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PALESTINE AS SCENE AND SYMBOL IN MELVILLE'S CLAREL

By

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INTRODUCTION

On January 6, 1857, Melville arrived in Jaffa after a week's stay in Egypt, and he left for Beirut from the same port on January 24. Melville spent about half the visit to Palestine in Jerusalem, and went on a three day excursion down to the Jordan River and the Dead Sea and up to the Convent of Mar Saba and Bethlehem.¹ The quick glimpses of the Middle East were part of a journey to Europe and the Levant undertaken by Melville to improve his declining physical, mental and psychic condition. His physical decline was serious², and he was depressed and struggling with doubts about the world and God.³

The experiences of Melville in Europe and the Levant were used later in lectures⁴, and in short poems ("The Great Pyramid," "In the Desert"). But the greatest manifestation of the journey is the enormous Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land (1876). Clarel consists of four

¹Herman Melville, Journal of a Visit to Europe and the Levant, Oct. 11, 1856 - May 6, 1857, ed. Howard C. Horsford (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1955), p.52 (introduction) and the text. All page references to the Journal are to this edition.

²See Herman Melville, Clarel, ed. Walter Bezanson (New York, Hendricks, 1960), p.xiii (introduction) for a quotation from Mrs. Melville's diary, and The Letters of Herman Melville, eds. M.R. Davis and W.H. Gilman (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1960), p.184. All references to Clarel are to Bezanson's edition and refer to the part, the canto and the lines.

³Nathaniel Hawthorne, The English Notebooks, ed. R. Stewart (New York, Russell, 1962), pp.432-433.

⁴Melville as Lecturer, ed. Merton M. Sealts, Jr. (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1957).

parts: "Jerusalem" (44 cantos), "The Wilderness" (39 cantos), "Mar Saba" (32 cantos) and "Bethlehem" (35 cantos). The poem tells of the pilgrimage of Clarel, a young American divinity student, and his search for faith and meaning. He becomes attached to Ruth -- the daughter of Nathan, an American Christian turned Jew by marriage to a Jewess, and an immigrant to Palestine. Clarel travels to the Jordan Valley with other pilgrims after Ruth goes into the traditional Jewish mourning seclusion over the murder of her father by Bedouins. The story ends with the death of Ruth in Jerusalem, while Clarel is in Bethlehem on the way back after "Rounding the waste circumference." The main interest of the poem, however, is not in the plot (apart from the story's symbolic significance), but in the philosophical, political, religious and moral ideas presented by Melville.

Young Clarel is the sensitive consciousness against which is pitched an array of mature or principled characters with varying and conflicting views and ways of life. With Clarel as the searcher, the developing naive youth, the poem presents a spectrum of characters that can be divided, for convenience, into three groups: those of false principles like the hypocritically progressive Anglican priest, Derwent; characters of delusion like the meek adventist Nehemiah or the aggressive Zionist Nathan; and finally, the more favorably treated characters who are aware, in one way or the other, of the world's problems and ^{who} approach truth. This last group contains characters like: Rolfe, an uncommitted "sterling" intellectual who, nevertheless, has grievances of the heart; Vine, a majestically detached sufferer; Ungar, the self-outcast soldier-philosopher from the West; Celio, a rebellious Catholic hunchback; Mortmain, the Swede, a disillusioned idealist and a spiritual malcontent;

and the Lyonese, a young but experienced Jewish hedonist. Though it is dangerous to identify any character exclusively with Melville, Rolfe is often an indicator of approval or disapproval of certain characters. The members of this last group, however, are complementary, each representing a part of Melville's apparently vast consciousness, and all of them -- their opinions and experiences -- forming ~~into~~ one cumulative intention that is within the poem as a whole and not at a particular place or places in it. The reliability of thus viewing the poem and of equating certain positions with Melville's is based on comments and clues provided by the narrator, the argumentative flow among characters, the overall structure and intention of the poem into which certain ideas fit, and parallels with the Journal.

It is, however, an oversimplification to assume an exact correspondence between the Journal and Clarel. One has to consider the passing of years, the maturation and change of ideas involved, between the hasty jotting down of impressions in the Journal and the serious effort that went into Clarel. Still, the parts of the Journal on Egypt and Palestine throw much light on Clarel, especially in relation to myth and religion. One should also note the brevity of the visit to Palestine and its having been in January, a time when the Land is most barren. The season and brevity of the visit account for Melville's feeling impelled to supplement his factual knowledge by reading a number of the contemporary books on "Sacred Topography" and travel, such as: Arthur P. Stanley's Sinai and Palestine (1856), William H. Bartlett's Walks about the City and Environs of Jerusalem (1844) and Forty Days in the Desert, on the Track of the Israelites (1849), William Thomson's

The Land and The Book (1859), Eliot Warburton's The Crescent and the Cross (1845), and Robert Curzon's Visits to Monasteries in the Levant (1849).⁵

These and other books, read before and after the visit to Palestine, must have influenced Melville's views and impressions. His final position, however, is original and detached from the pious or disputative and narrow-minded application of Bible and prophecy to the Land by the clerical travelers; Melville worked the other way, rather. Notably in the first two parts of Clarel, Melville uses some of the travelers, especially Stanley, with adequate modifications. Melville must have been immensely patient! and he must have been greatly motivated to write Clarel. These readings, however, did not provide Melville with factual information as much as they afforded him a fuller perspective of the currents of thought and religion in his time.

Melville's first impression of Palestine was a mixture of disappointment and fascination with its barrenness and weirdness. It was probably later that he realized that Palestine could serve as a more inclusive and synthetic symbol of the human and world conditions than the steamboat in The Confidence Man, the archipelago in Mardi, or the ship and the sea in Moby Dick. The object of this thesis is not only to show Melville's attitude to the Holy Land and its places, but also to place his

⁵Merton M. Sealts, Jr. in Melville's Reading: A Checklist of Books Owned and Borrowed (Madison, Milwaukee, and London, the University of Wisconsin Press, 1966) lists only Bartlett, Stanley and Thomson; Bezanson, in his notes to Clarel, traces the use of these travelers. Curzon's book probably inspired "Of Monasteries" (III, ix), and its use is suggested in footnote 1 to Chapter I of this thesis. For the use of Warburton see footnote 8 to chapter II; also Warburton's chapter, "The Arab," probably affected Melville's observations on the "Lawless" Arab: "A slayer, but chivalric man" (II, xxvii, 85-91). Other relevant books listed by Sealts are: William Beckford's Vathek: An Arabian Tale (1849), Thomas Hope's Anastasis; or, Memoirs of a Greek (two copies: 1831?, 1836), Edward H. Palmer's The Desert of the Exodus (1872), George Sandys' A Relation of a Journey Begun An. Dom.: 1610 (1652); dates are of the editions listed.

views on religion, human nature and the world at large within the framework of the scenic and symbolic significance of the Land.

Melville was probably more disappointed with the poor reception of Clarel than with the barren appearance of Palestine. He 'recommended' Clarel in a letter to James Billson, dated October 10, 1884, in this manner: " 'Clarel' published by George P. Putman's Sons, New York -- a metrical affair, a pilgrimage or what not, of several thousand lines eminently adapted for unpopularity. -- The notification to you here is ambidexter, as it were: it may intimidate or allure."⁶ Clarel remained a neglected work until recently; and although the recognition of it as an important work has increased, it has not yet received adequate attention or evaluation. Walter Bezanson's fine edition (1960), with its thorough general introduction, its excellent critical index of characters (though rather too systematized in its analysis and classifications) and its satisfactory notes, is partly responsible for the increase of interest in Clarel.⁷

The reason why Clarel is still neglected and misinterpreted lies partly in the difficulty of the poem and its apparent disjointedness and partly in the great amount of ambiguous discussion among characters. Clarel, moreover, contains a wide range of elements that appear unconnected: speculations by and discussions among the characters (on science, the American Civil War, democracy, the different religions and sects, etc.), deep psychology of character, and 'excursions' by the narrator into history, monasteries, churches, paradises, deserts and so on. These

⁶The Letters of Herman Melville, p.275.

⁷Bezanson reviews previous criticism on Clarel in the "Introduction," section iii.

excursions have been neglected. I hope to present a unified view of Clarel: to relate the doubt-faith issue to the motivation for the pilgrimage to Palestine and the results, to discuss Melville's attitude to Christ in relation to the Christian sects, to expound Melville's views on the idea of God, religion, myth and human nature in terms of the nature of the Land, and finally to arrive at a meaningful symbolic significance (which is consistent with the main themes) for the slight plot.

Two books, relevant to this thesis, should be mentioned: Dorothee Finkelstein's Melville's Orienda⁸ and Merlin Bowen's The Long Encounter. Melville's Orienda has useful sections on "The Near East on the American Scene, 1810-1850," and on Melville's Oriental sources and reading. But the book does not seem to crystallize Melville's views, particularly in relation to the pyramids, which are discussed at length, and no coherent literary interpretation emerges. In the discussion of the Journal and Clarel in the last two sections of the book, the arguments are confused and often unsubstantiated, and contain numerous misapplied quotations. Dorothee Finkelstein concentrates on the grape, rose and palm imagery, but neglects the more crucial symbolism.

Merlin Bowen, though he deals with Clarel from the point of view of character only, suitably considers it the most mature and final of Melville's works.⁹ I believe that once the technical difficulties of the poem are surmounted, it provides the deepest possible insight into the work and thought of Herman Melville.

⁸New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1961.

⁹The Long Encounter (Chicago and London, the University of Chicago Press, 1960), p.280. Bowen concludes his book with the 'answer' that the poem gives: the best way to cope with life is "armed neutrality."

"This legend, dream, and fact of life!"

(III, xxviii, 17)

But faith?

Ah, Nehemiah -- and, Derwent, thou!

'Twas dust to dust: what is it now

And here? Is life indeed a dream?

Are these the pilgrims late that heard

The wheeling desert vultures scream

Above the Man and Book interred --

Scream like the haglet and the gull

Off Chiloe o'er the foundered hull?

