he does work out a pattern based on one observation from this tale: "For consider the vacillations of a man" (p. 255). Melville, as the omniscient author, illustrates that a variety of interpretations for any given set of circumstances is possible because the union of objective and subjective is unique, and may not even be constant, in each individual. Each understanding is valid but each is different, and there is no way of arriving at certain or absolute knowledge about any subject.

"Norfolk and the Chola Widow" has a more complex manipulation of perspective. Again, Melville uses the narrator who alternates between first and third person, describing the entire incident as though he were an actual witness to the event. The subtle effects of this tale, however, lie in having the narrator give three points of view simultaneously. First, he describes the scene as a sailor aboard the ship would have seen it: "Glancing across the water in the direction pointed out, I saw some white thing hanging from an island rock, perhaps half a mile from the sea" (p. 261). And he continues to interject comments from the sailors' point of view: "But not thus did she defraud us of our tears. All hearts bled that grief should be so brave" (p. 265). Secondly, he tells the tale as Hunilla tells it to the

captain and as the captain translates it to the crew. "By some bad tide or hap, or natural negligence of joyfulness (for though they could not be heard, yet by their gestures they seemed singing at the time) forced in deep water against that iron bar, the ill-made catamaran was overset, and came all to pieces; when dashed by broad-chested swells between their broken logs and the sharp teeth of the reef, both adventurers perished before Hunilla's eyes" (p. 264). It is not an altogether matter-of-fact account, but it omits the emotional response of Hunilla herself. The reader is told that Hunilla does not tell of her own reactions. "Construe the comment of her features as you might, from her mere words little would you have weened that Hunilla was herself the heroine of her tale" (p. 265). Finally, the narrator merges Hunilla's own factual account with a more imaginative one that ascribes to her strong emotion and almost total existence within the immaterial reality of her mind. "Before Hunilla's eyes they sank. The real woe of this event passed before her sight as some sham tragedy on the stage" (p. 264). By repeatedly alternating between the three views, the narrator gives greater depth to the tale. He reveals the pathos as it appears to the crew, the whimsical cruelty and seemingly conscious malignity of external nature, and the internal agony of the woman herself--three different, but not unrelated, views.

The ambiguity of perspective is neatly summarized in the symbolic use of the tortoise in Sketch Second. Melville opens the sketch with the question, "In view of the description given, may one be gay upon the Encantadas," and answers it affirmatively, "Yes: that is, find one the gayety, and he will be gay. And, indeed, sackcloth and ashes

as they are, the isles are not perhaps unmitigated gloom" (pp. 235-236). Then the tortoise becomes symbolic of the simultaneous existence of an organic relationship between positive and negative values, between joy and tragedy.

> Everyone knows that tortoises as well as turtles are of such a make, that if you but 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. The tortoise is both black and bright. (p. 236)

Rosenberry concludes that "in keeping with what the tortoise had taught him about 'black and bright,' he portrayed the geography and history of the blasted Galápagos with a comprehensive eye to their tragedy and their comedy and with a refreshing sense of the sovereign respect each owes to the other."[9] The image of the tortoise expresses Melville's faith in the unity of all experience--material and immaterial--despite man's inability to grasp the relationship.

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[9] Ibid., p. 179.

CHAPTER IV

RELIGIOUS THOUGHT

Melville's religious views were shaped by the Calvinistic background of his childhood. After his two sailing adventures of 1839-40 and 1841-44, however, Melville began to read widely among the great works of Western literature, religion, and philosophy, and to some extent Oriental literature and philosophy. His unquestioning Calvinistic faith weakened under that introduction to a wide variety of idea. Melville favored the humanism and skepticism of Montaigne and Rabelais, the idealism of Plato and the nineteenth-century romantics, the tragic vision and the insights into human nature of Shakespeare. He was well acquainted with the writings of Aristotle, Cicero, Plutarch, the Greek Stoics, Dante, Spenser, Milton, Goethe, Shelley, Arnold, Locke, and Hobbes.[1] The result was a questioning, and a partial rejection, of Calvinism, and the beginning of a life-time search for a satisfactory religious belief. Thus, Fogle has called Melville a "religious-minded agnostic,"[2] and Arvin says that in him "the mating of romantic idealism with the masculine sense of reality . . . approaches, if it does not quite overtake, a naturalistic theism."[3]

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[1]William Braswell, Melville's Religious Thought: An Essay in Interpretation (Durham, N.C., 1943), pp. 10-18.

[2]Fogle, p. 3.

[3]Arvin, p. 190.

Melville's grandfather and father departed from the family's Scotch Presbyterian tradition to accept what was, in Arvin's words, "a typically Unitarian fusion of reasonableness, optimism, 'Arminianism,' and trust in the rational beneficence of a paternal deity."[4] His father's "liberal and enlightened theological cheerfulness"[5] was eclipsed by his mother's severe Calvinism of the Dutch Reformed Church. Maria Melville imposed upon her household an intense religious observance that became even more emphatic in later years when she and her unmarried daughters lived with her son's family. "Melville's mature mind," observes Arvin, "is incomprehensible save partly against this dark-hued distance."[6]

The Calvinism of Melville's early life ascribes absolute sovereignty to God and utter depravity to man. Both a jealous and a merciful Being, God is all-powerful. His justice is rigorous. On the other hand, man, having sinned through Adam's disobedience, is totally depraved; his will is corrupt. Condemned to eternal damnation, he has no hope for salvation except by God's freely given grace. God in His mercy has arbitrarily predestined a few men to eternal salvation, but no good works can effect salvation for the "unelect." Above all, however, God's ways are mysterious and inscrutable, and man should not question them. As Arvin writes, "there was always present at the heart of Calvinist Protestantism, despite its dogmatisms, that essentially humble and saving sense of something unaccountable, something unanalyzable and incomprehensible, something mysterious in the scheme of

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[4] Ibid., p. 30. [5] Ibid., p. 31. [6] Ibid., p. 34.

things, in 'God's ways.'"[7]

From Melville's early religious training and later from his literary interests came his great familiarity with the Bible, comments Nathalia Wright,[8] not only as Holy Scripture, but as allegory, mythology, Oriental literature, and as a style book for artistic expression. "The allusions he made to it [the Bible] were not studied but involuntary; they came from him spontaneously, as idioms in his vocabulary, as patterns of his thought,"[9] writes Miss Wright. Well-versed in the Old Testament, he was particularly fond of the wisdom literature and was quite at home in the "darkness" of the Apocrypha.

The Encantadas are pervaded by a sense of Old Testament darkness, judicial punishment, and the wrath of God, which Melville establishes by allusions and direct references to the Bible and paraphrases of it. "'Have mercy upon 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. 231). The sense of punishment and torment in this world as retribution for innate depravity and the commission of sin informs the scene: "the shores of the clinkered Encantadas, whereon tormented Job himself might have well sat down and scraped himself with potsherds" (p. 242).[10]

Although the Old Testament gives The Encantadas their dominant Biblical coloring, Melville injects overtones and bits of wisdom from the New Testament as well. "Nay, by swift doom coming like the thief

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[7]Ibid., p. 34.

[8]Nathalia Wright, Melville's Use of the Bible (Durham, N.C., 1949), pp. 14-16.

[9]Ibid., pp. 7-8.

[10]Cf. Job 2:8.

at night, ere seven weeks went by, two of the little party were removed from all anxieties of land or sea" (p. 263)--an allusion to the parable in Luke.[11] The "small gray ass"[12] and the "armorial cross" link Hunilla with Christ.

Calvinism implies a universal hierarchy. With God reigning supreme, man has a place lower than He but higher than unreasoning creatures of the animal kingdom--a hierarchy that closely parallels a natural order found in the world comparable to the scale of being among the British romantics. Necessity is implicit. God has ordered the world so that every event among men or natural phenomena contributes to the fulfillment of divine design. This belief finds its counterpart in the naturalistic doctrine of cause and effect, a version of which Melville highly respected. "Whatever Melville's later reservations concerning science, he was first and last a strong believer in cause and effect. The doctrine of necessity seems early to have impressed him,"[13] writes Bowen.

In The Encantadas Melville implies a universal hierarchy. At the bottom of the most nearly material level are the forms of nature, physical individualizations. Here natural forms are the "blind agents"[14] of a higher principle, as Bowen writes; they are subject to a doctrine of necessity in the physical world. The functions of the specific forms are implicit in the creation of the forms. They do not act by any conscious desire or design of their own. Man has a dual nature--physical and spiritual--which places him between the lower level as

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[11]Cf. Luke 12:39.

[12]Cf. Mat. 21:7.

[13]Merlin Bowen, The Long Encounter: Self and Experience in the Writings of Herman Melville (Chicago, 1963), pp. 92-93.

[14]Ibid., p. 110.

simply another form of physical nature and the higher level as a spiritual being having an awareness of and connection with a higher universal order. Uppermost is the mysterious region of the Deity, or universal ruling Power. In The Encantadas the only evidences of God or a Supreme Being are indirect, coming through what may be termed the forces seen acting in nature (as distinct from the mere forms of nature). These forces are the intangible powers that motivate and guide the forms of nature, that suggest ethical or moral values, that give the appearance of a directing consciousness. Since the ruling Power seems to order and direct the world through these forces, man derives his notions of God from that order and activity of observable nature. These forces seem to pervade the forms of nature so that sometimes there is little distinction between the forces and the forms. Fogle notes Melville's "vision of complex organic unity"[15] in which these are intermeshed.

