

A CRITICAL AND HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF MELVILLE'S  
THE ENCANTADAS

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A Thesis  
Presented to  
The Faculty of the School of Arts and Sciences  
The University of Houston

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts in English

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by  
Mary E. Daniel  
January, 1969

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine the historical and critical aspects of The Encantadas, Herman Melville's series of sketches about the Galapagos Islands. This study includes relevant features of Melville's life prior to the composition of the stories, as well as the facts relative to publication, the reputation it has enjoyed, sources of materials, an analysis of its structure and content, and reflections on the author's ideas and philosophy.

Since its publication in 1854, Herman Melville's The Encantadas has received little attention from critics or analysts. However, a careful examination of the sketches in the light of Melville's personal history and some of his other work reveals some interesting parallels. The mood of these stories apparently reflects the author's disillusioned, hopeless mood at the time they were written.

Within the past fifty years Herman Melville has been described both as one of the "lesser novelists" and as one of the greatest and most strangely neglected of American writers. Until his death in 1891, he was known chiefly as the author of Typee and Omoo. During the Melville revival of the 1920's he was lauded primarily as the author of Moby-Dick. In the last

two decades, Melville has at last begun to receive the recognition he deserves, not only for Moby-Dick, but also for his later work, including The Encantadas.

Analysis of The Encantadas reveals it to be a carefully organized work with a compact structure, a carefully sustained mood, thematic unity, and an underlying significance strongly emphasized through symbolism and imagery.

Most of Melville's works, beginning with Mardi, are concerned with his search for answers to the same problems that have disturbed philosophers through the ages. Evidence from the works, from letters, from family records and other sources shows that he went through a number of phases in his efforts to find a philosophy or a religion that he could accept with complete conviction. The Encantadas may represent the most important phase of the search. The wavering uncertainties and the dreadful barrenness of the Encantadas reflect Melville's life as a seeker after truth who continues his search even after realizing that the knowledge he is seeking is limitless.

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## CHAPTER I

### FACTS RELATIVE TO THE COMPOSITION

Since its publication in 1854, Herman Melville's The Encantadas has received little attention from critics or analysts. The ten short sketches centered around the Galapagos Islands are praised from the standpoint of descriptive writing, but are generally considered to be of little value in studies of Melville's work. However, a careful examination of The Encantadas in the light of the author's personal history and some of his other work reveals some interesting parallels. The mood of these stories apparently reflects the author's disillusionment and hopeless mood at the time they were written. The philosophies expressed in The Encantadas may be seen in other works, particularly in Pierre and "Bartleby."

Melville's ten brief sketches concerning the Galapagos Islands were first published under the pseudonym of Salvator R. Tarnmoor. The stories appeared serially in Putnam's Monthly Magazine in March, April, and May, 1854. Letters exchanged between Melville and Harper's publishers show that he had contracted to write a book for them on tortoises and tortoise hunting,<sup>1</sup> but the book apparently was never written.

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<sup>1</sup>Merrel R. Davis and William H. Gilman, eds. The Letters of Herman Melville (New Haven, 1960), p. 164.

The Galapagos sketches may have been background material for the promised work. After the disastrous fire at Harper's in December, 1853, Melville sold the sketches to Putnam's.<sup>2</sup> Then in May, 1856, The Encantadas was included in a book of Melville's short stories entitled The Piazza Tales, published by Dix and Edwards.<sup>3</sup>

An examination of Melville's state of mind at the time that The Encantadas was written is relevant to a study of the work. Evidence shows that Melville was suffering from depression, frustration, and physical fatigue caused by a combination of overwork, financial problems, and an indifferent, often antagonistic public. His life was never free from financial and emotional problems, and it is possible that these factors, reaching as far back as his early childhood, may have had an important influence on his literary efforts.

Melville's choice of Tarnmoor as a pseudonym seems quite appropriate, not only to the landscape of the islands, but also to the author's state of mind at this time.<sup>4</sup> When Melville began the sketches, probably in late 1853, he was recovering from a severe mental and physical strain brought on by a lifetime of inward as well as outward struggle. From

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<sup>2</sup>Jay Leyda, The Melville Log (New York, 1959), I, 485.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., II, 515.