III, xiv, 115-123)

CHAPTER I

ILLUSION VERSUS REALITY

This chapter explores the tension in Clarel between reality and myth and between fact and illusion. Illusion is associated with the past, or the past as transmitted into the present, and belief; while doubt is the heritage of the present as a result of 'progress' and an increasing consciousness. The facts of the present, and indeed the realities of the world at all times, do not agree with the myths and dreams of the past. Moreover, the realities of the world and human nature are found to be reflected in the Palestinian landscape. This view of the barrenness of Palestine as symbolic of reality results from a process whereby Melville de-mythicized Palestine, for (as will be shown in Chapter II) Melville analyzes man's reaction to this barrenness, essentially an escape from or a compromise with it, which produced the myths of the past. Two kinds of myth emerge from the above exploration: myth that results from an illusionary and dreamy hope, and myth that springs from the actual basis of human existence; in other words, the myth of the ideal and the myth of the real.

Melville's description of the train of pilgrims in the first canto of Part II, "The Wilderness," and the first canto of Part IV, "Bethlehem," is a conscious, ironic imitation of Chaucer's Prologue to the Canterbury Tales. It is recognized that the present pilgrimage out of and back to Jerusalem is of "Another age, and other men, / And life an unfulfilled romance" (II, i, 12-13), and that, if the light which led the Magi was not a fable, man should "lament the foundered star" (IV, i, 18). From these and other juxtapositions of past and present emerges the preoccupation in

Clarel with the disparity between past and present, between the ideal and the real. This disparity is used to enhance the sense of religious doubt in which the book and many of its characters are immersed, and their groping after an ideal condition is contrasted with modern, bitter reality. The above-mentioned motifs are related to the setting of the poem in Palestine; these motifs can be better understood by keeping in mind Palestine as the scene where the past is readily invoked or remembered. It should be said, however, that the nature of the past is not easy to ascertain; it is the reservoir of myth and fable, and, at the same time, its evolution into the present contains myth and distortion.

Consciousness, doubt and despair probably best describe the modern, Western temper in Clarel. Melville is intent on contrasting the atmosphere of awareness and painful doubt with the romantic and fictional accounts of Palestine, the blind belief in the Middle Ages and of the Easterners, and, in short, all the illusions about the land and religion. Against the sordid pilgrimage of search in doubt are set, as in "Night in Jericho" (II, xvi): the purposeful travelers to Palestine in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries like Volney, Chateaubriand and Lamartine; the romantic, dreamy fiction about the land such as Scott's Talisman and Tasso's Jerusalem Delivered; the "Belief devout and bandit rage" (I, iv, 12) of the crusaders; and miraculous Biblical adventures like the parting of the waters of the Jordan and the ascension into heaven by Elijah (II Kings, ii:1-11).

The contrast between the modern pilgrimage and medieval pilgrimage to Palestine is brought out clearly in "Arcult and Adamnan" (I, xxxv) and the cantos before and after it. "The child-like pilgrim throngs of yore" and the impassioned, reverent account of the "fleecy fires" from Mount Olive

on Ascension Eve, by the eighth century French bishop Arculf, are placed against "'doubt's heavy hand'" (I, xxxiv, 20) and the view of Jerusalem by Rolfe as an "'Old blurred, bewrinkled mezzotint'" surrounded by "'lifeless hills'" (I, xxxvi, 31-32). The contrast here, however, is not simply between the blind belief that existed in the past and the disturbing consciousness of the present but also between bare reality and the illusions that resulted from religious fervor when heaven was, ironically, "receptive" (I, xxxv, 3). The sense of Western doubt is also enhanced by the comparison, as in "The Sepulcher," of the skeptical views of Western travelers on the holy places in Jerusalem with the simple unintellectual faith of the Easterners, who:

Unvexed by Europe's grieving doubt

Which asks And can the Father be?

Those children of the clime devout,

On festival in fane installed,

Happily ignorant, make glee

Like orphans in the play-ground walled. (I, iii, 135-140)

Another contrast occurs in "Clarel" (I, v) where Clarel's desperate pilgrimage of search for faith is placed against his dreamy reconstruction of the determined, painful Islamic pilgrimage through the desert to Mecca and the mystic Buddhist and Brahman pilgrimages. Indeed, Clarel and the book in general seem to be caught in a tension between fact and myth, between the sordidness of reality (especially the European and American background of civil strife, scientific progress and change) and the easy, but lost, comfort of unconscious belief and myth. Clarel imagines the consorted ritual of the Oriental Christian sects saying to him:

Thou who misgivest we enthrone
A God untrue, in myth absurd
As monstrous figments blabbed of Jove,
.....
..... try Nature's reign
Who deem'st the super-nature vain:
To Lot's Wave by black Kedron rove;
There crouch thee with the jackal down --
Crave solace of the scorpion !

(I, vi, 21-23 and 26-31)

It should be noted here that the alternative (nature or, in a wider sense, the hateful realities of the world) is described in terms of the Palestinian scenery. As the comments on the Eastern sects and the Christian sites later branch out into an elaboration on all Christian churches, religion, Christ and God, so does the Palestinian scenery gradually take on cosmic significance.

Doubt is the motivation, among most of the intellectual, Western pilgrims, for the pilgrimage to the land of Christ and the Old Testament. Melville's pilgrims come to the land of the origin of Christianity and to Jerusalem, the meeting place of all sects and races, for some kind of spiritual affirmation. The conflict between secularism and religion, the capitulation that Western churches had to make in the face of surging progress, and the fragmentation of religious belief have resulted in a need for re-assessment at the core. Thus, some of the pilgrims come with romantic, fictional expectations, believing that by seeing the holy places and retracing the steps of the originators they can restore their faith. But the places they come to were "Before but dreamed of in the

glow / Of fancy's spiritual grace" (I, i, 114-115); their actuality is different.

Melville's attitude towards the Christian sites in Jerusalem is a modification of that of most contemporary clerical travelers like Arthur Stanley and William Thomson. The Protestant travelers are generally skeptical about the authenticity of the sites in and about Jerusalem; they have little respect for uncertain locations and resent, for puritanical reasons, excessive decoration and elaborate ceremony, but they greatly venerate natural spots such as the Mount of Olives, the Sea of Galilee and Sinai. Though Melville used these travelers in connection with the Christian sites, his overall view of the land and his Biblical analysis are original, as mentioned in the introduction and as will be shown in later chapters. Melville's first response to the sites of Jerusalem in the Journal was almost that of personal revulsion, typified by his remark on the Holy Sepulcher: "Smells like a dead-house ... All is glitter & nothing is gold. A sickening cheat" (pp. 148-149). In Clarel, however, his position is objective, detached and humane.

The first few cantos utilize the fictional and arbitrary nature of the sites to intensify religious doubt and the futility of attempting to recapture a romantically conceived past. The poem recurrently recalls reality in the midst of fable and illusion. A good example occurs in "Tomb and Fountain" (I, xxviii), where the dreamy adventist Nehemiah still believes in the healing power of the waters of Siloam and washes his failing eyes. And while Vine ponders over the site of miracles,

By chance a jostled pebble there
Slipped from the surface down the stair.

It jarred -- it broke the brittle spell:

Siloam was but a rural well.

The arbitrariness of the sites as arranged by priests and the devout rulers of the Roman empire is shown in the ironic description of the church of Christ's sepulcher:

To sum in comprehensive bounds

The Passion's drama with its grounds,

Immense the temple winds and strays

Finding each storied precinct out --

Absorbs the sites all roundabout --

Omnivorous, and a world of maze.¹ (I, iii, 21-26)

Only "faith child-like" and the accumulation of suffering and penance over the ages associated with the sepulcher, its acting as a fetish or outlet for human pain, give it significance:

. . . such ties, so deep,

Endear the spot, or false or true

As an historic site.

The implication of the "serial wrecks on wrecks" where "Era and monument and man" are confused (I, x, 3-4) is that the true image and spirit of the original can no longer be salvaged. Moreover, the excessive decoration,

¹For a close parallel argument see Robert Curzon's Visits to Monasteries in the Levant (Ithaca, N.Y., Cornell University Press, 1955), pp. 168-169: "The mere circumstance that the localities of almost all the events which attended the close of our Saviour's ministry are crowded into one place, and covered by the roof of a single church might excite a very justifiable doubt as to the exactness of the topography maintained by the monkish traditions of Jerusalem." This was generally remarked by Protestant travelers, particularly in the nineteenth century.

the sophisticated and artificial embellishment, and the "contention for each holy place" (I, vi, 38) indicate a distortion that contrasts sharply with the humility and simplicity of the life of Christ.²

Another related theme is the sterility of Jerusalem. Jerusalem, "the deicide town" (IV, xxix, 130) and the "Stony metropolis of stones" (IV, ii, 12), has become a dead wreck (IV, i, 181 and 191) encompassed by cemeteries (Journal, p.144) outside its blank towers (I, i, 61) of "solemn shadows" (Journal, p.146); and it is filled with

. . . the glades of cactus trees
Where no life harbors, peers or calls --
Wild solitudes like shoals in seas
Un sailed . . .

and surrounded by barren hills: "'Dead long for them the hymns of rills / And birds'" (I, xxxvi, 33-34). The appearance of the city is seen as having deteriorated since the time of Christ. When Christ wept over Jerusalem, the city

Then spread before him sunnily --
Pillars and palms -- the white, the green --
Marble enfoliated, a fair scene;

but it is "now -- a vision here conferred / Pale as Pompeii disinterred (I, xxxiii, "By the Stone," 11-15). Rolfe, who is usually suspicious of Biblical texts and sites, ponders over the view of Jerusalem, seriously recalling the account of St. Luke (Luke, xix: 41-44), where Christ is said to have uttered his woeful predictions. Clarel, seeing Rolfe concede to the site and the text only to prove the sordid hopelessness of the

²Belief centered on decorative ceremony and ritual is, however, better than nothing and certainly better than atheism (see I, xli and IV, xv); ritual serves a human need, as a release for painful emotions.

situation, thinks that

Dissent itself would less appear

To imply negation

(I, xxxiii, 44-45)

than Rolfe's concession. Clarel has very little to hope for, since the center of religion is dead --its 'revelatory' nature is vanished and its interest can only be historical much like ancient Rome or "Homer's sites." In short, the fictional and fanciful conception of the holy places and city-- what they should be --and the hope they evoke of regaining faith are met with the bitter realization of the distorted nature of the sites and the disenchanting aspect of the land. What most pilgrims find in the blanched blankness and the confused ruin of Jerusalem is a physical reflection of the spiritual barrenness they attempt to escape.