Physical nature itself is organized on a hierarchical principle: the birds of Rock Rodondo are described as "thrones, princedoms, powers, dominating one above another in senatorial array" (p. 242); fish are similarly disposed, smaller and quicker ones near the surface, larger and slower ones at greater depths. The doctrine of necessity governs this level of nature impersonally. Necessity does not imply harmony; but rather a harsh indifference and an unconcerned inevitability exist among the forms of nature. In this natural order it is a fact of life that the larger and more powerful forms of nature victimize their inferiors; the life of one form, including man, depends upon the manipulation or death of another. Ageless tortoises, "Lords of Asphaltum"

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[15]Fogle, p. 11.

(p. 234), are captured, eaten, and reduced to casks of oil by their human adversaries; and a sailor, left on the islands, saves his own life by killing a seal and drinking its blood: "at last he only saved his life by taking that of another being. . . . the palpitations of the creature's dying heart injected life into the drinker" (p. 286).

The Deity that rules over the Encantadas is like a Calvinistic God for whom human reverence, awe, and obedience are accompanied (and perhaps overshadowed) by a Job-like questioning, a strong sense of human dignity, and a vision of tragedy in man's life. Here Melville's God is an Old Testament God. Melville has retained the sense of "something unanalyzable," something mysterious, surrounding God so that man cannot know God's ways. "Consider the work of God: for who can make that straight, which he hath made crooked?"[16] God purposely makes himself unseen, unknown by man, regardless of man's efforts to discover more intimate knowledge of God. God has kept from man the purity of spirit (or one may say man has rejected it through the Fall) that would be necessary to know God by interfusing man's spirit with earthliness: "he hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end."[17] To prevent man from deriving accurate knowledge of God by observation and reason, God purposely makes the universal pattern appear chaotic to man. "In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: God also hath set the one over against the other, to the end that man should find nothing after him."[18] Melville represents God's intentional confusion of man's perspective

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[16]Eccl. 7:14. [17]Eccl. 3:11. [18]Eccl. 7:14.

in his own writing. For one positive statement Melville gives a negative; for a view of goodness there is one of evil; for an act of justice there is one of injustice.

Melville opposes a sense of predestination and conscious universal design against an appearance of ruling chance and whimsy. An undercurrent of predestination runs through the Hunilla tale. "With half a mile of sea between, how could her two enchanted arms aid those four fated ones?" (p. 265). "Nay, by swift doom coming like the thief at night, ere seven weeks went by, two of the little party were removed" (p. 263).[19] The Christian necessity of rigid moral and spiritual behavior is implied in Sketch Seventh. "It tempts no wise man to pull off and see what's the matter but bids him steer small and keep off shore" (p. 260)--echoes of Christ's words, "strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life . . ."[20] And the final glimpse of Hunilla on the donkey enforces the belief that steadfastness in faith is virtuous.

Nevertheless, man's experience does give him cause for doubting God's rationality and design. Man does not always observe steadfastness and reliability in himself or the forms of nature around him. "For consider the vacillations of a man" (p. 255). The inconsistency in human nature that unites murder and robbery with philosophical meditation in the same men reflects a similar inconsistency in all of nature, which unites good and bad, serious and humorous, just and unjust in a way that is at once complex and ambiguous. At times the forces of

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[19]The underlinings in both passages are mine.

[20]Mat. 7:14.

nature appear to be sheerly whimsical, indifferent to human values or designs, helping or hindering mankind indiscriminately: "a strange sail was descried which . . . seemed to be staggering under a violent wind, while the frigate lay lifeless as if spellbound" (p. 251). The elements thwart one man's intentions and rescue another. "A smart breeze, however, at last helped her [the ship Essex] off, though the escape was so critical as to seem almost miraculous" (p. 251).

Melville's religious sense of "something mysterious in the scheme of things"[21] balances evil enchantment with a similar benevolent enchantment. Evil enchantment pervades the sketches; but Melville implies also a goodness in describing Hunilla's "enchanted arms"—"how could her two enchanted arms aid those four fated ones?" (p. 265)--and the "mysterious presentiment borne to her, so our mariners averred, by this isle's enchanted air" (p. 269) which directed her to the ship as it was leaving the harbor: "'something came flitting by me. It touched my cheek, my heart, Señor. . . . something came through the air!" (p. 269).

In conflicting elements Melville shows the inadequacy of the human perspective. He is at once examining that in man's experience which makes it difficult for him to believe in the goodness and rationality of God, and giving evidence of the inscrutability of God. Fogle offers an interpretation of Sketch Eighth which is drawn from the statement, "But they cannot break faith who never plighted it" (p. 265). "Man suffers from the tragic delusion that he has a contract with God, but the understanding is on his side only."[22]

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[21]Arvin, p. 34.

[22]Fogle, p. 109.

Melville suggests here a questioning of the traditional Calvinistic belief in covenant relationships between God and man, a doubt in the same vein as Hardy's and Swinburne's but certainly not as extreme as their denial of God.

Melville's view conflicts with Calvinism on the point of man's essential nature. Rejecting the doctrine of the total depravity of man, Melville replaces self-abasing humility with a strong sense of human dignity and integrity, which reside in the combination of pride, patience, and poise. Howard notes that "Melville interpreted the humble patience which fascinated him as an expression of pride."[23] And Bowen observes that "poise and not passion, it would appear, is the desired state."[24] Thus Hunilla, Melville's most sympathetically treated character in the writing, patiently and pridefully bears her grief--"Pride's height in vain abased to proneness on the rack; nature's pride subduing nature's torture" (p. 272)--and endures her suffering with poise--" her face was set in a dusky calm" (p. 273).

Evil is that which injures or degrades human dignity; the existence of evil is a reality for Melville. In a sense Oberlus is evil personified: his own human dignity has been warped beyond recognition, and he destroys the dignity of the men he enslaves. Hunilla is the victim of a seemingly evil spirit in nature, exercised for what appears to be sheer whimsical pleasure. "More terrible, to see how feline Fate will sometimes dally with a human soul" (p. 267). Even lesser violations of human dignity are malicious. The sea persists in an "all-pervading monotone" which is to Hunilla "the least loved voice

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[23]Howard, p. 209.

[24]Bowen, p. 48.

she could have heard" (p. 266); the "incessant waves . . . bore nothing to her but a dirge, which maddened her to think that murderers should mourn" (p. 266).

Melville's vision of tragedy, also, is closely related to the Old Testament. Tragedy lies in the universal limitations imposed upon man's sense of his own dignity and potential; the very center of tragedy is man's awareness of the discrepancy between his human dignity and integrity, and nature's or God's treatment of him. Melville sympathizes with Job when Job complains that he is being punished for uncommitted sins, that God has no regard for Job's integrity. It is as though one who is aware of the conflict implicit in man's situation is too knowing to be thence-forth content with life. "For in much wisdom is much grief; and he who increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow."[25] Melville realizes man's situation; but, unlike Job, he is not fully convinced of God's absolute goodness and reason; and he will not cause man to humble or abase himself before God.

The conclusions of many critics reviewing Melville's religious thought point toward the insignificance and cruelty of man and the remoteness and indifference of the Deity. Sedgwick writes that man appears to be savage and God indifferent,[26] that nature marks man but man leaves no significant mark on nature.[27] Nathalia Wright finds that nature is an area of mysterious forbidden knowledge and God Himself is "amoral, inexorable, unknowable."[28] Bowen concludes that the "significant cause" in nature is "remote"[29] and the evidence of God

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[25]Eccl. 1:18.

[26]William Ellery Sedgwick, Herman Melville: The Tragedy of Mind (Cambridge, Mass., 1945), p. 43.

[27]Ibid., p. 173. [28]Wright, p. 106. [29]Bowen, p. 105.

indirect; God reveals only "His 'back parts,' a practice imitated by the soured hermit Oberlus."[30]

However, Arvin thinks that Melville's Calvinistic background "led him to believe or to hope that, beyond all the apparent formlessness, wildness, and anarchy of experience, there was an ultimate Rationality, an absolute order and purpose, in the knowledge of which one could reassuringly abide. . . . that, beyond all the moral and physical evil in human affairs, beyond wickedness and suffering, there was an absolute Goodness or Justice on which one could unquestioningly rely."[31] Rather than rejecting God, or quarreling with Him,[32] Melville treats the difficulties of maintaining an unquestioning faith in the midst of human experience and concludes, as Bowen observes, that "nature and God are too vast to be captured in any of our formulations."[33]

Melville's orthodoxy is hindered by his simultaneous belief in humanism. A second interpretation that Fogle puts on Sketch Eighth is based upon Melville's exclamation "Humanity, thou strong thing, I worship thee. . ." (p. 267): "Man is a noble creature, who by virtue of his humanity is morally superior to his creator."[34] Melville definitely has high regard, if not for all of mankind, at least for certain qualities man is capable of possessing and exercising (e.g., the pride Hunilla possesses). His is not an optimistic humanism, however; for it is interfused with a recognition of man's frequent failure to fulfill his noble potential. Hunilla's superior morality and spiritual strength

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[30] Ibid., p. 109.