<sup>4</sup>Lewis Mumford, Herman Melville (New York, 1929), p. 239.

the time of his father's bankruptcy and death in 1832, the family was never free from financial problems, although there are no indications that they suffered actual want. But the combined loss of financial security and an idolized father at the crucial time of early adolescence produced an emotional crisis that was to have a permanent effect on his psychological makeup. For the next eight or nine years, the family lived in an unsettled state between prosperity and penury, with the humiliating necessity of recurrent appeals to relatives for financial aid. As Melville neared manhood, he tried various ways of supplementing the family income, including a job as a schoolmaster and a course in surveying and engineering at the Lansingburgh Academy, but he was unable to find any kind of lucrative work.<sup>5</sup>

In the summer of 1839 Melville went to New York and signed up as a "boy" on a merchant vessel bound for Liverpool.<sup>6</sup> For the next five years he led a life of constant movement. The initial voyage was followed by one on the whaler Acushnet in 1841, from which he deserted in the Marquesas Islands.<sup>7</sup> He was later picked up by another whaler, the Lucy Ann. At the English Island of Tahiti, mutiny aboard brought arrest

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<sup>5</sup>Newton Arvin, Herman Melville (New York, 1950), p. 11.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., pp. 23-24.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 50.

for the mutineers, including Melville, who had thrown in his lot with them.<sup>8</sup> The English officials in Tahiti were disinterested in the case, and the Tahitian jailer was lax. Soon Melville and his companions were free to roam and explore this romantic South Seas paradise.<sup>9</sup> In January, 1843, he signed on with a third whaler, the Charles and Henry, from which he was discharged a few months later in Honolulu.<sup>10</sup> In August of that year Melville joined the crew of an American man-of-war, the frigate United States. During the next fourteen months he led the life of a sailor in the American Navy.<sup>11</sup> On October 3, 1844, the United States came to anchor in the Navy Yard at Charlestown, and within a few days Melville had received his discharge and was with his family at Lansingburgh.<sup>12</sup>

The travels of his early youth brought Melville into situations and scenes that were almost indescribable and which made permanent impressions on his imagination. When he first went to sea at nineteen, he was an eager romantic, sensitive boy, friendless and alone. The shock of the horrors encountered aboard ship and in the harbor at Liverpool were unlike anything he had seen in New York or Boston. Such things as the dock-wall beggars, the hovels, the wretched,

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<sup>8</sup>Arvin, p. 64.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 70.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 76.

narrow streets, the mother with her children starving in the pit, must have contributed to his tragic sense of life.<sup>13</sup>

His first impressions of the miserable conditions aboard ship and the villainy of short-voyage sailors were more deeply impressed on his mind in his later voyages by the wickedness he saw, the scourgings, the floggings, and the chains. Murder, suicide, and syphilis thrived among these rogues of all nationalities and races who were shut up together with the cockroaches and the rats.<sup>14</sup>

When Melville first settled down to write about his adventures, he concentrated more on the pleasant aspects of his voyages. These first adventures were well received and acclaimed by the critics, but they did not bring financial security, nor did Melville himself feel they were worth while. After his marriage to Elizabeth Shaw in 1847,<sup>15</sup> the responsibility of providing for a growing family added more pressure. Two sons and two daughters were born in the first eight years of the marriage. In addition to these responsibilities, Melville provided a home most of the time for

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<sup>13</sup>In Redburn Melville tells of his first voyage and his impressions of Liverpool. Although considerable fiction is blended with the facts, evidence from other witnesses substantiates the conditions, according to William H. Gilman in Melville's Early Life and Redburn (New York, 1951).

<sup>14</sup>Van Wyck Brooks, The Times of Melville and Whitman (New York, 1949), pp. 146-147.

<sup>15</sup>Leyda, I, 255.

his mother and two or three of his sisters.<sup>16</sup> But the greatest tension was probably caused by the inward searching for signs of hope in what appeared to be an increasingly hopeless world. A blackness of spirit gripped his mind and continued to grow due to a culmination of frustrating experiences. Melville's imagination seemed to be obsessed with all the ills of existence, and the most crushing blow of all was the failure of the public to understand him when he tried to express his deepest thoughts, as he did in Mardi, Moby-Dick, and Pierre.

Melville's first two books, Typee and Omoo, may reflect his effort to forget the horrors and remember only the pleasant aspects of his travels. After their publication, Melville was, for a while, a successful and popular young author. When he began a third book, apparently intended as a sequel to Omoo, he felt successful enough to consider matrimony. Following his marriage in the late summer of 1847, he moved to New York.<sup>17</sup> He found the intellectual environment stimulating, but not sufficient to provide him with the narrative invention needed to complete his third novel. He had, in Typee and Omoo, used up most of his novel experiences and was compelled to draw upon his imagination in an effort to invent a story that would be as interesting as his

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<sup>16</sup>Arvin, p. 197.