Nature seems to be indifferent to the holiness associated with the sepulchral appearance of Jerusalem. As Melville writes in the Journal: "The mind cannot but be sadly & suggestively affected with the indifference of Nature & Man to all that makes the spot sacred to the Christian" (pp. 141-142). This idea of the indifference of nature is impressionistic, and the impression results from a feeling that the aspect of the Christian sites and their surroundings is really incongruous with nature; nature seems to have lain still and neglected them. Thus, nature appears to be remorseless and cruelly indifferent to the exasperations and agony that result from the inability to attain or the unreality of the dreams and hopes evoked by Palestine and its religious history. Celio repeats Melville's reflections on the indifference of nature, only Celio is very much involved in the dream:

"He breaks. Behold, thou orb supreme,

'Tis Olivet which thou ascendest --

The hill and legendary chapel;
Yet how indifferent thy beam !
Awe nor reverence pretendest:
Dome and summit dost but dapple
With gliding touch, a tinging gleam:
Knowest thou the Christ? believest in the dream?"

(I, xv, "Under
the Minaret," 6-13)

Christ is, indeed, the controlling ideal in Clarel; his principles of love, peace and forgiveness, and the hope of eternal life have also been interred in the land and have really not gone out to the world. The attempt to recapture this ideal or dream in the land of its birth is the tragic occupation of two major characters: Celio and Mortmain. The disparity between the content of Christ's message and the realities of the world and human nature is the cause of their tragic agony. As noted in the introduction, no single character represents Melville's full position, but rather Melville's views are presented dialectically and should be deduced cumulatively; this is particularly relevant to the opinions on Christ as an ideal. Celio and Mortmain, in a desperate search for this ideal, enact the tragedy of conflicts implied and are finally consumed by them; Ungar appears, in Part IV, to clarify the conflicts and resolve the issue.

Celio's long internal outcry (I, xiii, 36-102) at the arch "Ecce Homo" is a bitter exclamation rather than a denunciation of Christ.³

³The view of this outcry as "a hostile attack on the character of Jesus Christ" is held by Lawrance Thompson in Melville's Quarrel with God (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1952), p.336, and in Bezanson's critical index of characters, p.533. There is really more tragedy than irony in the name "Celio (heaven-rooted)."

Disappointed with life and the Catholic Church, Celio leaves Italy for Palestine, "that pontiff-land / Whose sway occult can so command" (I, xii, 140-141) to recapture the hope given by Christ, but he realizes that reality anywhere is far from that illusionary hope. The barren sordidness of Palestine is even more painful since it contrasts more immediately with Christ's ideals. Christ was the first to announce "a heaven's unclouded days," but his tragic death showed that nothing could be salvaged and was, in fact, self-mocking. Celio is sympathetic to Christ but life's "pangs constrain / Pathos itself to cruelty." Celio, moreover, cannot find anything in life, nature or history that is in harmony with Christ's message (ll. 73-82). The myth of heavenly life causes despair and more bitterness by affording a sharp contrast to the realities of actual existence:

Ere yet thy days no pledge was given
At homes and mansions in the heaven --
Paternal homes reserved for us;
Heart hoped it not, but lived content --
Content with life's own discontent.

Another disconcerting thought is that Christ's principle of heavenly love has been corrupted "into the creeds malign," and the opposed Christian churches merely pay lip-service to Christ's essential teaching (ll. 83-91 and Ungar in IV, xxii, 40-43).

Mortmain's introduction in Parts II and III further accentuates the theme of the disparity between ideal and real, particularly Christ as ideal and the realities of human life. Mortmain, a bastard, grows up in emotional privation, and his early, naive belief in social peace and

his political optimism are frustrated by experience in the European revolutions of 1848. He realizes that his efforts were futile and were not the first, that most people are either ignorant or malicious (II, iv, 92). So he comes to Palestine, "'takes the wild plunge,'" (II, xvii, 117) looking for the religious alternative after his disillusionment with the essentially Christian social dream, decrying science (II, xxxi) as one reason for the perversions in Christianity and atheists and revolutionaries as anti-Christ (II, xxxiv). Mortmain is a modern 'prophet', a lonely voice in the wilderness of life; he is unable to realize peace and goodness, qualities intrinsic in him, in the modern context, and thus he reverts to self-torture and a suicidal strife to recapture the prophetic mood. In one mad scene that recalls Christ's ordeal on the cross, Mortmain drinks from the bitter water of the Dead Sea (II, xxxiv).⁴ Mortmain, however, finally admits that the hope given by Christ contradicts reality, for people hate more than they love (III, xxviii, 52-54) and that there is no evidence of eternal life in the face of death and evil (III, xxviii, 39-50): "the true lore / Is impotent for earth" (III, xxviii, 8-9). But Mortmain can neither retreat into a cloister nor loses hope completely -- he remains involved and finally dies of psychic exhaustion.

As suggested in the second head quotation to this chapter, two extreme modes of belief are presented in the figures of Nehemiah and Derwent. Nehemiah is immersed in illusion, waiting for the realization of

⁴This recalls Melville's comment on "the bitterness of life" while at the Dead Sea (Journal, p.136).

prophecy -- the dream of the second coming of Christ to revive the temporal world. Derwent, on the other hand, is the modern realistic priest who can accomodate progress and change and who believes in the functional value of religious myth, regardless of its truth (III, xxi). In other words, Nehemiah rejects reality and withdraws into the myth, while Derwent adapts perfectly by consciously forming a deceiving and superficial system. Nehemiah, however, drowns in the bitter Dead Sea of Actual Existence, dreaming of the New Jerusalem (II, xxxviii). Derwent's ideas are continually exposed by Ungar as contradictory to the true spirit of Christ:

"Your methods? These are of the world:
Now the world cannot save the world;
And Christ renounces it"

aiming "'straight at heaven'" (IV, xx, 35-37 and 39).

Celio and Mortmain waver in agony between the hope provided by Christ and the realities of life and human nature; Nehemiah escapes from reality completely into illusion, and Derwent falsifies Christian principles to accomodate progress and the world. Ungar's 'solution' places the four figures in a firm perspective. Ungar understands the true faith, though its application is deemed impossible. Ungar is in line with Celio and Mortmain in maintaining the departure of the Christian religion from the initial teachings of Christ and the variance of the spirit of Christ with the state of the world. He also amplifies Mortmain's belief in the fallen and predominantly evil nature of man; in fact, this is why the churches and life do not accord with Christ's principles: the world turned Christian, changed its gods, but remained essentially the same. Ungar doubts if man can ever feel or even understand the

"sweet" and "wholesome" spirit of Christ:

"Not unto all does nature lend

The gift; at height such love's appeal

Is hard to know, as in her deep

Is hate; a prior love must steep

The spirit"

(IV, xviii, 130-134)

Christ came with "' no thought to mend a world amiss'" (IV, xx, 44) but with a clear message of love and an invitation to the other world of "many mansions," which man can only accept instinctively, if at all.⁵ Since man cannot accept this message instinctively, he is unredeemable and reform or attempts at correct application of Christian principles are irrelevant.

This dark view of man is often uncovered in Clarel in terms of the Palestinian scenery as expressive of man's abject barrenness and inert wickedness. There is an added pertinence to the symbolization of man's nature in Palestine because the symbolism has behind it Biblical accounts. In II, xxxvi, "Sodom," Mortmain contemplates the Dead Sea area, proclaiming that the sins for which the "Cities Five" were destroyed by flood are inborn in man --

. . . the hate which under life's fair hue

Prowls like the shark in sunned Pacific blue.

He finally proclaims the Dead Sea as the epitome of man's nature: "'The

⁵See Rolfe's proposal that Christ should have come to Tahiti (IV, xviii, 45-46), which echoes Melville's in the Journal, p.263. Presumably, in Tahiti, the outside world does not contradict the dream -- Tahiti is an earthly paradise.

mould thou art of what men be," presumably because the myth of (or possibly the mythic modifications made on) the flooding of the Five Cities was one way by which man 'varnished' and submerged his other nature. The Biblical 'support' for the view of human nature is better suggested in IV, xxix and in "Of Wickedness the Wor/d" (IV, xxii). In IV, xxii Ungar seems to suggest that wickedness in man is not "vulgar vice" or the result of the fall but natural and latent in man; it is the cause of man's creation of the myth of hell and the reason why a Hebraic theological system like Calvinism has appeal. Derwent is characteristically disturbed by Ungar's argument and says to Rolfe, in the following canto, that man should keep on the bright side; this only incurs the stinging reply: "'Two sides imply that one's not right.'" The word two is reiterated in IV, xxix, and man's double nature is expressed by reference to the story of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah:

Did the deep nature in them say --
Two, two are missing -- laid away
In deserts twin? They let it be,
Nor spake; the candor of the heart
Shrank from suspected counterpart.

Indeed, this double nature of man is almost the summing up of the pilgrimage to the Jordan Valley -- the lesson which the pilgrims learned or should have learned.

A parallel position is taken by Melville in an earlier short prose work "The Encantadas" (in The Piazza Tales). The islands here described have a desolateness and "desertness" that could only exist in a "fallen" world, and their most remarkable creature is the tortoise which has a

"self-condemned" appearance and two sides --black and bright. Melville urges that one should be honest and not deny the black. In "The Encantadas," we have another of Melville's microcosmic creations in which the empty, dry islands are symbolic of the world's decay and the tortoise is symbolic of man's "hopelessness" and mortality. The same islands are described, using some of the same phrases, in Agath's comparison to "this stricken land" (IV, ii, 210; the change from "fallen" in "The Encantadas" to "stricken" is maybe indicative of a de-mythicized thinking) of Palestine (IV, iii, "The Island"). In "The Island," however, there is a deeper pessimism, but the tortoise as man is unmistakable because of the numerous analogies to the life and struggle of man and the exclusive, repetitious use of the personal pronoun. The searching of the tortoise for water in "the parching zone" among the "chinks of stone" seems to be parallel to man's search for (his creation of myth out of) the obscurity of his own nature and the emptiness and inscrutability of the universe.