[31] Arvin, p. 34.

[32] See Lawrence Thompson, Melville's Quarrel with God (Princeton, 1952).

[33] Bowen, p. 121.

[34] Fogle, p. 109.

are counterbalanced by the inferior morality and spiritual values of Oberlus and the Dog-King. Just as Melville has developed other sets of opposites, here, too, he illustrates the range of moral and spiritual beliefs and practices in man rather than establishing man's moral superiority over his Creator.

Melville believes in the impersonal and inevitable function of necessity in the form of cause and effect in the experiential world; and, although this necessity would make his God appear remote and indifferent, it also resembles a Calvinistic predeterminism. The insufficiency of the human point of view reaffirms the mystery and inscrutibility of God; it requires that belief in God reside in intuition and faith, not reason, observation, and experience. Such is the basis for Hunilla's faith. She is like one who accepts the trials of depraved man's condition, trusting in God's ultimate purpose and care and love although God's love is not directly evidenced. Hers is a reaffirmation of faith in a loving and concerned God. If Arvin is right in believing that Melville longed for this faith, Hunilla is an expression of an ideal that Melville seeks but cannot attain because he is too much aware of the deficiencies of the Oberluses and the Dog-Kings.

Animated forms of nature, somewhat resembling the pantheism of the romantics, are actually the concrete forms through which Melville questions and examines the characteristics of God. The spirit external to man is much like the Old Testament God whose activity is independent of the human mind. Sedgwick clearly and perceptively states Melville's difficulty with religious belief. "He would not rest in a religious faith which discounted his intellectual findings. On the other hand,

he would not rest in an attitude of skepticism, by which, as he believed, a man demeaned his human nature. Accordingly, his mind was forever tacking as if against a powerful headwind, now in the direction of religious feeling and now in that of religious disbelief; and on either tack his mind was taut to a passion of sincerity."[35]

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[35]Sedgwick, p. 6.

CHAPTER V

MAN

Man is Melville's greatest concern. Melville's understanding of man has been suggested in the preceding chapters; but neither religion nor the duality of idealism has great significance to him except in relation to man. Melville is most interested in man's recognition of self and his ability to maintain his entire human dignity and integrity within his material environment and against cosmic forces. Bowen concludes that "central to nearly everything he [Melville] wrote from 1849 on lies an awareness of this mystery, a sense of the simple yet undiscoverable self maintaining and realizing itself in the midst of a hostile universe."[1] All of Melville's writings contribute to an examination or illustration of this problem. In The Encantadas Melville does not give a comprehensive philosophy of man, but he does examine some quite important components of human nature and call into question traditional and contemporary concepts of man. What Melville substitutes for traditional concepts has the toughness of conformity to a realistic--as opposed to romantic, or idealized--confrontation of the material world and man's adaptation to it without losing an awareness of the potential spiritual grandeur and nobility of man.

As Stallknecht has noted, man is "a metaphysical amphibian."[2]

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[1]Bowen, p. 15.

[2]Sedgwick, p. 208.

Man is at once a physical form of nature subject to the rigid operation of necessity and a spiritual being capable of transcending the material world subjectively and approaching a divine character.

In the strictly material realm, man is a form of nature like all other physical phenomena, confronting the same cosmic indifference and victimizing influences; he has no more significance in this scheme than any other form of nature. Therefore, Bowen writes, "man cannot be adequately understood in isolation from nature. He is . . . but one member of a fighting world."[3]

The larger and more powerful forms of nature are indifferent to man. So little is the mark of man on Abington Isle and "so far as yon Abington Isle is concerned, Adam and his billions of posterity remain uncreated" (p. 249). Man is incapable of controlling external circumstances in order to bring his ambitions to fruition. "But in all things man sows upon the wind, which bloweth just there whither it listeth; for ill or good, man cannot know" (p. 267). Man tries to complete his own designs but ultimately must conform to forms of nature external to himself, adapting to circumstances as best he can like the shipwrecked sailors who accept their lot and prepare "for a hermit life, till tide or time, or a passing ship arrives to float them off" (p. 286); and many are the victims of stronger natural elements. "If now it be added that grave-stones, or rather grave-boards are also discovered upon some of the isles, the picture will be complete" (p. 287).

But man is more than an unconscious physical form. He has spirit,

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[3]Bowen, p. 83.

or soul, which gives him the capacity for deep intellectual reasoning, for intense emotion, for poignant awareness of a Divine Being whose nature he shares. Universal among men are these capacities only, however, not the fulfillment thereof. Melville rejects the romantic (and partly Victorian) belief in the innate goodness of man and the provocation of nobility and virtue in man by the influence of external and spiritual nature. A Calvinistic sense of innate depravity seems to temper romanticism, although that does not form Melville's entire understanding of man, either. Melville senses the capacity within man for achieving moral and spiritual heights, but he also observes the not uncommon failure to achieve, or even to attempt to achieve, those heights. Noting both fulfillment and failure in man, Melville cannot accept either as absolute. Instead, he considers the complexity and inconsistency of man's moral, spiritual, emotional, and intellectual nature. "For consider the vacillations of a man" (p. 255).

Given these observations, Melville cannot base his ideal of man upon man's attainment of the "poetic" vision of universal unity and the consequent effusion of virtuous and benevolent sentiment as the romantics try to do. Given his strong religious background, although he questions it, he cannot attribute human activities to an evolutionary earth-spirit; and he refuses to excuse man's material situation as a "dreadful" but "necessary condition." Finally, Melville evaluates man, first, by the extent to which man recognizes his own inner being and spiritual capacities as entities separate from the rest of the universe, secondly by his effort to fulfill his potential, and thirdly by his ability to maintain human dignity and integrity in the face of all external forces, be they stronger spiritual influences or material

conditions. Melville, then, measures each man by his own individual characteristics and achievements, treating material and spiritual as complementary and inseparable. Bowen's summary of Melville's definition of man is quite clear. "A man is both his inmost sense of himself and outward declaration in his interaction with the opposing world."[4]

Merlin Bowen's book, The Long Encounter, is particularly useful as one discusses the kinds of men whom Melville sees as composing humanity, the ways in which they encounter the self and the external world, and their degrees of success. Bowen first makes a distinction between those of Melville's characters who are "morally awakened, the dark-seers"[5] and those who are not. He classifies the characteristic reactions of the "morally awakened" in three ways: "Defiance : The Way of Tragic Heroism"; "Submission: The Way of Weakness"; "Armed Neutrality: The Way of Wisdom." One may consider "armed neutrality" as lying between "defiance" and "submission." In The Encantadas, Hunilla represents the delicate balance between defiance and submission; all others in the sketches either fall short by submitting or they are not even morally awakened. Ahab of Moby Dick is the finest representation of defiance; no defiant character appears in The Encantadas.

Hunilla first impresses one as being a fulfillment of the romantic ideal of the peasant life. Coming from a primitive Indian culture, she lives in close association with nature. Her simple and pure emotions are unaffected by artificial social convention. Thus, tragedy strengthens, not weakens, her faith, love, loyalty, and even hope. The

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[4] Ibid., p. 3.

[5] Ibid., p. 5.

purity of emotion, deep but not excessive, is the source of the delicate pathos that pervades the sketch.

Hunilla is not merely a romantic "noble savage," however. She maintains the balance between the necessary acceptance of material restrictions and the intense emotional realization of self or spirit. Her "way" is "more proportioned to our strength and grounded in a more balanced, if less intense, vision of reality. This is the path of acceptance, of what may be called 'armed neutrality.' The attitude so named may be further described as one of resistance without defiance and acceptance without surrender, of an indifference that is not apathy and an affirmation free of all illusion."[6] She is the ideal of man living in the experiential world. Bowen writes that for Melville "greatness is not measured by success" but rather by the "persistence of self."[7] Hunilla's stoicism is her greatness.

Stoicism is the mediation between an intense intellectual and spiritual awareness of human potential and dignity, and the necessity of adapting to material conditions. Hunilla does not have a sharp intellectual awareness of her "self" or of suprapersonal infringement upon human dignity. Her emotional or subjective reactions are almost all irrational, unmotivated by reason or philosophic thought. Her subjective life is regulated by "heart," the purely emotional reaction uninfluenced by reasoning--a genuine human compassion.

This woman is the only character in The Encantadas capable of such complete emotional identification with another human being that she does undergo extreme anguish at his death. Sadness and grief

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[6] Ibid., p. 235.