<sup>17</sup>Leyda, I, 260.

own adventures. The result, Mardi, instead of being an adventure story, became a collection of incidents and discussions related to a group of distinctive characters on a quest. It was a strange rambling allegory of man's search for happiness which included a resume of the politics of the entire civilized world as it was affected by the ethical, religious, and social movements of 1848. The critics did not like it, and it was a commercial failure.<sup>18</sup>

Following the birth of his first son Malcolm in 1849, Melville's financial difficulties increased. He turned, therefore, in the spring of that year, to his earliest adventuring, and using the direct narrative approach, rapidly wrote Redburn: His First Voyage. He followed this with White Jacket, based on his Navy experiences, and written even more rapidly in the summer of 1850. Melville spoke contemptuously of the first book and with no great enthusiasm of the second, although they were deemed successful by reviewers and acclaimed by the reading public.<sup>19</sup>

When Melville wrote his first draft of a novel concerning whale fishing, he seemed to have recovered from the disappointment of Mardi and to be filled with enthusiasm and optimism. In addition, his imagination had been stimulated

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<sup>18</sup>Leyda, I, 448-449.

<sup>19</sup>See letter to Richard Henry Dana, Jr. May 1, 1850; Davis and Gilman, Letters, pp. 106-108.

by his first meetings with Nathaniel Hawthorne, in whose tales Melville found a darkness that appealed to his own gloomy spirit. He was also inspired by a fresh encounter with the dark plays of Shakespeare and was impressed by Milton's great epic Paradise Lost.<sup>20</sup> His literary interests reveal the tensions that existed in his mind as he began to revise the original draft. These were the same tensions that were affecting all of Western civilization during the nineteenth century. They arose from the conflict between the will to believe and the desire to be shown. The two important philosophies of Transcendentalism and empiricism were in conflict, as were religion and science, faith and skepticism. Melville tried to resolve these tensions for himself by dramatizing them.<sup>21</sup>

The stimulus provided by Hawthorne's friendship was vastly important to the disillusioned, pessimistic young writer. Since Hawthorne was also a pessimist, Melville felt that a strong bond existed between them. He was sure that Hawthorne at least understood what he tried to do in writing Moby-Dick. In a letter thanking the Hawthornes for their praise, Melville wrote that he felt "a sense of unspeakable

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<sup>20</sup>Norman Foerster, Robert P. Falk, and others, eds. Eight American Writers (New York, 1963), pp. 266-267.

<sup>21</sup>Leon Howard, "Herman Melville" (University of Minnesota Pamphlets on American Writers no. 13, Minneapolis, 1961), p. 2.

security is in me this moment, on account of your having understood the book."<sup>22</sup> This friendship seemed to be Melville's last great hope. Hawthorne doubtless had a high regard for the young Melville as a man and as a writer. But as Newton Arvin points out, Hawthorne's offense "in his relation to Melville was that he could not play the super-human role--of father, friend, elder brother, and all but God--that Melville in his misery and egoism, would have him play."<sup>23</sup> And when the Hawthornes moved away from their Berkshire farm in 1851, Melville was left desolate and disillusioned anew. Hawthorne had not proved to be the companion temperament Melville thought him to be. Melville was left, at thirty-two, a sick man, very poor, with no source of income but from the writing of books which did not sell.<sup>24</sup>

The writing of Moby-Dick apparently was a very trying experience. It was a story that "drove" Melville to super-human efforts. His health had probably been undermined earlier by the hardships of his life at sea; his nerves and imagination were now exhausted, his eyes weakened. But the sacrifice of health and nerves was in vain; Moby-Dick did

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<sup>22</sup>Willard Thorp, ed. Herman Melville, Representative Selections (New York, 1938), p. 394.

<sup>23</sup>Arvin, p. 205.