With this view of man in mind, one can see an added significance in Ungar's remark that Christ is not for "a world amiss" and in his high-toned opinions on God. The Hebraic God and penalty, Moses' "'undetering dart'" (IV, xviii, 163), are bitterly acknowledged as the only adequate means of dealing with man (IV, xviii, xx and xxi) because they recognize evil and restrain it. God is necessary for the world because

"Where He is not, corruption dwells,

And man and chaos are without restraint." (IV, xxi, 45-46)

Therefore Christ, who appealed to love and man's lost innocence, is not in accord with actuality, while the idea of a God, which helps to bridle evil, suits man's mixed and predominantly vicious nature. In other words,

the myth of the goodness of human nature does not conform to man's reality, but the idea of God is its mythic symbolization or projection. The next chapter in this thesis discusses the basis of this reality in the Middle Eastern scenery, whereby Melville goes right back to the roots of time to reveal man's confrontation with barrenness and the creation of myth as a projection of Self.

Though in many of its aspects this visible world seems
formed in love, the invisible spheres were formed in
fright. (Moby Dick, Chapter 42)

Yet, yet and yet

Our saving salt of grace is due

All to the East -- nor least the Jew. (II, xx, 13-15)

Shall endless time no more unfold

Of truth at core? (III, v, 104-105)

As the sight of haunted Haddon Hall suggested to Mrs
Radcliffe her curdling romances, so I have little doubt,
the diabolical landscapes... of Judea must have suggested
to the Jewish prophets, their ghastly theology. (Journal, p.151)

CHAPTER II

THE DESERT AND THE SEA : THE ORIGIN OF THE MYTH

That Melville felt the cruel indifference of nature to the religious associations of Palestine is only part of a wider view of man's helplessness in the struggle with the incomprehensible and impenetrable elements of the universe. This chapter attempts to reconstruct Melville's own rationalization, in the Journal and Clarel, of the 'holiness' of Palestine. However, Melville's concern with the emergence of holiness by the interaction of man with nature predates the time Palestine drew his attention and can be seen throughout Moby Dick and particularly in Chapter 42, "The Whiteness of the Whale." Ishmael's analysis of whiteness implies that man's reaction to emptiness or blankness results in symbolic meaning being attached to objects according to the needs of human nature thus producing the supernatural out of the natural or out of nothing.

In other words, Melville had come to realize "the heartless voids and immensities of the universe" which threatened man with "the thought of annihilation," and he was agonizingly free to confront this without the comforts of a mythico-religious system. (Melville's symbolic art is probably the way by which he personally filled the immense gap). Man's problem from the start has been to grapple with the indefiniteness of the universe and his own nature; the struggle resulted in making the indefinite, the incomprehensible concrete and also in abstracting or spiritualizing the concrete. For example, the "Christian's Deity," of whom whiteness is the "very veil," orders the chaotic endlessness of the universe and (to complete the example arbitrarily) the idea of immortality

cope with the fear of annihilation. The result of the "colorless, all-color of atheism from which we shrink" is a movement towards a unified conception of an ordered universe created and ruled by a supreme God.

But Melville had, by thus unravelling man's mythic apparatus, gone back to face a primeval world with all its mystery and unfathomable nature. It is from this point of 'nakedness' that he built his views on God and religion, retracing the imaginative man's myth-making process and measuring it against the emptiness that he assumed man to have started from.

Why did the old Persians hold the sea holy? Why did the Greeks give it a separate deity, and own brother of Jove? Surely all this is not without meaning. And still deeper the meaning of that story of Narcissus, who because he could not grasp the tormenting, mild image he saw in the fountain, plunged into it and was drowned. But that same image, we ourselves see in all rivers and oceans. It is the image of the ungraspable phantom of life; and this the key to it all. (Moby Dick, Chapter 1).

The sea is a symbol of "the ungraspable phantom of life" in two senses: it is a symbol of the incomprehensibility and fearful vastness of the universe, and it is an image of man's unfathomable nature. The sea also reflects man's inability to understand both the world and himself. Man's mythologizing and his creation of holiness is an attempt to appease or come to terms with unknown or uncontrollable forces. In this light, the hunt of the White Whale can be thought of as man's attempt to stabilize or pin down his own inscrutable nature and the mysteries of the universe. However, although man changes, the sea remains unchanged and primeval.

But Melville could not extend the sea and whiteness as symbols to encompass Christian mythology within the framework of the Bible. Almost the only foothold in the Bible is the story of Jonah which Melville manipulated excellently in the sermon of Father Mapple, giving his own

elaborated version of the fable with superb critical irony. Melville wanted symbols of the same quality as the sea and whiteness, but in the land of the origin of the religious myths adopted by the Western world so as to go to their roots. These symbolic objects came handily during Melville's visit to the Middle East; they were the desert, the pyramids and, to a lesser extent, the stones. The transition from the sea to the desert involved a shift in sensibility only as much as it was a movement towards a drier, more solid and less abstract kind of symbol. Otherwise, the sea and the desert are very similar in that they are both primal, unchanging, evocative of endlessness and the unknown, not touched by man's progress and thus suggestive of his beginning. The sea as scene and symbol in Moby Dick is, in a sense, a prologue as well as a parallel to the desert in Clarel; for the desert proves to be a more comprehensive symbol and can be thought of as combining both the sea and the whiteness of the whale. This inclusiveness of the desert is expressed most concretely in "Of Deserts" (II, xi):

Sands immense

Impart the oceanic sense:

The flying grit like scud is made:

Pillars of sand which whirl about

Or are along in colonnade,

True kin be to the water-spout.

Moreover, the description of the weary caravan "like a fleet / Dismasted," that follows the section quoted above, is reminiscent of chapter 87 in Moby Dick where the "vast fleet of whales" formed into "immense caravans." Also, the Valley of Kedron between Jerusalem and the Dead Sea is described

as the "belly of the whale" (III, xiv, 130) and the desert vultures

Scream like the haglet and the gull

Off Chilow o'er the foundered hull [of the Pequod]

above "the Man and Book interred" in the Land (III, xiv, 120-123). The numerous sea images in Clarel need not be gone into in detail and, although they are used in the dramatic development of the poem, these images point to the special proximity of the sea to Melville's mind while writing on Palestine.

The pyramids are also related in Melville's sensibility to the desert and the sea. In "Of Deserts," the "shadow vast / Of Cheops' indissoluble pile" (the Great Pyramid) is mentioned as a monument of the remotest past, between statements of holiness associated with barrenness. The most direct association of the pyramids with the desert and the desert with the sea occurs in the Journal:

Color of pyramids same as desert. Some of the stone (but few) friable; most of them hard as ever. ... No vestige of moss upon them. Not the least. Other ruins ivied. Dry as tinder. No speck of green. ... Desert more fearful than ocean. (pp.118-119).

Moreover, the pyramids are, in a way, proximate to the sea. The qualities of the pyramids: "vast, undefiled, incomprehensible, and awful" (Journal, p.119) are also qualities of the sea. Later, Melville directly relates the sea to the pyramids: "As with the ocean, you learn as much of its vastness by the first five minutes glance as you would in a month, so with the pyramid. Its simplicity confounds you.... It refuses to be studied or adequately comprehended. It still looms in my imagination, dim & indefinite" (p.123). This seems quite near to Ishmael's observation that the whiteness of the whale which "appalled" him seems "so mystical and well nigh

ineffable" that he despairs "of putting it in a comprehensible form."

In Chapter 41 of Moby Dick, "Moby Dick," Ishmael mentions that the unassailable quality and incomprehensibility of the White Whale caused the whalers to associate ubiquity and immortality with it. Ahab, on the other hand, identifies with the whale "not only his bodily woes, but all his intellectual and spiritual exasperations" and all evil. The whalers make a God, and Ahab makes a Devil, out of the White Whale, while Ishmael retains a neutral and natural reaction to whiteness which is probably why he finally survives. Ahab's and the whalers's reactions show the many-sidedness and impressionism of man's mythic reaction to illimitable nature. These reactions are analogous to the motive for the construction of the pyramids: putting the incomprehensible, the endless into a recognizable form. To attack the White Whale "would be inevitably to be torn into a quick eternity" -- and so is going beyond the pyramids into the desert.

In his analysis of the origins of the idea of God in the Journal and Clarel, Melville does not seem to separate the transcendent and Yahwistic conceptions clearly and sees them both reflected in the Middle Eastern scenery and synthesized out of various mythologies. One can say, however, that God is in essence transcendent, and while his origins are found to be Egyptian, the Hebrew improvisations that resulted from their desert experience are what finally emerged and were transmitted through the Old Testament. Moreover, the above-mentioned ambiguity in Melville's treatment of the idea of God springs from the complexity of the idea itself. God is all-knowing, unknowable, all-powerful and incomprehensible, at the same time that he is the fearful and restraining law-giver. But he

is also One and the creator of the universe. In other words, God is both concrete and abstract and provides man with a unity of the outside and inside worlds. He is thus the perfect object of worship; for he sums up and accounts for all the forces of nature, the mysteries of the universe and the laws of man, but, at same time, his existence is elusive and unsubstantiated. This is probably the God which Melville inherited from the Puritans -- the mixture of transcendent and Hebraic conceptions.¹

One should add that Melville does not construct a systematic or complete historical system in his analysis of God and religion. A historical framework has to be, more or less, imposed on the material from the Journal and Clarel. Such a framework is not arbitrary and must have been in Melville's mind because the material from the Journal, which deals more with the transcendent origins of the concept of God in connection with the pyramids, and the material from Clarel, which is more concerned with the analysis of holiness and Hebraic religion in relation to barrenness and the desert, fit together (even in their dispersion) into a quite complete history of the formulative process of religion and the idea of God.

Melville's rationalization in the Journal takes the form of an analogy between the pyramids and God as works of men, for he writes that as the Egyptian "wise men" were able to transcend nature using the crude elements of the earth as materials to build the pyramids, so "out

¹For a good discussion of this see Perry Miller's Errand in ^{to} the Wilderness (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard U.P., 1964), Chapter III, "The Marrow of Puritan Divinity," pp. 50-56.

of the rude elements of the insignificant thoughts that are in all men, they could by an analogous art rear the transcendent conception of God" (Journal, pp.123-124). The pyramids are, however, not just analogous to God in the strict sense but, in a way, prompters -- a step towards the idea of God. They are a physical embodiment of the idea of a God, and their superb, finished form denotes an eternity made definite. Hence, the pyramids are described with adjectives that could easily apply to the nature of God: "vast, undefiled, incomprehensible, and awful" (Journal, p.119). The creation of the pyramids implied and foreshadowed the idea of God.