[7] Ibid., p. 234.

inform even the first glimpse of the woman's "mournful image" (p. 262). After briefly relating the essential facts of the tragedy, the narrator juxtaposes the grief endured by the isolated woman and the restrained manner of her explanation after being rescued, weaving into a single vision the double perspective of the rescued and the unrescued woman. At the moment of the two deaths she is thrown into shocked inaction. Silence encases and muffles the violence of the scene. Hunilla associates almost no physical sensation with it. Deep emotion, not action, receives emphasis. Hunilla breaks her stoical reserve at this point only in her tale. "'Señor, I buried him;' then paused, struggled as against the writhed coilings of a snake, and cringing suddenly leaped up, repeating in impassioned pain, 'I buried him, my life, my soul!'" (p. 265).

After the initial daze, Hunilla follows an almost instinctive prompting, an irrational inner force--"some dull sense . . . some dull anxiety and pain" (p. 266)--as she searches the beach for her brother's body. The instinctive reaction is translated into a more significant spiritual commission, yet remains essentially irrational: "the strong persuasions of her Romish faith, which sets peculiar store by consecrated urns, prompted her to resume in waking earnest that pious search which had but been begun in somnambulism" (p. 266).

The rest of her existence on the island consists of the exercise of loyalty to her husband and an abiding love, of religious faith, and of blind hope and trust. Here is a "vastness" in the human spirit that causes it to find relationship with and attachment to things outside of sight and touch. The mental life--belief, imagination--embodies things beyond temporal and spatial limits to give a richer, deeper

dimension to human life. She will not abandon the site of her husband's grave; her rosary is worn featureless by constant fingering; she forces patience upon herself and trusts the sea, which has taken two lives from her, to bring her own salvation. "As mariners, tost in tempest on some desolate ledge, patch them a boat out of the remnants of their vessel's wreck, and launch it in the self-same waves, see there Hunilla, this lone shipwrecked soul, out of treachery invoking trust" (p. 267). Melville expresses his approval, emphasizing Hunilla's spiritual power and purity, through a Christ image. "The last seen of lone Hunilla she was passing into Payta town, riding upon a small gray ass; and before her on the ass's shoulders, she eyed the jointed workings of the beast's armorial cross" (p. 274).[8]

Hunilla is in accord with a practical life on earth; for, consciously or unconsciously, she witnesses to the fact that mankind must adapt to natural conditions and uncontrollable circumstances. He must allow some universal infringement upon his human dignity in order to prevent total madness and frustration at his own inadequacy to challenge universal forces. Hunilla does not have the "excessive humanity" of Ahab and hence does not cause her own destruction but rather limits her pride and dignity to what Sedgwick describes as the landsman's concept or understanding of the human nature. "[Land] is the proper sphere for that soundess of heart . . . The landsman puts aside the indefinite heights of human nature (and the depth likewise . . .) for soundness at the core of his being . . . He accepts the limitations which

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[8]Jay Leyda, The Melville Log: A Documentary Life of Herman Melville, 1819-1891, I (New York, 1951), pp. 487-488. Charles F. Briggs writes to Melville from Putnam's Monthly, May 12, 1854, that he omitted a few of Melville's words in the final paragraph of this sketch but that he does not believe the "idea" or "touching figure" of the woman to have been injured.

have been ordained for men, his acceptation taking the twin forms of pity and common sense. . . . [These two virtues] are represented as vital safeguards of the deepest and tenderest ties of man's nature, including what is the fine flowering of all of them--his faith."[9]

Melville's ideal of man who lives satisfactorily (not necessarily happily or contentedly) in this world embodies pride and patience. "Poise and not passion, it would appear, is the desired state," Bowen remarks. "Melville gives an increasingly prominent place in his writing to the figures of the patient sufferer and the stoic realist whom neither elation nor despair can drive from a conviction of the unitary nature of experience."[10] Hunilla possesses both in abundance, her patience seen in her endurance of long isolation without losing self-control of mental faculties (although she undergoes much mental anguish), and her pride in the calm narration of her experiences and her unemotional departure from the island. "She but showed us her soul's lid, and the strange ciphers thereon engraved; all within, with pride's timidity, was withheld" (p. 265). A Promethean defiance[11] is within her pride: "A Spanish and an Indian grief, which would not visibly lament. Pride's height in vain abased to proness on the rack; nature's pride subduing nature's torture" (p. 272).

"The air of a vast iceberg drifting in tremendous poise" (p. 245) aptly describes the poise with which she leaves the island, scene of much misery for her, leaving behind the puppies, her only companions

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[9]Sedgwick, p. 100.

[10]Bowen, p. 48.

[11]Ibid., p. 131. Bowen discusses Promethean defiance, treating it as one of the three characteristic responses of Melville's characters.

during her isolation. "Her face was set in a stern dusky calm. . . . She never looked behind her; but sat motionless, till we turned a promontory of the coast and lost all sights and sounds astern" (p. 273). Through these qualities Melville finds Hunilla most praiseworthy. "Humanity, thou strong thing, I worship thee, not in the laureled victor, but in this vanquished one" (p. 269). In this is man's strength: in maintaining himself in the fullest realization of his human capacity, yet knowing his mortal limitations and accepting where he cannot control.

The practicality and the nobility of stoicism are made clearer by contrast to the extremes which lie on either side of the balance. Bowen explains that in Moby Dick Ahab's "excessive humanity" gives him a sharp awareness of man's spiritual capacity and self-dignity--and thus an equally clear vision of injury and neglect of that dignity by God through the indifference and whimsy of nature. But Ahab's perceptiveness is his self-destruction because he insists upon challenging cosmic forces greater than he and upon pursuing answers to the "ultimate philosophical questions." He lacks the patience to endure his mortal conditions and the stoicism to accept without unreasonable defiance. Ahab's "excessive humanity," although noble, is not practical in a world which must reconcile material and spiritual.

The remaining characters in The Encantadas are at the other extreme--that of submission to the environment--or are not "morally awakened." Here Melville strongly deviates from romantic standards and, like some of the Victorians, insists upon confronting the actualities of human nature. Placed in an extreme situation--and the volcanic islands must be considered as such--the visitors and few inhabitants of the Enchanted Isles display unpleasant characteristics, exaggerated

so that the reader may readily identify the components of human nature with which Melville refutes the romantic concepts of man and nature. He opposes innate goodness of man, the progressive improvement of mankind, and the stimulation of human nobility by association with nature. Instead he parallels man's characteristics with features of the land or other natural phenomena--neither being beautiful and virtuous but rather ugly, immoral, savagely cruel, and indifferent to normal human values. These sketches are not a repudiation of those all too frequent characteristics, nor are they a mere tolerance (as is implied by the Victorian acceptance of materiality as a "necessary" but undesirable condition). They are an acceptance of these forms of human nature as part of the reality of the material (and human) situation. Although Melville recognizes a possible solution to man's amphibious character in stoicism, he gives no hope of achieving universal stoicism. The remaining characters are too engrossed in the petty human vanities and problems of material existence to be aware of compassion or human dignity the way either Hunilla or Ahab is. Melville calls for a frank recognition and acceptance of these realities of human nature.

Written in the mock-heroic tradition, "Charles's Isle and the Dog-King" is in part a satire upon man's relation to society, and the evolution of political organization. In this brief sketch Melville indicates his rejection of "the delusion that political and social freedom is an ultimate good, however empty of content; that equality should be a literal fact as well as a spiritual ideal; that physical and moral evil are rapidly receding before the footsteps of Progress,"[12] as Arvin has written.

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[12]Arvin, p. 95.

Increasing the population of his isle by duplicity, the king himself is victim of conspiracy and revolt; he is driven into the uncivilized part of the island until forced by the natural conditions of the isle to sue for peace and accept banishment to Peru. The revolutionaries form a republic, or democracy, which rapidly degenerates into an anarchy, a "Riotocracy," that attracts "scamps from every ship which touched their shores" (p. 259) until "it became Anathema--a sea Alsatia--the unassailed lurking-place of all sorts of desperadoes, who in the name of liberty did just what they pleased" (p. 259).

Arvin further suggests that Melville saw "a complex moral reality of which one pole was a pure and strong affirmation of the grandeur of the individual, and the other pole a wild egoism, anarchic, irresponsible, and destructive, that masqueraded in the kingly weeds of self-reliance,"[13] Melville has incorporated that notion also into the tale primarily through the Creole's character, making a thrust against man's social irresponsibility by which personal satisfaction determines the form and nature of government. Irresponsible selfishness replaces individual integrity and self-understanding.

The Creole first appears with a characterization quite favorable in terms of society. He is a valourous patriotic warrior in the struggle for Peru's political independence. However, the desire for personal political power unmodified by humility or humanitarian concerns leads him to request sovereignty over Charles's Isle as reward for military service. "To be short, this adventurer procures himself to be made in effect Supreme Lord of the Island, one of the princes of the

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[13] Ibid., p. 180.

powers of the earth" (p. 256). His justifications for increasing tyranny and brutality thinly disguise an arbitrary exercise of selfish and unfeeling power.

The king has little faith in humanity. He attempts to enforce his own superiority by surrounding himself with an army of dogs, a vivid symbol of his independence of other men, his "self-reliance," and possibly an identification with bestial savagery. "Armed to the teeth, the Creole now goes in state, surrounded by his canine janizaries, whose terrific bayings prove quite as serviceable as bayonets in keeping down the surgings of revolt" (p. 257). His self-reliance, his "individualism," is not only a totally ineffective preservative of power but it is in part responsible for his downfall and his end as an "exiled monarch, pensively ruralizing in Peru" (p. 259).