<sup>24</sup>Raymond Weaver, ed. Shorter Novels of Herman Melville (New York, 1928), pp. xxiii, xxxix.

not sell very well and critical reviews were generally unfavorable.<sup>25</sup>

After the Hawthornes left, Melville had several choices open to him, short of suicide or a miracle. At this point he could not seem to arrive at any kind of truce with the world. Something was wrong either with him or with the world or with both. If the problem lay in himself, he could examine his conscience and reform. If the world were at fault, he might try to reform what he could, despise the rest, and draw some solace from self-pity. Or he might rise above his emotions and try to understand both himself and the world. He took no one of the alternatives, but through a combination of them, sat down and tried to write something that would explain his own complex nature, if not that of the world. The result was Pierre.<sup>26</sup>

Financial necessity and a passionate urge to purge himself of inward darkness caused Melville to rush through the writing of Pierre. His experiences, especially in the writing of Moby-Dick, seem to be recounted in those of Pierre, who "supped at black broth with Pluto," driving himself mercilessly throughout the day, unable to sleep at night because

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<sup>25</sup>Brooks, p. 166.

<sup>26</sup>Weaver, p. xxxi.

the book "like a vast lumbering planet" revolved in his brain. This realistic account in Pierre suggests the dreary slavery that Melville described when he was finishing Moby-Dick and hurrying it through the press, wandering the streets of New York at night to spare his weakening eyes.<sup>27</sup>

In addition to the financial and emotional urgency that spurred Melville on to write Pierre, other factors added to the tensions. His wife Elizabeth contributed to his depression by spreading reports everywhere that he was ruining himself with overwork. The rumors are mentioned in a letter from Sarah Morewood to George Duyckinck: "I hear that he is now engaged in a new work [Pierre] as frequently not to leave his room till quite dark in the evening--when he for the first time during the whole day partakes of solid food--he must therefore write under a state of morbid excitement which will soon injure his health."<sup>28</sup> And Jay Leyda records from Elizabeth's memoirs: "We all felt anxious about the strain on his health in the spring of 1853."<sup>29</sup> The birth of their second son served to upset the household routine. Elizabeth decided she must go "home" to Boston to recuperate from her confinement. Melville, though very busy, escorted her to

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<sup>27</sup>Brooks, p. 166.

<sup>28</sup>Leyda, I, 441.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., I, 468.

New York, spent a few days there visiting his brother Allen, then sent Elizabeth on to Boston. Melville returned home to work, probably feeling somewhat sorry for himself. His sister, Augusta, who did much of his copying, was spending the winter in New York. So Elizabeth's departure left him without a copyist. Since the Hawthornes had moved away, Melville had no outlet for his emotions except through the manuscript. He was cut off from normal communication and lived for long hours of the day entirely in his book.<sup>30</sup>

A mood of recklessness seems to have driven Melville to the very end as he went "deep, deep and still deep and deeper" in his efforts to "find out the heart of a man." His usual literary and commercial judgments were abandoned. He attempted to fit his narrative into a setting with which he had no familiarity and was soon floundering beyond his depth. Such a course could only end tragically. Melville was unable to unravel all the mysteries the story tried to explore. After the book was in the process of publication, Melville seemed curiously unwilling to face the fact of what he had done. He persistently thought of the book he had intended rather than the book he had written.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>Leon Howard, Herman Melville, A Biography (Berkeley, California, 1951), p. 185.

<sup>31</sup>Brooks, p. 191.

Public reaction to Pierre was disheartening. The book failed financially and was thoroughly blasted by the critics. Melville felt that his creativity was gone. The public had lost all interest in a writer who had no more exciting stories of adventure to tell. In addition to the external causes of extinction of the literary flame, an excessive subjectivity and speculation kept his spirit in turmoil. A passionate determination to discover a reality modeled after his illusions had led to feelings of bitterness and defeat. He was convinced of the futility of trying to write or of making an effort of any kind; he wanted only tranquility for thought.<sup>32</sup>

Melville's friends and members of his family, believing that writing was bad for him, decided to take matters into their hands and tried to secure a consular appointment for him. Melville's mother Maria probably helped to instigate the effort by writing letters herself to influential friends and by asking relatives to secure recommendations. She felt that Herman needed to go abroad, where he would be compelled to have more intercourse with his fellow men. "It would materially renew and strengthen his mind and body," she wrote to Peter Gansevoort. "The constant in-door confinement with little intermission to which Herman's

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<sup>32</sup>Brooks, p. 193.

occupation as author compels him, does not agree with him. This constant working of the brain, & excitement of the imagination, is wearing Herman out, & you will my dear Peter be doing him a lasting benefit if by your added exertions you can procure for him a foreign consulship."<sup>33</sup>

His Uncle Peter Gansevoort did help by contacting many influential friends and acquaintances. On April 21, 1853, he sent letters of recommendation he had collected to Allan Melville with a note: "I have for some time been of the opinion that his severe labors, would eventuate to his injury and most anxiously wish that he may for a time be relieved from constant confinement which the occupation of author imposes upon him."<sup>34</sup> Despite the aid of many influential friends, including Hawthorne, the effort failed. Reasons for the failure probably lay partly in Melville's lack of interest in politics, as evidenced by the reply of Phineas Allen to Caleb Cushing's query concerning Melville: "I would say that Mr. Herman Melville has not taken any part in politics since his residence in Pittsfield, and I believe he has not attended the polls. I am not aware that he has made any public expression of his political opinion."<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>Leyda, I, 469.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., I, 470.