A clearer statement of the religious significance of the pyramids occurs in a small poem "The Great Pyramid," written years after Melville's Egyptian visit. The building of the Pyramid was more "some Cosmic artisan's" than man's, and it is unaffected by the forces of nature: "But aridly you cleave the blue / As lording it." The importance of the Pyramid lies in its being an artistic product that denoted man's apparent control of nature, thus suggesting the necessity for a reason or origin for this order:

Craftsmen, in dateless quarries dim,
Stones formless into form did trim,
Usurped on Nature's self with Art,
And bade this dumb I AM to start,
Imposing him.²

²Herman Melville, The Works (New York, Russell, 1963), vol.16, p.294. "I AM" is mentioned in II, xxxiii, 100 where it clearly refers to God. See also Exodus, iii:4: "And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you." Ernst Cassirer in Language and Myth (1923), tr:S.K. Langer (New York, Harper, 1946), pp.76-77 mentions the importance of "I am" in religious thought and argues that it originates in Egypt and Babylon. Cassirer also discusses the reiteration of "I am" in the Bible and refers the reader to a German book on Hebrew myth by Goldziher published in 1876.

Man managed to create out of his "insignificant thoughts," his pettiness, something great and ultimate in art. This achievement was the first expression of man's identity; and it heightened man's regard for himself because he had created something comparable to the mysteries of the universe. Man was thus elevated to a position of strength and mastery whereby he felt on a par with the alien and dangerous external world. Once this internal I am was reached, it necessarily implied the external, universal I AM; for self-identity is achieved only when the outside world is conceived of as One or unity, because the external is the measure for the self. The next step can only be for this One to take shape as a distinct personality. This definite personality was formed by the Hebrews aided by Moses' contact with Egyptian religion and the pyramids.

The link between ancient Egypt, its mythology and the pyramids, and the Mosaic God remains obscure in the manner in which Melville expressed it in the Journal. He stated it vividly but disconnectedly: "It was in these pyramids that was conceived the idea of Jehovah. Terrible mixture of cunning and awful. Moses learned in all the lore of the Egyptians. The idea of Jehovah born here.... Only people who made their mark, both in their masonry & their religion (through Moses)" (Journal, p.118). Although the above statement is revealing and indicative of Melville's manner of thought, it is contradictory because the direct conception of a Jehovah in Egypt contradicts the "transcendent conception of a God" associated with the pyramids, for how can a transcendent idea lead to a Jehovah? Moreover, the above quotation contradicts the spirit of Melville's analysis of the desert and the Hebrews' desert experience. The difficulty, however,

can be resolved thus: that Jehovah was "conceived" and "born" by inspiration from the pyramids and Egyptian religion in the sense that Moses learned the tricks of a craft or a method by which the infinite, the formless was made concrete and substantive. During the years in the wilderness, this 'skill' was properly adapted to the new desert experience.

What probably prompted the building of the pyramids was "the thought of annihilation," and they were, with their imperishable form, a protection against this; for beyond them there is death:

Slant from your inmost lead the caves
And labyrinths rumoured. These who braves
And penetrates (old palmers said)
Comes out afar on deserts dead
And, dying, raves.

The pyramids are on the edge of the desert with the sphinx near them having "back to desert & face to verdure" (Journal, p.119). The Hebrews, on the other hand, after being expelled from Egypt, were plunged right into the desert to face terrible infinity. The eternity which the Egyptians solidified and epitomized in art was released upon the Israelites. Upon contact with the Sinai desert and, later, the barrenness of Southern and Eastern Palestine, the transcendent idea of God had to take a suitably modified form; a new theological system was produced in response to the new experience and the nature of the new land. The Egyptian deity was developed by Moses into a national figure -- a comforter, an integrator and a fearful restrainer. The experience of the Hebrews upon meeting the vastness of the desert and barrenness was also of a more general kind -- it was that of mankind faced with its

own nakedness and iniquitousness. Supernatural fear inspired by this experience, arising from the impure in man, resulted in a theological system where the transcendent God became a fearful and restraining power. The movement from Egypt to Palestine, in other words, produced the 'mixture': infinite and absolute power personified and acting as restrainer. Thus was "rolled the thundered Law" (II, xi, 52) of the Mosaic God in Sinai, the terrible Et-Tih (the Land of Loss), and the "ghastly theology" of the Jewish prophets was inspired by the "diabolical landscapes" of Palestine (Journal, p.151).

Behind all that has been mentioned above lies a special view of man and man's nature. "'Man sprang from deserts'" (II, xvi, 109); that is, man was born of nothing, into nothingness and surrounded by the inscrutable universe.³ When desperate, man returns to the 'desert' (as most characters do in Clarel and as Ishmael does by going to sea), for there they find a reflection of their own inner emptiness and "forsakenness" (II, xi, 9-12) and a comforting reminder of "Adam's primal joy" (II, xi, 4), the innocence of the first encounter with the universe that was lost with progress into self-consciousness. The endlessness and terror of the desert is evocative of eternity, the dangers of the outside world and the nakedness of man's soul. Man's tendency has been to shrink from and fear his own nothingness and the unknown waste about him (the "colorless, all-color of atheism"). Fear

³This view of man is affected by the Darwinian biological revolution. Melville mentions, in "Of Deserts" (II, xi), that Darwin agrees with Shelley that the desert educes "an awful doubt" (self-doubt and doubt about man's beginning). Darwin is also mentioned in the "Epilogue" as representative of science which made "The light ... greater, hence the shadow more."

is the greatest motive in the creation of the holy, for it is from fear of the invisible forces in nature that man attempts to come to terms with or appease these forces by making them more concrete, by personifying, symbolizing and venerating them. So what for Melville is a symbol of the nothingness and nakedness of man, of the chaotic expanse of the universe is, at the same time, the means through which man constructed a system of compromise for his own advantage and which sprang from his nature. Man constructed a system whereby he elevated his nothingness by making the alien forces holy and by conceiving of unknown and infinite power as a unity that is not alien or indifferent but attentive and concerned with man.

Melville's most compact statement on the desert as determinant in the development of religion in the ancient Middle East occurs in "Of Deserts" (II, xi). The canto is written in apparently disconnected stanzas which can, however, be synthesized. Melville's sensibility here separates two aspects of the desert: the charming and the horrible, and it also separates two aspects of barrenness: the endless emptiness evoked by sand and the sterile desolateness of stony and shrivelled ground. For the desert has "A charm, a beauty from the heaven / Above them, and clear air divine," but there "floats / Over all desert places known, / Mysterious doubt -- an awful one." Beauty and divinity are inherent in nature, but doubt is man's heritage (the doubt of his origin) because man cannot tolerate the loneliness of his insignificant mind and being in the face of the large expanse. Nature is neutral and has a disturbing 'whiteness'; and it is fear which springs from inside man that creates holiness, which is essentially man's reaction to the

reflection of his inner desolation that he sees as horror in nature. In connection with the desert, Melville also introduces the theme of the pyramids: "Thou shadow vast / Of Cheops' indissoluble pile," but he stops himself with "But curb" as if it is dangerous to go into that. Yet the suggestion is unmistakable and it should refer us back to the discussion of the pyramids above.

On the other hand, the land of Palestine is pure terror⁴:

'Tis horror absolute -- severe,
Dead, livid, honeycombed, dumb, fell --
A caked depopulated hell.

Palestine, moreover, is the land of stones, and Melville seems to be obsessed with this as shown in II, x where the word stone, or variations on it, is repeated eighteen times in the first thirty-eight lines and in the Journal (pp. 151-152) where it is repeated twenty-seven times in about a page. Although the reference to stones in the Journal is more emotionally charged than that in Clarel, they both point to various Biblical mentions and uses of stones (for example: "Stones rolled from well-months, altar stones," "Sling stones, stone tables," "Stones sealed the sepulchers," and "death too by stones / The law decreed for crime") and to the abundance of stones in Palestine as a sign of sterility and "'blank indifference so drear'" (II, x, 140).

In II, xi, the narrator asks a question similar to the questions

⁴The stress on terror and horror in this canto has special significance and so does the association of the desert with the sea, for they echo Melville's 'favorite' prophet Isaiah (Isaiah, xxi:1): "The burden of the desert of the sea. As whirlwinds in the south pass through; so it cometh from the desert, from a terrible land." See also chapter 42 of Moby Dick for the repetition of the words terror and horror, or variations on them.

asked in connection with pagan deities of the sea in Chapter 1 of Moby Dick:

But why does man
Regard religiously this tract
Cadaverous and under ban
Of blastment?

A parallel is provided from Greek mythology -- the peasants building a stone wall round the hole "Deemed hallowed by the thunderclap."

So here: men here adore this ground
Which doom hath smitten. 'Tis a land
Direful yet holy -- blest though banned.

The implied reason for the association of holiness with desolateness is fear which arises out of man's impure and predominantly evil nature. It follows that Hebraic religion is a product of the desert and barrenness and that the God of this religion is primarily the deity of the desert just as Persian and Greek mythologies have sea-deities.

The small poem "In the Desert"⁵ is important and suggestive in relation to the development of the conception of God. Here, the sun is ironically described transcendently as the earthly manifestation of God's essence, and this is contrasted with the sun's reality as power by citing its dizzying effect on the Napoleonic armies in Egypt. The sun is, indeed, the most powerful presence in the desert, and Melville engages in a bit of sun worship:

Like blank ocean in blue calm.
Undulates the ethereal frame;
In one flowing oriflame
God flings his fiery standard out.

.....

⁵Herman Melville, The Works (New York, Russell, 1963), vol.16, p.292

Holy, holy, holy Light !
Immaterial incandescence,
Of God the effluence of the essence
Shekinah intolerably bright !