"Oberlus is the Encantadas at their darkest and worst,"[14] writes Fogle. Oberlus the hermit in Sketch Ninth is a refutation of romanticism's optimistic view of man's natural goodness and his derivation of moral qualities from communion with nature. Oberlus exemplifies man's ability to negate his human potential; he is man with a sterile spiritual and moral life in, ironically, an almost total identification with nature as it is manifested in the Encantadas. As Fogle comments, "Oberlus is the fullest human embodiment of the Encantadas . . . He is at once pitiable and evil."[15]

In Elizabethan fashion, as Fogle observes,[16] Oberlus's physical appearance reflects his spiritual and moral state which, in turn, satirize the transcendental doctrine of correspondences with nature. Like

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[14]Fogle, p. 100. [15]Ibid., p. 110. [16]Ibid., p. 110.

the sparse vegetation covering on the islands, his "rags [are] insufficient to hide his nakedness" (p. 275). His "befreckled skin blistered by continual exposure to the sun" (p. 275) is as barren rock, cracked beneath equatorial heat "like split Syrian gourds left withering in the sun" (p. 231); and his facial features--"nose flat, countenance contorted, heavy, earthy" (p. 275)--resemble the convoluted and creviced surface of the volcanic isles. He seems to be a member of the reptile population, "coiled asleep in his lonely lava den" (p. 275). As the primitive reptilian life is in an arrested state of development, so is Oberlus's spiritual life. He does not grow spiritually or morally; his "special curse" is that "change never comes" (p. 231). Meager and underdeveloped, it is paralleled by his gardening. He has poor ground in the "vale, or expanded gulch, containing here and there among the rocks about two acres of soil capable of rude cultivation; the only place on the isle not too blasted for that purpose" (p. 275) and succeeds "in raising a sort of degenerate potatoes and pumpkins" (p. 275), symbolic of his own spiritual sterility.

As do the islands themselves, Oberlus partakes of a mysterious evil enchantment and misanthropic ambition. His appearance "much as if he were a volcanic creature thrown up by the same convulsions which exploded into sight the isle" (p. 275) is heightened by his "fiery red . . . hair and beard unshorn, profuse" (p. 275) and the images of his having "drunk of Circe's cup" (p. 275), of the "hoe seem[ing] gradually to have shrunk and twisted in his grasp . . . so warped and crooked was his nature" (p. 275), and of his whole aspect and all his gestures [being] so malevolently and uselessly sinister and secret" (p. 276).

Meager intelligence parallels the spiritual void. Obliteration of

the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual capacities which distinguish man from animal reduces Oberlus to a bestial level much like the tortoises themselves. "The only companions of Oberlus were the crawling tortoises; and he seemed more than degraded to their level, having no desires for a time beyond theirs, unless it were for the stupor brought on by drunkenness" (p. 276). The man is hardly distinguishable from the barren land and primitive non-rational life of the islands. Yet he has an instinctive animal-like cunning that turns him against fellow men. "The wicked, moreover, show a singleness of purpose far surpassing that of ordinary men," Bowen writes. "They have their own perverted integrity. Unlike their victims, they rarely hesitate between right and wrong, the struggle of conscience being in their case already largely resolved."[17] Oberlus's treatment of the few men he meets is eccentric, at its best; it is savage, cruel, and cunning when opportunity occurs. "The cruel rocks, the impenetrable thickets, the treacherous chasms, the unquiet, dangerous seas are the misfortunes, but also the iniquities, of the islands. Like Oberlus, a detestable, subhuman, misanthropic tyrant who lures castaway seamen into slavery, they are alike oppressors and oppressed," observes Fogle.[18] Melville emphasizes Oberlus's savage disregard for human dignity in himself and others, a highly selfish ambition for tyrannical power, and an intelligence capable only of instinctive animal-like cunning to serve his selfish depraved motives.

At the peak of his power and dominion, Oberlus is still like the primitive reptilian inhabitants of the island. He converts the slaves

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[17]Bowen, p. 89.

[18]Fogle, p. 110.

"into reptiles at his feet--plebian gartersnakes to this Lord Anaconda" (p. 279). This lordly position held on the island is put into the perspective of human society when Oberlus arrives in Payta. Men see him as a rascal and a suspicious character (which he unquestionably was even on the island). Devoid of the lesser creatures, his subjects, he cannot assume the relative proportion of lord and master. "And here [in a South American jail], for a long time, Oberlus was seen; the central figure of a mongrel and assassin band" (p. 283).

The slaves themselves devolve to a totally bestial state in which human emotion, morality, and intelligence are dead. Those spiritual elements of man capable of ennobling him also reduce him to the most base conditions in their absence; it is the contrast between "the charming palm isles" and "this other and darker world" (p. 232). The slaves are the human counterpart to that portion of the islands' features that "suggest the aspect of once living things malignly crumbled from ruddiness into ashes. Apples of Sodom, after touching, seem these isles" (p. 231). Nothing remains of the slaves's human spirit. Oberlus "uses them as creatures of an inferior race; in short, he gaffles his four animals, and makes murders of them; out of cowards fitly manufacturing bravos" (p. 280).

Melville broaches the question of man's self-image. "The long habit of sole dominion over every object round him, his almost unbroken solitude, his never encountering humanity except on terms of misanthropic independence, or mercantile craftiness, and even such encounters being comparatively but rare; all this must have gradually nourished in him a vast idea of his own importance, together with a pure animal sort of scorn for all the rest of the universe" (p. 277). Man must be

able to see himself in relation to the varied aspects of society and the forces of nature beyond society in order to measure his own capacity and limitations. Melville again contradicts the optimistic romanticism that sees no limitation to man's potential.

Melville concludes that the nature of man is many-sided, ranging from the heights of spiritual nobility to the depth of animal-like cruelty, even unconsciousness. Like the birds of Rock Rodondo, humanity encompasses many kinds of men from the "outcasts of the beasts" (p. 231) to the lofty "angelic thing" (p. 243). Hunilla most closely approximates the soaring Boatswain's Mate (p. 243); the Buccaneers with their gentlemanly virtue are at least midway on the levels of the hierarchy. The Dog-King is farther down, and Oberlus and his slaves correspond to the lowest levels, to the "outlandish beings" (p. 241).

"In no world but a fallen one could such lands exist" (p. 232)—or such characteristics of man. Mankind is neither entirely good, as romantics would have nor entirely depraved, but shares portions of each quality in varying degrees. One must understand this mixture. Melville does not distrust mankind, but he admonishes his reader to be aware of the existence of depravity and duplicity as well as of nobility. He would have the reader not be blind to the mixture. "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. 243).

Most importantly, however, Melville insists upon the reconciliation of man's awareness of self and his material conditions. As Bowen writes, "survival in such a universe is no inconsiderable victory. For this is a world, clearly, that was not made with either man's

comfort or his welfare in mind. . . . It is the acknowledged task of the self not merely to survive but to survive as a free, moral and intelligent agent--to avoid annihilation, but to realize something of the immense potentiality it feels within it."[19] The proud Hunilla achieves that reconciliation by virtue of her stoical patience and endurance. This is the wise way to handle the duality of man's nature. "Wisdom may be said to begin with the recognition of what must be."[20]

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[19]Bowen, pp. 198, 199.

[20]Ibid., p. 244.

CHAPTER VI

THE POEMS

Striking expressions of Melville's attitudes toward nature make his concept of nature vivid in some of his poems. A brief discussion of them is included here to further illustrate Melville's views. The short poems mentioned in this chapter are from John Marr and Other Sailors, published in 1888,[1] with the exception of "The Lake," which, after Melville's death, was found in a manuscript entitled "Weeds and Wildings."[2] Clarel is an epic poem that has received relatively little critical attention. G. P. Putnam's Sons originally published Clarel in 1876. It has also appeared in the English edition of Melville's works by Constable and Company in 1922-24 and in Walter E. Bezanson's edition in 1960.[3]

Melville gives a firm sense of necessity working through the process of cause and effect in "The Aeolian Harp" (pp. 194-196). The drifting wreckage has neither intelligence nor purpose of its own, as it is tossed randomly on the waves. Yet the very part of its nature that causes it to float instead of sink makes it a hazard to other ships:

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[1]Quotations of the poems are from Collected Poems of Herman Melville, edited by Howard P. Vincent (Chicago, 1947).

[2]Arvin, p. 281.

[3]Herman Melville, Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land, edited by Walter E. Bezanson (New York, 1960). All references to Clarel in this chapter are from Bezanson's edition.