For more than a year Melville wrote only two short stories. One of them, "Bartleby," gives insight into Melville's mind in the miserable year of 1853. The story seems to be a message telling those who have failed to understand him that he will no longer produce or "willingly be misemployed." He was in the same kind of dilemma as that shown in the story. He could not get employment or remuneration unless he would abandon his inner purpose. This he "preferred not to do." His persistence caused some estrangement between Melville and friends and relatives who might have helped him: Allan or his father-in-law or Uncle Peter Gansevoort. They became impatient. They tried to find some kind of gainful employment for him, but he remained adamant with the Bartleby answer, "I would prefer not to." A few literary friendships might have helped him, but he was indifferent to other writers, in Boston as well as in New York. In fact, he had no real interest in society or in actual people.<sup>36</sup>

During the winter of 1852 Melville had agreed to become a contributor to Putnam's Monthly Magazine at five dollars a page. In February, 1853, Putnam's published an article on him as the first of "Our Young Authors." But it was November before the first installment of "Bartleby"

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<sup>36</sup>Arvin, p. 211.

appeared. As time passed, Melville seemed to recover some of his force and energy and in 1854 produced a second short work, The Encantadas.

Harper's publishers had asked him to write another novel, in spite of the financial failure of Pierre, and in December, 1853, they advanced him \$300 for a work on tortoises or tortoise-hunting. He expected to complete it in January. Since he knew the Galapagos from experience as well as from his reading, background was not a problem. But he could not find a story to fit the framework. Using the story of the Chola widow, he attempted to relate it to the Agatha theme which had fascinated him for some time, but he failed to do anything with it in the way of a novel. He tried to find inspiration and suggestions from Spenser and other poets for an allegorical novel of patience.<sup>37</sup> While he struggled with the problem, a disastrous fire at Harper's destroyed the plates and most of the copies of his books. Falling deeper into gloom and thinking that Harper's book publishing activities would be suspended, he lost all incentive for continuing with a difficult job. Instead he used what material he had to write the Encantadas sketches which he sold to Putnam's for serial publication. This decision was unfortunate because the Harpers were offended, and

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<sup>37</sup>Howard, "Herman Melville," (pamphlet), p. 34.

Melville lost their encouragement and support when he needed it most.<sup>38</sup>

In writing The Encantadas, Melville returned to actual experience, which had been a successful form of writing for his first two books. But now the mood was different. The choice of a pseudonym, Tarnmoor, under which the sketches were published, is suggestive of Melville's inner state, and the landscape described in the islands is representative of his feelings of barrenness and futility. But the resulting sketches show that he had not lost the gift of descriptive artistry.

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<sup>38</sup>Howard, p. 34.

## CHAPTER II

### REPUTATION THE ENCANTADAS HAS ENJOYED

Within the past fifty years Herman Melville has been described both as one of the "lesser novelists" and as one of the greatest and most strangely neglected of American writers. In his own time the rise and fall of his reputation was equally dramatic. His first two adventure books, Typee and Omoo, were acclaimed by critics and public in both England and America, although Typee outraged the Protestant missionaries. Mardi (1849) baffled Melville's readers by its unexpected journeys into allegorical regions. But Redburn, also written in 1849, and White Jacket (1850) enhanced his fame at home and abroad. Perceptive critics acclaimed Moby-Dick (1851), although many critics attacked the involved rhetoric and considered the author mad.<sup>1</sup> Pierre (1852) was greeted with harsh denunciation or with disapproving silence. No American writer of that period could hope to survive such devastating disparagement.<sup>2</sup> The remarkable feats of artistry found in The Piazza Tales and The Confidence-Man were unrecognized even by friendly critics. Until his

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<sup>1</sup>Hershel Parker, ed., The Recognition of Herman Melville (Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1967), p. iii.