The mention of "Shekinah" (Hebrew for the dwelling or presence of God) here relates the Hebraic God to the Egyptian sun-gods, especially Amon-Re who was, along with King Ikhnaton's Aton, the closest to a monotheistic concept. It is interesting to note in this connection that Amon, the deity of life and reproduction later united with the sun-god Re as Amon-Re, was associated in Middle Egypt with the personification of the "mysterious invisibility of the primeval ocean" and identified by the Greeks with Zeus.⁶

What has been accumulating above is the material of comparative and (what can be called) naturalistic religion. Indeed, Melville's conclusion seems to be that the Hebrew concept of God, which the West inherited through the Bible, is all-inclusive; it 'includes' Egyptian and other mythologies in the sense that it encompasses, synthesizes and goes beyond them. God becomes the creator of everything, the law-giver, the lord of the earth and heaven (the desert and the sun). He is the quintessence of nature as well as of man's nature, by virtue of its being the shaping and reacting force, thus forming the great I AM. The process by which God was arrived at was evolutionary and adapted to

⁶Encyclopaedia Britannica (1967), "Amon." See Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament, ed. J.B. Pritchard (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1955), p.365 ff. for a collection of clearly monotheistic songs. Ancient Near Eastern Texts is also useful for tracing Biblical myths and law.

man's needs, and it consisted of a series of personifications and symbolizations. One can conclude that God and religion were a product of the interaction of nature and man, a process during which nature remained indifferent and constant while man's mentality functioned impressionistically and symbolically.

The themes of comparative religion can be developed more in the direction of ancient Middle Eastern mythology.⁷ In "The High Desert" (III, v), as the pilgrims view "Siddim's scene":

They recall to mind Abel and Cain --
Ormuzd involved with Ahriman
in deadly lock. Were those gods gone?
Or under other names lived on?

It is implied here that the basic Zinoastrian dualism could be conceived of as the prototype for God and Satan or, as in the Gnostic heresy, Christ and Jehovah. A slighter form of this Gnostic heresy, the narrator adds, occurs in the tendency to shift towards Christ as the good and "indulgent God." If the above can be argued, then

The two-fold Testaments become
Transmitters of Chaldaic thought
By implication

No more is said of the influence of Chaldean, and ancient Mesopotamian, mythology on Hebrew religion, particularly through Babylon. But

⁷Melville's knowledge of comparative religion and mythology might seem surprising. The subject, however, was coming gradually into vogue during the latter half of the nineteenth century. Two books, contemporary with the writing of Clarel, can be listed: Edward B. Tylor's Primitive Culture (1871) and James F. Clarke's Ten Great Religions: An Essay in Comparative Theology (1871).

Melville would have undoubtedly expounded on this theme had he the now available knowledge of Middle Eastern mythology.⁸

Melville also finds scope for comparative religion in Christian myths. For example, the celebrations of Christ's resurrection at Easter are found to be analogous to the rebirth of nature in spring after death:

Nor blame them who by lavish rite
Thus greet the pale victorious Son,
Since Nature times the same delight,
And rises with the Emerging One;
Her passion-week, her winter mood
She slips, with crape from off the Rood. (III, xxxiii,
25-30)

This relates the Easter celebration to fertility cults and particularly that of the Babylonian God Tammuz. Also Rolfe hesitantly ventures an analogy between Christ and the Egyptian savior-god Osiris (I, xxxi, 211-236). Osiris, originally a vegetation god, had a death-resurrection cycle.

If Egyptian and other Middle Eastern religions are found to lie at the roots of the Hebrew (and consequently Christian) religion, the two religious systems most acutely compared with the present state of Christianity are classical mythology and Islam. Classical mythology, Christianity and Islam (with Christianity as intermediate in time and classical mythology as antecedent to Christianity in the West) form an

⁸A convincing argument of the direct descent of Hebrew mythology from other Middle Eastern mythologies is made in S.H. Hooke's Middle Eastern Mythology (Penguin Books, 1963). The same point is implied in Ancient Near Eastern Texts mentioned in footnote⁵⁵ above.

evolutionary pattern. In "Rolfe" (I, xxxi), contemporary Christian doubt, the symptom of the death of faith, is compared, by Rolfe, to Cicero's age when "'doubt ran / Faith flagged'" and to Caesar's atheism; then "'the gods were gone'" and were replaced by Christianity (see also Ungar's argument, IV, xviii, 140-149). On the other hand, the still living and most powerful religion is Islam. Islam is still a vigorous religion because it commands the absolute attention and devotion of its believers as against the faded charm of Christianity (IV, x and Journal, p.139). Rolfe also notices, viewing Jerusalem as the pilgrims leave it, how "'palm-like the minaret stands / Superior, and the tower commands,'" and the muazzen calling the Moslems to prayer stands alone "over all those fields of loss / Where now the Crescent rides the Cross" (I, xx, 36-37).⁹ In a similar mood, Melville writes in the Journal, with amazing intuition and accurate understanding, presumably referring to the Dome of the Rock: "Here the wall of Omar rises upon the foundation stones of Solomon, triumphing over that which sustains it, an emblem of the relationship of the two faiths" (p.142).

So what emerges from the above scattered references is the interrelationship of Judaism, Christianity and Islam as well as the evolutionary and rejuvenating nature of religious belief. Judaism, as shown earlier, is traced back to its roots in Middle Eastern mythology and the nature of the land. It is, however, the East that possesses the ever-driving and re-creating mystic force (that spiritual inertness), while the West, which drew on this inertness, is unable to renew its

⁹This is probably an inverted reference to Eliot Warburton's The Crescent and the Cross (1845). Warburton is prejudiced against Islam and often, with the spirit of a crusader, wishes that the cross would 'ride' the crescent.

belief.¹⁰ It follows from the above comparative and evolutionary scheme that religious concepts are inherent in man. With this in mind, one can appreciate the irony in Rolfe's statement that "'Time, God are inexhaustible'" (I, xxxi, 271) because "'God is -- man'" (IV, xxi, 66). Rolfe's conclusion is surely connected with his purpose in visiting Palestine, as stated by the narrator:

To Jewry's inexhausted shore
Of barrenness, where evermore
Some lurking thing he hoped to gain. (I, xxxi, 34-36)

It also follows that religion is, strictly speaking, not true, not 'divine revelation', and that heaven is only "The High Desert" (III, v). Therefore, it becomes a poor consolation to think of faith and God as never-dying, "Casting the skin," because "truth at core," the ultimate made clear and understandable, can never be reached.

As a result of the analysis of God and religion within the intellectual dialectic in Clarel, the Bible is viewed critically. The intention is to uncover inconsistencies in the Bible and illusions about it and, especially, to discredit the enthusiasts of prophecy. Moreover, the Bible is looked upon as a purely human document, particularly in regard to prophets. The visions and utterances of the prophets are essentially psychic in origin. An analysis of this occurs in II, xviii where a Syrian monk re-creates the experience of Christ's temptation in the wilderness and narrates it to the pilgrims with the aid of "his lonely mine / Of deep illusion." Rolfe remarks after hearing the account:

"And this but ecstasy of fast?
Construe then Jonah in despair."

¹⁰For a direct discussion of this see IV, xix.

The examination of Biblical texts is concentrated between II, xxviii and II, xxxviii and in IV, xxvi. These cantos have a humorous touch and dismiss, rather than discuss, theology and the Bible. In II, xxxiii, for example, Rolfe and the Jewish geologist Margoth discuss the destruction of the "Five Cities" (where were the Dead Sea and the Jordan River before the destruction, especially since the river is mentioned in the Bible previous to the account of the destruction by flood?) against a background of braying asses. Similarly, the tone of the Jewish Lyonese's enlightenment of Clarel in IV, xxvi is jocular, ironic and sensual. The points which the Lyonese makes are, briefly, that: the prophecies of the Jewish prophets are arbitrary and emanate from their "dark burden" -- an evidence for the falsity of these prophecies is the still prosperous Damascus which was doomed by Isaiah (Isaiah, xvii); the songs of Solomon are plainly erotic like the songs of the Persian poet Hafiz, although some mysticize them; the myth of the Jew as a special being, God's chosen, is largely the fabrication of priests; and the anxiety shown by Christians over the dispersion of the Jews is needless because the Jew shares the "Gypsies" heritage.

For the purposes of this chapter, the best example of Biblical analysis in Clarel is "By the Marge" (II, xxix) where the setting is the Dead Sea and its barren surroundings. The discussion here concerns Isaiah's declaration of the impassibility of Edom or Idumea (Isaiah; xxxiv:10). Derwent points to Mount Hor from the Dead Sea Valley, and Rolfe mentions the relevant Biblical account. Nehemiah, of course, does not doubt Isaiah's statement, but Margoth says: "'My friend Max Levi, he passed through.'" The reactions of Derwent and Nehemiah to Margoth's reply are characteristic: Nehemiah does not hear Margoth being "Absorbed

in vision"; while Derwent, although taken aback, talks of making allowance for "'Orientalism's display'" and the necessity for 'mystic' explanation of Biblical texts. What comes out clearly is that the Bible is faulty because it is a human product and it does not apply to modern experience, thus it can no longer be believed in. It is significant, moreover, that the first sixty-one lines in this canto describe the sterility and emptiness of the Dead Sea area where "all is charred or crunched or riven" and where there is "No sound / Nor motion but of sea. The land / Was null." By pointing out Mount Hor, Derwent hoped to divert the attention of the pilgrims away from the "Unwelcome impress" of the utter desolateness of nature that echoed inside them, but he succeeded only in accentuating the emptiness by the exposure of the nothingness of their belief.

But Ruth -- still Ruth, yet strange involved
With every mystery unresolved
In time and fate

.

'Twas Ruth, and oh, much more than Ruth. (III, xxx, 4-6
and 12)

Clarel, receptive, saw and heard
Learning, unlearning, word by word. (II, xiv, 53-54)

CHAPTER III

CLAREL'S DISILLUSIONMENT: THE DEATH OF PARADISE

Indications of a symbolic significance in Clarel, particularly in the plot and Clarel's attachment to Ruth, are numerous. But this symbolism is difficult to disentangle because the plot is disturbingly static. The dominant tone is argumentative, and the characters exhibit little or no action and are carried along with the movement of ideas in the poem. This might indeed cause one to deem the symbolism in Clarel undeveloped, since the common kind of plot symbolism springs from action or incidents -- is, in fact, their second level(s). Let us first determine the kind of symbolism to be found in Clarel. Two kinds of literary symbolism concern us here: symbolism that results from description and narrative -- associative or 'word' symbolism; and plot symbolism, which is often dependent on and supplemented by the first kind. In Clarel, difficulties arise in connection with the plot symbolism which is surprisingly novel in kind. There is a network of anticipation whereby a dramatic event is prefigured by a series of cantos whose dialectic movement leads to that event, although their content may not be obviously related to it. This may be considered as abstract symbolism: when incidents result from and are determined by an intellectual or emotive movement and are a culmination of it, thus making the incidents symbolic of the movement.