Saturate, but never sinking,
Fatal only to the other! (ll. 39-40)

The wreckage, once part of a sailing vessel itself, has been transformed through natural processes into

a levelled hull:
Bulwarks gone--a shaven wreck,
Nameless, and a grass-green deck. (ll. 22-24)

It begins to be "waterlogged, / Till by trailing weeds beclogged" (ll. 27-28), moving aimlessly, "Pilotless on pathless way" (l. 30), and unseen,

Drifted, drifted, night by night,
Craft that never shows a light;
Nor ever, to prevent worse knell,
Tolls in fog the warning bell. (ll. 33-36)

Near the end of this natural transformation,

Deadlier than the sunken reef
Since still the snare it shifteth,
Torpid in dumb ambuscade
Waylayingly it drifteth. (ll. 41-44)

The wreck has become a device of destruction through the natural processes that order this world, oblivious to moral implications of their functions.

Melville infuses "The Haglets" with a sense of predetermined doom by the mere presence of the birds and by repeated mention of them.

There, peaked and gray, three haglets fly,
And follow, follow fast in wake
Where slides the cabin-lustre shy. (ll. 49-51)

They are ominous.

And, shrilling round, the inscrutable haglets flew.
And still they fly, nor now they cry,
But constant fan a second wake,
Unflagging pinions ply and ply,
Abreast their course intent they take;
Their silence marks a stable mood,
They patient keep their eager neighborhood.
(ll. 108-114)

They foreshadow the shipwreck upon the reefs and suggest the inevitability of events.

Nature informed by conscious intelligence has three aspects, or assumes three distinguishing poses, much as it does in The Encantadas. "The Maldive Shark" makes dull, passive consciousness--unthinking and unfeeling existence--vivid by the contrast between the "phlegmatical" shark and the "alert" pilot-fish:

> About the Shark, phlegmatical one,
> Pale sot of the Maldive sea,
> The sleek little pilot-fish, azure and slim,
> How alert in attendance be. (ll. 1-4)

Indifference to and aloofness from man finds poignant expression in "The Berg" when a ship crashes into an iceberg and is destroyed against the iceberg's "dead indifference of walls" (l. 37). The enormous size and strength of the iceberg standing calmly poised and immoble against the ship's impact reduces the relative power of man's invention to absurd proportions. The impact of the ship breaks off "huge ice-cubes" (l. 6) that fall

> Sullen, in tons that crashed the deck;
> But that one avalanche was all--
> No other movement save the foundering wreck.
> (ll. 7-9)

The "hard iceberg . . . so cold, so vast" (l. 28), is animated "with mortal damps self-overcast" (l. 29), or at least seems to be as it stands "exhaling still [its] dankish breath" (l. 30). Although the massive strength of the iceberg in gigantic repose makes possible the iceberg's dignity, indifference, and aloofness, it also imparts a passivity similar to the shark's. Both are potentially powerful destructive forces; yet both are insensitive to the more quick-witted forms of life around them. The iceberg is "a lumbering lubbard

loitering slow" (l. 33), and the shark, similarly, is a "dotard lethargic and dull" (l. 15).

The third aspect of nature has an actively malicious principle acting consciously against mankind. In "Far Off-Shore" the spirit informing the waves is not so malicious as it is heedless of man; but its carelessness is more capricious than the dull indifference of the iceberg. When "the sea-fowl, hovering over" (l. 5) the empty raft, cries "'crew, the crew?'" (l. 6), then "the billow, reckless, rover, / Sweeps anew" (l. 7-8). "Pebbles" also recognizes the maliciousness of nature:

> Implacable I, the old implacable Sea:
> Implacable most when most I smile serene--
> Pleased, not appeased, by myriad wrecks in me.
> (ll. 23-25)

These aspects are co-existent and intertwined, in the same way that black and bright are organically related in The Encantadas. They are multiple aspects, seemingly contradictory, of the same world. Not only does the "dotard lethargic and dull" (l. 15) live in the midst of the alert, harmless pilot-fish; but the existence of both is founded upon their interdependence. The pilot-fish do not fear the shark and, hence, they use him as protection from other dangers. They

> lurk in the port of serrated teeth
> In white triple tiers of glittering gates,
> And there find a haven when peril's abroad,
> An asylum in jaws of the Fates! (ll. 9-12)

In return the pilot-fish lead the shark to his food.

> They are friends; and friendly they guide him
> to prey;
> Yet never partake of the treat--
> Eyes and brains to the dotard lethargic and dull,
> Pale ravener of horrible meat. (ll. 13-16)

Peace and benevolence contrast but exist simultaneously with irrational cruelty in "Pebbles."

Elemental mad ramping of ravening waters--
Yet Christ on the Mount, and the dove in her nest!
(ll. 28-29)

Two contrasting principles, the injurious and the curative, dwell together:

Healed of my hurt, I laud the inhuman Sea--
Yea, bless the Angels Four that there convene;
For healed I am even by their pitiless breath
Distilled in wholesome dew named rosmarine.
(ll. 30-33)

Man remains insignificant and weak. In "The Berg" a "ship of martial build" (l. 1)--embodying man's greatest physical force with which he conquers peoples and empires--steers into the iceberg, the massive power of nature. The ship is fatally wrecked; the iceberg scarcely notices the impact. Man's vessel is "directed as by madness mere" (l. 3). Melville repeats the disdain for human reason and weakness here and in three parallel descriptions: "the infatuate ship went down" (l. 5), "the stunned ship went down" (l. 15), "the impetuous ship in bafflement went down" (l. 27).

Melville suggests the discrepancy between man's scientific knowledge and the actualities of nature.

Though the Clerk of the Weather insist
And lay down the weather-law,
Pintado and gannet they wist
That the winds blow whither they list
In tempest or flaw. (ll. 1-5)

Man deceives himself by believing that he understands the mysteries of nature and can make them work for him; he cannot overcome human folly, however. In "The Haglets" the victorious Admiral's ship crashes against the reefs when the compass, man's device for accommodating himself to nature and nature to his own use, is, as Arvin has pointed out, deflected by the swords which are the symbol of the military victory.[4] The

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[4]Arvin, p. 279.

helmsman fails to notice the needle's wavering and allows his human incompetence to render the device ineffective. He gives

> no thought of where
> The sensitive needle keeps its place,
> And starts, disturbed, a quiverer there;
> The helmsman rubs the clouded glass--
> Peers in, but lets the trembling portent pass.
> (ll. 122-126)

The misdirection of the compass, of course, results from the cause-and-effect necessity that directs the material world; but human intelligence is too much detracted by human weaknesses even to make devices like this one work for man properly.

> "We tacked from land: then how betrayed?
> Have currents swerved us--snared us here?"
> None heed the blades that clash in place
> Under lamps dashed down that lit the magnet's case.
> (ll. 207-210)

These poems, like The Encantadas, are pervaded by the theme of death and decay. The wreckage in "The Aeolian Harp" is decaying.

> It has drifted till each plank
> Is oozy as the oyster-bank. (ll. 31-32)

But it never completely disintegrates and is thus a cause of destruction to other vessels. The tragedy of "The Haglets," the tale of the Admiral's shipwreck, is told to explain the meaning of an old and decaying memorial stone, reminder of death.

> By chapel bare, with walls sea-beat
> The lichened urns in wilds are lost
> About a carved memorial stone
> That shows, decayed and coral-mossed,
> A form recumbent, swords at feet,
> Trophies at head, and kelp for a winding-sheet.
> (ll. 1-6)

"The Lake" comes from an unpublished manuscript written in Melville's later years. The poems in "Weeds and Wildings," Arvin writes, show an "almost complete transformation of mood" and are

distinguished by "the homely imagery of countrified retirement and quiet domestic simplicity."[5] Arvin finds the change in mood indicative of Melville's own spiritual peace after a lifetime of uncertainty. "Nothing could be more eloquent of the unprotesting tranquillity that Melville achieved at the end of his life than this low-pitched poetry of weeds and wild flowers, of red clover, hardhack, and sweetbriar . . ."[6] "The Lake" speculates on cycles of life and birth, introducing the concept of rebirth into Melville's writing, which is not found in The Encantadas. Arvin notes that when "Melville seeks to express his sense of the primordial rhythms of death and rebirth, of decay and renewal, he does it through the image of a small New England lake in the midst of pines . . . It is an extraordinarily peaceful and pastoral coda to a body of work that had been predominantly stormy."[7] The lake is in a peaceful, romantic setting with much the same spirit as the Buccaneers' island as seen through the eyes of the "sentimental voyager."

> As dreamy Nature, feeling sure;
> Of all her genial labor done,
> And the last mellow fruitage won,
> Would idle out her term mature;
> Reposing like a thing reclined
> In kinship with man's meditative mind.
> (ll. 17-22)

But he interrupts himself with the thought that "all dies!" Still man is a part of material nature subject to death; now even immaterial reality must submit to that universal principle.

> All dies! and not alone
> The aspiring trees and men and grass;
> The poet's forms of beauty pass,
> And noblest deeds they are undone,
> Even truth itself decays, and lo,
> From truth's sad ashes pain and falsehood grow.
> (ll. 44-49)

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[5] Ibid., p. 280. [6] Ibid., p. 280. [7] Ibid., p. 281.