The plot symbolism is best illustrated by the series of deaths (of Celio, Nathan, Nehemiah, Mortmain, Ruth and Agar), where the death of the characters, who are already charged with meaning by associative symbolism, signifies the 'death' of what they represent in relation to

Clarel and the poem as a whole; the deaths seem to result, in most cases, from a preceding definite argumentation.¹ The symbolism involves Clarel's gradual awakening or his disillusionment -- the untying of all the illusory links which he attempts to establish. Palestine is the proper place for the enactment of the symbolism because of its relevance to the doubt-belief issue (see Chapter I) and its determination of character relationships. The principles, beliefs or associate significance of the characters involved in the symbolism are related to Palestine and its religious associations and to Biblical myths. Moreover, Biblical analysis and discussions of human nature (see the end of Chapters II and I, respectively) that spring out of the Palestinian scenery are the main determinant elements in the dialectic preceding the deaths.

Before we embark on the plot symbolism of Clarel, the relationship between the relevant characters and their symbolic stature should be clarified. Clarel, the divinity student, is shocked by the disenchanting appearance of Palestine and the loss of hope for faith and salvation associated with it; his doubts about God, moreover, are intensified by the unholy appearance of the Holy Land. He finds this hard to accept and his imagination keeps on conjuring up phantasies of belief in old times and other religions (I, ii, iii and v). At the point when Clarel is praying for someone to retrieve him, Nehemiah appears "as in answer to the prayer" (I, vii) carrying the Bible and offering it as a guide. Along with the Bible, Nehemiah offers himself and the Millennial hope, the renovation of Palestine and the conversion of the Jews in preparation

¹The interrelation of the deaths in Clarel's mind is seen towards the end of the poem when, during "Passion Week," he reviews them in a vision but with a bitter awareness of reality (IV, xxxii, 88-103).

for Christ's advent and the New Jerusalem (a second paradise), as guides (I, viii, 20-29; I, xvii, 261-263 and II, x, 233-236).² Clarel muses on this hope "in bitterness," but he accepts Nehemiah's guidance as "Dim solacement to previous thought" (I, ix, 48).

Nehemiah's dreamy worship of the Bible involves a literal application of it and particularly the Book of Revelation. The Book of Revelation prophesies a thousand year temporal rule by Christ in the New Jerusalem after the destruction of the world, during which only the good live; after the thousand years, there will be a general resurrection and judgement. This prophecy, with its mixture of temporal rule by Christ and a final resurrection, seems to be a compromise between the Jewish Messiah and Christ: a combination of Judaism and Christianity. The Book of Revelation can indeed be thought of as an attempt, in the early phases of Christianity, to convert the Jews and to find a basis for a dialogue between the two religions. The Jews, however, generally refuse the compromise or connection as shown, for example, when a Jew disdainfully repulses one of Nehemiah's characteristic approaches with a tract: "' 'Tis Hebrew, look'" (I, xvi, 139-156). But Nehemiah's approach is equivocal because he does not mention Christ here but talks of rebuilding the Temple. As Melville writes in the Journal (pp. 156-158), the Christians, depending on Biblical prophecies, started the movement of renovation, conversion and restoration of the Jews, while the Jews are averse to the Christian approach. But this bridge or meeting is pursued by some Christians because of the inescapable descent of Christianity from

²For Melville's views on Millennialism and missions in Palestine see Journal, pp. 155-161; there he sarcastically narrates a talk with and describes a certain "Old Dickson," a man of "Puritanical energy" characterized by a "preposterous Jew mania."

Judaism. This is why Nehemiah is attached to the house of the Zionist Nathan and befriends his daughter. Although Nehemiah and Nathan consider each other wrong, their relationship is really very deep-rooted (I, xxii, 77-94 and I, xvii, 261-266) because both work towards the same end -- the 'renovation' of Palestine.

The story of Nathan, and why he came to Palestine, is told to Clarel by Nehemiah through the narrator "with overflow / Of much Nehemiah scarce might add" (I, xvi, 205-206); let us see what Nehemiah "scarce might add." In I, xvii, Melville not only analyzes how Nathan develops into a Zionist but also provides a prototype for man's original experience of the universe (and for the American experience) and man's need for myth, for belief. On the farm in Illinois, Nathan experiences self-doubt, the thought of death and terror in nature: "The White Hill's slide! The Indian skull!" He also experiences vast space by looking at three Indian mounds that

Dim showed across the prairie green
Like dwarfed and blunted mimic shapes
Of Pyramids at distance seen

To escape doubt in the existence of God, Nathan embraces Deism (in which God is detached from human experience); but this is another fall:

An altered earth
Sullen he tilled, in Adam's frame
When thrust from Eden out to dearth
And blest no more, and wise in shame.

Melville seems to suggest here an explanation for the creation of the myth of Adam: man having to account for a world which does not seem to indicate the presence of God.

Nathan still needs belief and he wrestles "with the pristine forms / Like the first man." The opportunity for belief is offered by the charming Jewess, Agar. He marries her and becomes Jewish; thus Nathan takes the 'safest' step by going back to the source of the religious myth adopted by the West:

. . . for rear-wall shows
Far behind Rome and Luther -- what?
The crag of Sinai. Here then plant
Thyself secure: 'tis adamant.

Nathan's fascination with Hebrew lore, especially the hope for a return to the 'promised' land, deepens, and the reason is not only his passion for Agar but also

. . . the Puritan --
Mixed latent in his blood -- a strain
How evident, of Hebrew source.

The reason why American Puritanism has a Hebrew 'source' is the strong identification of the early American 'pilgrims' with the Old Testament, which sprang from the proximity of the American experience to the Israelite experience in the wilderness of Sinai. The motives for this identification are deeply embedded in the reaction to the inscrutability and expanse of nature, but one of its external manifestations is revealed by Nathan's equation of the Hittites, who 'disturbed' the Israelites until the days of Solomon, with the American Indians, who 'disturbed' his ancestors, and the Arabs, who were 'disturbing' him. Thus Nathan embraces Zionism, which channels the energies of his "northern nature" into the Hebrew cause.

The relationship between Clarel and Ruth appears at first to be simply an innocent love romance, arousing hopes in Ruth and Agar of

escape from the hateful life in Palestine back to the green West which they like. But the relationship, on closer examination, discloses a deep psychological and religious significance. Clarel was bereaved in childhood by the death of his mother and sister, thus Ruth and Agar replace the lost femininity: Ruth the lush and dreamy beauty and Agar the protectiveness and earthiness of Mother (I, xxiii, 85-93 and xxxix, 24-26). Ruth has an almost ethereal, a dreamy quality, which is suited to what she symbolizes. When Clarel first meets her at the Wailing Wall, he is fascinated by the Hebrew appearance and the

Eve-like face

And Nereid eyes with virgin spell

Candid as day, yet baffling quite

Like day, through unreserve of light. (I, xvi, 166-169)

Clarel reverts to this primeval, fertile hope after he contemplates a lifeless, ruinous and barren Jerusalem -- a sight which augments doubt, not only a religious doubt but one that goes to the roots of man's origin. Nehemiah is instrumental in the acquaintance with Ruth and later her mother, and Ruth gradually redeems everything with her "virgin eyes," the "Pure home of all we seek and prize" (I, xxiii, 66-67). In short, Ruth represents for Clarel the hope of an earthly paradise, an invitation to return to a primal, innocent joy -- in fact, a return to the myth of life before the fall. The quest for innocence is really an escape from consciousness and inward doubt, and the attempt to capture an Eden is to pretend that the 'fall' never happened and deny man's sinfulness -- unrealistic attempts that run against the intellectual dialectic developed in Clarel.

The hope for an earthly paradise (which is Hebrew by association with the Old Testament and Adam) is also in conflict with Christ's heaven,

the second being beyond the framework of the actual world.³ Indeed, if a worldly paradise can be achieved, the thoughts of Christ's crucifixion and suffering become "forged -- incongruous" (I, xxviii, 1-11). Celio is connected with the opposition of Eden to the Christian heaven, for Clarel's thoughts of Ruth were "strangely underrun / By Celio's image" (I, xviii, 52-53). Although Clarel never communicates with Celio, he feels their spiritual bond; Celio is his "second self" because both ask questions "on that primal ground / Laid bare by faith's receding wave" (I, xix). That Celio's death follows right after the first meeting with Ruth might indeed suggest that the elimination of this "second self" results from Ruth's appearance, which offers the hope for a dreamful life of innocence. Celio's tragedy is his attachment to the myth of the next life and Christ; Clarel, on the other hand, finally despairs of this heaven and attempts to substitute a paradise in the here and now.

In III, xxxi, during the separation from Ruth, Clarel tries to compromise between earthly love and Christian Love (a prototype of which is Eve versus God), unable to conceive of the sexless Christian heaven. He also tries to connect Ruth with the Virgin Mary. These attempts at connection are motivated by a need to consolidate what Ruth represents and Christianity, which Clarel is still trying to salvage. Ruth makes a charitable compromise by being kind and friendly to Nehemiah. Clarel meets Ruth a second time when she brings Nehemiah bread and water (I, xxii). When the "priestess of sweet charity" leaves, Clarel shares the bread with the air of one forlorn and in need of salvation. In this scene, the bond between Nehemiah,

³This frustrating difference between the Christian heaven and the paradises of other religions is dramatized in "Of the Many Mansions" (III, iii).

Clarel and Ruth is established. By accepting Nehemiah as guide, Clarel accepts a kind of Judaeo-Christianity, but in Ruth this link between the two faiths is more meaningful because it relates to deeper hopes. Ruth becomes almost everything to Clarel: an object of primal and innocent happiness, a hope for paradisiacal existence, and also his 'divinity' -- the link needed to re-establish the root myth. Ruth and Agar become to him, in short, safety, protection and myth.