In Clarel the forms of nature are used very much as they are in The Encantadas. The desert is the setting for the entire pilgrimage, which is Clarel's search for certainty of belief, or, as Walter Bezanson calls it, a "drama of faith and doubt."[8] Like the iceberg and Abington Isle, the desert is silent and indifferent. The desert is "blank indifference so drear," says the character Rolfe (II, x, 140). Desert country in the Holy Land is, like the Encantadas, severe and extreme in all its characteristics. Arvin writes that all the details of physical setting are "subordinated and held in place by one paramount, overarching impression, the unspeakably desolate impression of aridity."[9] Little vegetation or water, and a hot sun, have made the country dry and forsaken. It bears the marks of condemnation and hell.

> 'Tis horror absolute--severe,
> Dead, livid, honeycombed, dumb, fell--
> A caked depopulated hell;
> Yet so created, judged by sense,
> And visaged in significance
> Of settled anger terrible. (II, xii, 70-75)

The wilderness shows traces of death and violence in time past, the harsh aspects of nature and man alike. As the travelers descend a mountain slope, they see

> Two human skeletons inlaced
> In grapple as alive they fell,
> Or so disposed in overthrow,
> As to suggest encounter so. (III, i, 84-87)

This and the bones scattered throughout the desert enforce the sense of death.

Just as the "vitreous mass" seems to be the chief geologic ingredient in the composition of the Enchanted Isles, so bare, dry, sand-

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[8]Bezanson, p. cix.

[9]Arvin, p. 272.

colored stones are prevalent in the desert and figure into many aspects of desert life. Melville recalls the "diverse ways" in which "stones mention find in hallowed Writ" (II, x, 1-2), and, after a survey of their many uses, also observes "on stones, still stones, the gospels dwell / In lesson meet or happier parable" (II, x, 23-26). However, the stones are dead, lifeless, matching the country in which they are found.

> Behold the stones? And never one
> A lichen greens; and, turn them o'er--
> No worm--no life; but, all the more,
> Good witnesses. (II, x, 30-33)

Here again is the sense of endurance and age.

The land is scorched, volcanic, and unlike the rest of the earth.

> In graceful lines the hills advance,
> The valley's sweep repays the glance,
> And wavy curves of winding beach;
> But all is charred or crunched or riven,
> Scarce seems of earth whereon we dwell;
> Though framed within the lines of heaven
> The picture intimates a hell. (II, xxix, 13-19)

The ruins of Sodom bear no trace of man, reminding one that man does not leave his mark on nature but nature on man. They even inspire thoughts of evil enchantments among the pilgrims:

> "Demons here which dwell,"
> Cried Rolfe, "riff-raff of Satan's throng."
> (II, xxxii, 25-26)

As Melville modifies the severe picture of the Encantadas with Hunilla's bower and the pleasant groves on Barrington Isle, so here the desert is not "unmitigated gloom." Sedgwick writes that now Melville "has come to see, if good cannot exist without some evil, neither does evil exist without good."[10] Melville identifies a unique

[10]Sedgwick, p. 215.

charm about the desert that makes it attractive.

> Waste places are where yet is given
> A charm, a beauty from the heaven
> Above them, and clear air divine--
> Translucent ether opaline;
> And some in evening's early dew
> Put on illusion of a guise
> Which Tantalus might tantalize
> Afresh. (II, xi, 21-28)

The desert stretches in a vastness comparable to the sea's expanses.

> Sands immense
> Impart the oceanic sense:
> The flying grit like scud is made:
> Pillars of sand which whirl about
> Or arc along in colonnade,
> True kin be to the water-spout. (II, xi, 38-43)

The desert, also, measures immense lengths of time by its history as recorded in its ruins, and suggests that it approaches the limits of time.

> Thou shadow vast
> Of Cheops' indissoluble pile,
> Typ'st thou the imperishable Past
> In empire posthumous and reaching sway
> Projected far across to time's remotest day?
> (II, xi, 58-64)

But its immensity and its recording of time exist partly in immaterial reality, and Melville stops his speculation with an exclamation "But curb" (II, xi, 65).

The travelers encounter an island that seems to have been transported from the Galápagos, so like the Encantadas is it. Low, rainless clouds hang over the volcanic island. And the island's chief inhabitant is the tortoise, who looks much like the creatures on the Galápagos.

> Lo, 'tis the monstrous tortoise drear!
> Of huge humped arch, the ancient shell
> Is trenched with seams where lichens dwell,
> Or some adhesive growth and sere:
> A lumpish languor marks the pace--
> A hideous, harmless look, with trace

Of hopelessness; the eyes are dull
As in the bog the dead black pool:
Penal his aspect; all is dragged,
As he for more than years had lagged--
A convict doomed to bide the place;
A soul transformed--for earned disgrace
Degraded, and from higher race.
Ye watch him--him so woe-begone. (IV, iii, 62-75)

As in the Encantadas, water is scant and vegetation is limited to cactus plants. Age, endurance, decay, and death likewise distinguish this isle and these tortoises.

those bleached skull-like hulks below,
Which, when by life inhabited,
Crept hither in last journey slow
After a hundred years of pain
And pilgrimage here to and fro,
For other hundred years to reign
In hollow of white armor so--
Then perish piecemeal. (IV, iii, 84-90)

The significances of these forms of nature to man are varied, depending very much upon the personality of the individual men in the company. At one point the narrator observes that the wild country seems to be ruled by Chaos; at another, the Swede finds in the very same forms evidence of a powerful God, "'the striding God of Habakkuk'" (III, i, 172).

"Look! for His wake is here. On men,
Since Science can so much explode,
Evaporated is this God?" (III, i, 156-158)

The land appears "direful yet holy" (II, xii, 94). It is a place where man's religious faith is encouraged, yet it is a land scourged and feared.

But why does man
Regard religiously this tract
Cadaverous and under ban
Of blastment? Nay, recall the fact
That in the pagan era old
When bolts, deemed Jove's, tore up the mound,

> Great stones the simple peasant rolled
> And built a wall about the gap
> Deemed hallowed by the thunder-clap.
> So here: men here adore this ground
> Which doom hath smitten. 'Tis a land
> Direful yet holy--blest though banned.
> But to pure hearts it yields no fear:
> And John, he found wild honey here. (III, i, 83-96)

Here is the ambiguity that pervades the world. Appearances are chaotic and illogical; man cannot distinguish an absolute reason in the scheme of things. Clarel speculates that the world is too complex for man to understand by exercise of his own reason.

> What may man know?
> (Here pondered Clarel) let him rule--
> Pull down, build up, creed, system, school,
> And reason's endless battle wage,
> Make and remake his verbiage--
> But solve the world! Scarce that he'll do:
> Too wild it is, too wonderful. (IV, iii, 109-115)

Ambiguity of the material world carries over into the spiritual world.

> Since <u>this</u> world, then, can baffle so--
> Our natural harbor--it were strange
> If <u>that</u> alleged, which is afar,
> Should not confound us when we range
> In revery where its problems are. (IV, ii, 116-120)

The final note in <u>Clarel</u> is not despair or resignation, however: it is an affirmation of spiritual faith--and a confirmation of Arvin's opinion that Melville wanted to find an ultimate Reason and universal design beyond the human experience.

In the Epilogue the narrator--through whom Melville has hardly disguised himself--admonishes the disheartened Clarel to continue his quest for certainty and faith beyond the extreme trial of Ruth's death. The approbation of Hunilla's stoical preservation of faith and acceptance of personal grief is echoed as the narrator makes an appeal to the heart, not the head, where he thinks to find the steadfastness that

will bring Clarel through despair and lead him to confirmation of religious faith. Faith is emotional and enduring beyond the limitations of reason or intellect. It is the only positive conviction of God, the only source of hope for man's redemption in an afterlife (a hope which gives purpose to this life). Much more so than in The Encantadas, Melville is here clarifying his desire to believe despite the disillusioning experiences of mortal life.

Even as the dream-like vision of death is a questioning of death's finality in the Chola Widow's tale, so here Melville questions the nature of death in Clarel: "Even death may prove unreal at the last" (XXXV, 25). Melville speculates further here, however, considering death not as the final defeat in life, the end of life, but--strongly in the Christian, especially the Calvinistic, tradition--as the final conquest of life.

> Then keep thy heart, though yet but ill-
> resigned--
> Clarel, thy heart, the issues there but mind;
> That like the crocus budding through the snow--
> That like a swimmer rising from the deep--
> That like a burning secret which doth go
> Even from the bosom that would hoard and keep;
> Emerge thou mayst from the last whelming sea,
> And prove that death but routs life into victory.
> (XXXV, 27-34)

In their brevity, the poems often crystalize the concepts Melville examines at great length in his prose. Having been written many years after The Encantadas, these poems clarify and confirm Melville's perception of the inevitability of natural law that appears to man to be indifference in the natural order, his view of man as a mere--and not always significant, powerful, or intelligent--phenomenon of nature, his understanding of the ambiguity of human perception because of its

limitations, and also his desire to discover a wise, rational God who is concerned for the welfare of man--his desire to rest in religious conviction.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSIONS

Melville has used nature as the subject of the first half of The Encantadas, as antagonist to solitary human beings in the second, and as antagonist to groups of men or mankind in general in the poems. By making nature an acting force in his writings, he gives a characterization of nature, as it were, displaying her many facets--the external forms, the moods, the motivations, the forces. Melville's nature is different from the sympathetic view of romanticism, but does not rest in the unconscious evolution of Victorian naturalism. Like both, however, it is a combination of material and immaterial--a recognition of the essential unity of the universe.

Melville's nature is not a norm for human conduct, and Melville does not preach our emulation of it. In the first place, nature does not possess the moral or sympathetic qualities the romantics ascribe to it. At its best, nature is totally indifferent to man, itself acting in accord with the natural laws of its creation and continuing by the rigid necessity of cause and effect, the scientifically observable regularity and order in the objective world. Man is another form of nature existing under the reign of the same necessity; only in man's mind is man superior to natural universal law. But "The Berg" and "The Haglets" illustrate the feeble intelligence of man's reasoning, the deceptiveness in his self-congratulation. At times nature appears--

we can assume that Melville means us to be aware of the implicit human point of view which renders nature's activities merely "appearances"--to be inspired by an active intelligence. The activity at times seems to be as sheerly whimsical, as heedless of its effect upon humanity, as are the currents around the Encantadas; at times it is actively malevolent, as when the ocean current sweeps ships onto the reefs surrounding the Enchanted Isles or when the sea supports molding wreckage which sinks ships unawares. At times Melville gives the impression of saying the spirits of nature are independent of man's imagination, as in "Pebbles" the sea speaks of its own temperamental moods (ll. 23-25). But elsewhere Melville gives us confidence that objective nature merely adheres to the laws of necessity, from which it cannot escape. The wreckage of the "Aeolian Harp" merely decays and floats on the currents as is "natural," and the compass in "Haglets" is deflected only because unthinking man places his sword too close to the instrument.

Above all, however, Melville enforces our awareness of the coloring the human mind puts upon its perception of objective nature. In fact, observance of any conscious, intelligent spirit in nature is largely man's interpretation of natural forces. Vividly Melville makes this point in the view of Rock Rodondo as from a great distance it appears to be the sail of an ordinary ship, then of an admiral's ship, then it is only a "craggy keep" (p. 240). Hunilla may sense a malicious mockery in the sound of the waves; the narrator sees a hellish turmoil in the crashing waves. In Clarel, two men view the desert respectively as charming and satanic.

Nevertheless, Melville's strong religious sense prevents him from

denying God. Melville does not describe a pantheistic spirit residing in and directing nature. Rather he leads man to seek knowledge of God through the observable characteristics of God's creation and the natural laws which He has ordained to operate within it. Thus, in a somewhat Deistic fashion, Melville maintains the validity of scientifically observable laws--necessity--directing nature; but he also retains the sense of something mysterious, something inscrutable, about the universe. He does not place a personal, providential God in observable nature; yet he does not exclude Him; for, after illustrating the operation of natural law--and man's self-deception about it--he acknowledges the mysterious personal spirit in the "flutterings" which attract Hunilla to the opposite side of the island and, finally, to rescue. Melville concludes that God--a universal power--does rule over the universe. But man cannot know Him absolutely. He can only guess at God's characteristics by what he sees in nature and can figure out from that, although nature is not necessarily a close "correspondence" of the universal spirit.

The romantics encourage a spiritual identification with nature. In a sense Melville does exactly that with some of his characters. First developing a natural setting in which all is desolation, aridity, barrenness--a setting foreign to most romantic portrayals of nature--Melville places there men of comparable spiritual qualities, and in the case of Oberlus, even a similar physical appearance to enforce our understanding of his identification. The land Melville chooses as setting is parched, hot, a desolate in both The Encantadas and Clarel. One cannot avoid noticing the severity which characterizes both settings --the extreme dryness, the extreme heat, the extreme lack of vegetation.

Here nothing--either animal nor plant--grows; nothing progresses. Primitive reptilian life, unchanged since early geologic periods of millions of years ago, and the excessive age of the tortoises, which seems to defy time, testify to the lack of "progress"--the lack of progressive improvement as the romantics believe--in nature; nature--both land and animal--is here in one of its most primitive and restricted forms, giving no evidence of having changed at all in the long past or of changing any time in the future.

By identifying human personalities with the land, Melville succeeds in refuting the romantic (and somewhat post-romantic) belief in the inevitable spiritual progress of mankind. Just as the land remains forever unchanged, so does human nature remain constant, even in its degraded forms. The luxurious blossoming of human virtue hoped for by the romantics is stifled by Oberlus's fruitless, sterile morality. Nature being devoid of morality, it certainly cannot stimulate virtue in man. In fact, Melville suggests in his comparison of man and nature, that man's innate virtue is accompanied by an innate depravity, a quality which may be developed and exercised above, and even to the exclusion of, the other. Both Oberlus and the Dog-King witness to the potential depravity of man.

The romantic belief in nature as a norm of conduct for man has been distorted. Not advocating conscious imitation of nature, Melville shows that the qualities of nature are not what the romantics would have them be but that man is not unlike his natural environment, nonetheless.

Some admirable qualities emerge from Melville's nature, also. The iceberg, although indifferent to man's fate, has a regal poise, a

stoical aloofness. And even if "poise" is an interpretation placed upon the berg's massive size and brilliant whiteness by man, the same sense of poise, endurance, and strength is in Hunilla's stoical reserve and is an admirable quality in man. The tortoise's "impulse to straightforwardness in a belittered world" is not unlike Hunilla's enduring faith and hope in the midst of grievous circumstances and Melville's praise of stoicism in man's material situation. Silence in the iceberg, in the desert, even in the Encantadas, signifies solidity, endurance, aloofness and indifference (especially in the iceberg); in human beings--as we see in Hunilla--it again signifies noble stoical reserve, an aloofness and indifference of spirit toward the external universe, the attitude needed for survival under the law of necessity operating in objective nature.

The human mind is the key to the unification of material and immaterial even in Melville's scheme in a sense. The immaterial includes both man's subjectivity (such as emotions, values, ideals) and man's awareness of God. Yet, Melville places great stress upon the necessity of perceiving and understanding everything in the universe through the finite senses and intelligence of man--of individual man, at that. Therefore, regardless of what kind or how much of a spirit exists outside of man, governing the natural order of the universe, man has only the data of his senses and the interpretations of his mind and emotion. Understanding this limitation upon human knowledge, Melville insists that reality ("nature" in the sense of being the total universe) is a combination of both the sense perception and the subjective, or immaterial, reaction. To do so, he illustrates in The Encantadas the impossibility of separating the sense and the subjective. The appearance

of Rock Rodondo, for example, is perceived through the objective sense of sight, yet the imagination renders that piece of information into an Admiral's ship. Hunilla sees the death of her husband, yet retains her love and loyalty, the spiritual counterpart of the physical presence. The narrator describes the physical appearance of the islands in terms of impressions (emotional colorings) made upon him; the factual account of his first encounter with the tortoise flows into a dream which associates the tortoise with Indian mythology; and even in the narrator's old age a social setting merges with memories of objective scenes so that he can hardly distinguish between the shadows of the house and the memories of the tortoise.

Reality necessarily unifies material and immaterial (not a reconciliation because Melville will not accept the separation of the two in the first place). Reality is also necessarily individual, different for each person, because each must view nature through his own individual senses and mind. Melville's recognition of the inevitable ambiguity of nature lies in the necessity of individual realities and in man's limited perceptions.

Individual reality is drawn from metaphysics and scientific studies which identify man's place in physical nature. His insignificance comes from the Calvinistic heritage which keeps man humble before some unknowable universal power. From the religious implications of his attitudes Melville derives a sense of man's inevitable limitations: God has created man to be always limited in his knowledge that man may never know God absolutely. Arvin writes, "Besides, there was always present at the heart of Calvinist Protestantism, despite its dogmatisms, that essentially humble and saving sense of something unaccountable,

something unanalyzable and incomprehensible, something mysterious in the scheme of things, in 'God's ways,' that was to find so deeply responsive an echo in Melville's own meditations."[1]

Melville suggested that there is an essential continuity in nature apart from the unity through the human mind, although man, of course, is restricted to perception of it through his limited faculties. The sense of vastness in nature leads to essential continuity. As the narrator sits atop Rock Rodondo and observes the waves washing against the rock's base, he imaginatively perceives Rock Rodondo in relation to the rest of the world. The very ocean out of which arises Rock Rodondo washes the shores of all other lands as well and thus, stretching immensely before the narrator's eye, connects this spot in the Encantadas with all other geographical points. "You see nothing; but permit me to point out the direction, if not the place, of certain interesting objects in the vast sea, which, kissing this tower's base, we behold unscrolling itself towards the Antarctic Pole" (p. 244). The desert likewise is space unlimited. Vastness is even carried into the human realm, a vastness in Hunilla suggesting the depths of her emotion, her compassion and understanding. The awareness of vastness in either man or external nature epitomizes Melville's awareness of the impossibility of comprehending or of defining reality in a single formulation. The essential task Melville sets for himself and men is to understand the continuity between all forms of external nature and between material and immaterial--nature--while realizing the impossibility of confining nature into a single description.

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[1]Arvin, p. 34.

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