Then Clarel is invited to join the pilgrims to the Jordan Valley, but

Loathe was he here to disentwine
Himself from Ruth. Nor less Lot's land,
And sea, and Judah's utmost drought
Fain would he view, and mark their tone:
And prove if, unredeemed by John,
John's wilderness augmented doubt. (I, xlii, 14-19)

Clarel hesitates to leave the hope for paradisiacal safety in Ruth, and a conflict emerges between the myth of man's origin (the Garden of Eden) and the reality of man's sinfulness and his desertness. Nathan's death, however, decides for Clarel; he joins the pilgrims after being barred from seeing Ruth by the Jewish custom of mourning seclusion -- a custom which signifies Judaism's antagonism to and its seclusion from other faiths because non but Hebrews are allowed to visit the mourners (I, xlii, 59-75). Clarel, in fact, later blames this Jewish custom for Ruth's death (IV, xxx, 97-99). Clarel is thus forced out of the radiant circle of myth he has drawn around Ruth to face the wilderness and learn from the conversation and experiences of the other pilgrims. Until now, the symbolism (excepting that of Celio's death) has been of the usual associative kind. But from

here onwards begins the special plot symbolism mentioned in the first paragraph, a symbolism which involves Clarel's gradual education or awakening that is completed after "Rounding the waste circumference" (IV, xxix, 13). The symbolic meaning centers on the deaths of Nehemiah and Ruth.

Sleepwalking during the vision of the New Jerusalem, Nehemiah drowns in the Dead Sea. Nehemiah

Much heed had given to myths which bore

Upon that Pentateuchal shore; (II, xxxviii, 2-3)

this, and his dreamy meekness, earn him death in the Dead Sea -- the symbol of death, wickedness and the realities of human existence. Nehemiah's death occurs at the end of Part II and is preceded by cantos of Biblical criticism which prove the falsity and arbitrariness of prophecies and the absurdity of their literal application. Nehemiah's death is indicative of the 'death' of the Bible as an object of faith, and it 'results' from the Biblical discussions. At the burial, Rolfe remembers Nehemiah's Bible, and it is buried along with Nehemiah's other "relics" (II, xxxix, 121-131).⁴ Here we have the death of a dream, and all it implies, in the Dead Sea of Reality. Nehemiah is buried amongst the indifference and desolation of nature with the Jewish geologist Margoth watching coldly (Margoth is also a 'cause' of the death). Only Clarel regrets that Nehemiah will no longer have the comfort and friendliness of a "raven" or "God's bird" (II, xxxix, 60-66), which recalls the terms used by Nehemiah to describe Ruth (I, xxii and xxviii, 20). Clarel is not fully awakened by this death

⁴See III, xiv, 119-123 for an amazing parallel between "the Man and Book interred" and "the foundered hull" of the Pequod.

because his illusions about Ruth are still overwhelming.

Hope in Ruth, however, is constantly underrun by the fear of her death. This fear begins when Clarel decides to join the other pilgrims after being prevented from seeing Ruth, and it takes the form of a vision of a pale bride of Death on an "Armenian bier."⁵ After this first fear (I, xliii), Clarel is plagued with doubt and thoughts of blind fate, death and hell ("the thought of annihilation")-- thoughts which he escaped from into Ruth's paradisiacal presence and Agar's motherly protection. The "Armenian bier" recurs four times later, and, in three cases, is tied with preceding critical discussions of the Bible and human nature. When the bier last occurs (IV, xxxii, 61-72), Ruth's spell has been broken and Clarel receives the vision dully.

In II, xvii, "In Mid-Watch," Clarel "Disturbed by topics canvassed late," feels his hopes receding into the surrounding dense mists and is attacked by "fears." The topics preceding this are: Biblical illusion and barrenness (II, xiv), the lost belief of the past and man's essential desertness (II, xvi). Later also, after the discussions pointing to the fallibility of the Bible and the arbitrariness of its prophecies (see the end of Chapter II) and among the surrounding barrenness and gloom,

Craved solace here would Clarel prove,

Recalling Ruth, her glance of love. (II, xxix, 163-164)

But the recollection of Ruth's virgin eyes is useless, and "in perverse recurrence ran / Dreams of bier Armenian." The hopes associated with Ruth are shaken by the absorption into Clarel's receptive mind of the

⁵The prototype of Clarel's recurrent fear is Melville's own haunting experience of an Armenian funeral in a lane in Istanbul (Journal, p.89).

disillusioning knowledge resulting from what he hears and sees. In "The Valley of Decision" (IV, xxx), just before the scene of Ruth's and Agar's burial, a "novel fear" obtrudes that is even worse than the Armenian bier because it has a definite reasoning behind it. The main figure in this decisive final movement is the Jewish Lyonese.

Let us trace the culminating dialectic of Clarel. As a result of Ungar's explanation of wickedness and man's basic fleshliness (IV, xxii), Clarel sees the possibility of a life of the senses without faith in the divine. After this, the Lyonese hedonist is introduced as the unknown singer of "a tropic song" which attracts Clarel (IV, xxiv). Melville introduces the canto on the Lyonese (IV, xxvi, "The Prodigal") as "helping to fulfill the piece / Which in these cantos finds release" (IV, xxv, 58-59). The Lyonese's arguments on the human origins and the fallibility of the Bible and on the Jews have been outlined on page 41. The Lyonese also points out the sensual history of Jewesses and the ordinariness of Palestine. In short, the Lyonese presents a de-mythicized and natural view of the 'holiness' and 'divinity' associated with Palestine and blames the West for taking the matter far too seriously:

"You of the West

What devil has your hearts possessed,

You can't enjoy?"

The Lyonese lives happily without rejecting any part of human nature or reality, for "To Nature nothing is amiss" (IV, xxviii, 18). The Lyonese lives life fully and seems to be, in this sense, an ideal of the poem, along with the Druze guide, who has "calm" and is not involved in the "waste of words" (III, v, 172-186).

Clarel is, of course, pleased by the Lyonese's remarks on Jewesses

("'There is no tress / Can thrall one like a Jewess's'") though his feelings for Ruth are quite sexless⁶, but he is otherwise shocked. Clarel is unconsciously convinced by the Lyonese and he senses an "organic change" working in him that leads to dispelling the "Runic spell" of the Bible and the fanciful conception of the Jews (IV, xxviii, 117-121). Ungar's view of human nature and the Lyonese's disenchanting influence impel Clarel to follow "'Signora Nature'" (IV, xxvi, 338) and "pluck the nodding fruit" of the Tree of Knowledge (IV, xxix, 58); in other words, he wants to undergo the 'fall', to immerse himself in flesh and not long for an innocent paradise. Clarel decides to leave the life of religious agony, and he remembers Ruth's warning against an obsessive sense of mission in Palestine: "'Ah, tread not, sweet, my father's way'" (IV, xxix). However, although Clarel intends to take Ruth and Agar (Bride and Mother) away from Palestine, he acutely feels the loss of his previous dreamful, mythic outlook on Ruth and "the passion that could give / Feathers to thought" (IV, xxix, 83-84) -- that is, the mythic mentality. This loss seems to be, by analogy with the previous fears, the cause of the "novel fear" which is realized by the death in him of the myths represented by Ruth.

This inward death of Ruth is projected in reality, and Clarel's last experience is that of Ruth's actual death. Agonizing over the coffins, Clarel fully realizes the blindness and barrenness of the universe, and, holding Ruth's hand, cries: "'But 'tis not she!'" But as the shock wears off, we see Clarel viewing his ended 'pilgrimage' and Palestine with a disenchanted, cold air, though he is still unable to grasp the thought of death. The poem leaves Clarel in this neutral state. So the tension

⁶There are many references to Clarel's femininity (e.g.: I, i, 16 and II, xxvii, 110).

between illusion and reality is resolved in the direction of reality. All the illusionary ties 'die': the attachment to the Christian heaven and the goodness of human nature, the quest for the roots of faith and a sense of mission in the Bible land. Finally, once the religious associations which made Ruth and Agar significant in the first place are shattered, there follows the psychic shock at the actual loss of the personifiers of the hope for a protective earthly paradise.

In the "Epilogue" (IV, xxxv), Melville declares the uselessness of attempting to solve the conflicts and doubts of man which ramify endlessly. Life demands endurance, and in Palestine, like anywhere else, life plods on and creatures are "Cross-bearers all" (IV, xxxiv, 27-44). Then, in a romantically expressed finale, Melville demands of Clarel to surpass despair and to re-create his life continually and naturally, without outside support:

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.

This existential urge for survival and re-creation is external to the action (though not the general concern) of Clarel. This kind of life is hinted at only in II, xxvii where Vine compares the "western Red Men" to the Arabs, saying that the Bedouins have an ideal mixture of law with lawlessness, wildness with an unconsciously inherited culture and are

thus able to constantly renew their experience of nature⁷; but, Vine regrets, Arab camps have "no lack of scamps." The implication of course is that, in the desert (and let us exclude the present century here), there are no means of protection and no scope for progress or stabilization -- so also with the desert of human existence once the protective mists of myth are cleared.

Melville's demand, one cannot help feeling, is incongruous with Clarel's rather effeminate and melancholic character. Clarel's position is different from that of Ishmael at the end of Moby Dick, where the narrator's survival is part of the action and 'results' from his uncommitment and resignation in regard to 'whiteness' or the indefiniteness of the universe -- that is, his acceptance of the facts of existence; Ishmael is from the start a self-outcast. When we last leave Clarel, he is still unable to accept death while Ishmael is buoyed up by the coffin, unharmed by the sharks and sea-hawks. But Clarel is differently conceived from Ishmael, and Melville can view him detachedly. Clarel learns and awakens -- he is on the way. Melville thus pushes Clarel into an Ishmael-like survival; such a life of detached endurance (living it out as it is) can be thought of as the result of a process of 'solidification' or neutralization after helplessness in the face of an unredeemed world and an inscrutable universe. Clarel's progress has ended in an initiation to

⁷An amazing parallel is the first section of Walden (1854), "Economy." Thoreau advocates a return to the "simplicity and nakedness" of the 'uncivilized' man's life. He mentions the Indians, Arabs and Mexicans as examples of simple, regenerative human life: "The customs of some savage nations might, perchance, be profitably imitated by us, for they at least go through the semblance of casting their slough annually."

reality, to the nakedness of existence, to face the natural emptiness of human life and the fact of death without the secure protection of illusion and myth.

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