<sup>2</sup>Newton Arvin, Herman Melville (New York, 1950), p. 201.

death in 1891, Melville was known chiefly as the author of Typee and Omoo. During the Melville revival of the 1920's, he was lauded primarily as the author of Moby-Dick. In the last two decades Melville has at last begun to receive the recognition he deserves, not only for Moby-Dick, but also for Pierre, The Piazza Tales, The Confidence-Man, and the posthumously published Billy Budd, Sailor.<sup>3</sup>

Through the years there has been a great divergence of criticism concerning Melville's works, especially Moby-Dick, which is the only book for which he has received recognition commensurate with his achievements, and even this recognition was too long delayed. In 1851 an anonymous reviewer in the London Spectator ranted: "This sea novel is a singular medley of Naval observation, magazine article writing, satiric reflection upon the conventionalities of civilized life, and rhapsody run mad . . . It repels the reader instead of attracting him."<sup>4</sup> But William T. Porter, writing in the New York Spirit of the Times in December, 1851, strongly recommended it "to all who can appreciate a work of exceeding power, beauty, and genius."<sup>5</sup> In the September, 1852, Southern Literary Messenger, John R. Thompson bemoaned Melville's decline from the genius shown in Typee:

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<sup>3</sup>Parker, p. iii.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 48.

The meandering nonsense of Mardi was but ill atoned for even by the capital sea-pieces of Redburn and White-Jacket; Moby-Dick proved a very tiresome yarn indeed, and as for the Ambiguities, we are compelled to say that it seems to us the most aptly-titled volume we have met with for years.<sup>6</sup>

The very first number of Putnam's Magazine in February, 1853, published an uncomplimentary essay by Fitz-James O'Brien, assessing Melville's work to date and finding very little to commend.<sup>7</sup> Less than a year later, however, this same magazine began publishing Melville's shorter works, with "Bartleby" as the first contribution.<sup>8</sup>

After 1856 Melville published only The Confidence-Man and several volumes of poetry. He was soon virtually forgotten by a fickle public, until the Melville revival began about 1917. Nevertheless, in this long interim of almost complete obscurity, a few astute readers continued to enjoy Melville's works and to note his artistic talents. Through the years occasional printed comments appeared, most of which were complimentary. At the time of his death he had not achieved the kind of fame he had called "manufactured to order" in the "almost innumerable journals that enlighten our

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<sup>6</sup>Parker, p. 56.

<sup>7</sup>Hugh W. Hetherington, Melville's Reviewers, 1846-1891 (Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1961), p. 57.

<sup>8</sup>Jay Leyda, Melville Log (New York, 1951), p. 481.

millions."<sup>9</sup> But people who read books for enjoyment had not forgotten him. Fifty-six new editions and reissues of his various books had appeared in America and England during his lifetime. A columnist in the Boston Post pointed out that Melville did not have the fame he would possess had he been a Bostonian rather than a New Yorker, a statement that was no doubt partially true.<sup>10</sup>

Little evidence of continuing enthusiasm for Melville can be found in the literary histories and textbooks, But beginning with the Duyckincks' Cyclopaedia of American Literature and Gostwick's Handbook of American Literature, Melville found a place in a considerable number of academic works. But these notices, in general, were plagiarisms or paraphrases of previous criticism and reveal an abysmal ignorance both of the man and his work. Obviously, few of the literary historians bothered to read Melville's work critically, if at all, or to check the accuracy of the biographical data. Nevertheless, the few significant references by men of letters and literary amateurs in America and Europe indicate a lasting interest. It is impossible to accurately judge the extent of interest of the reading public because

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<sup>9</sup> Leon Howard, Herman Melville, a Biography (Berkeley, California, 1951), p. 338.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 339.

their opinions never find their way into print. But a list of the more important readers who mentioned Melville includes Robert Louis Stevenson, Charles W. Stoddard, Henry S. Salt, Arthur Stedman, W. Clark Russell, J. M. Barrie, Archibald MacMechan, and William Morris.<sup>11</sup> These evidences of his recognition would seem to preclude his being overlooked by posterity.

There were several attempts to start a Melville revival, the first occurring in the middle 1880's with Robert Buchanan and Henry Salt as chief advocates. There was another in 1891, when new editions of four of Melville's books were published in England. The one which resulted in Moby-Dick being acknowledged as Melville's masterpiece began in 1914 with Professor Archibald MacMechan's essay on the White Whale.<sup>12</sup>

During the much stronger revival which began in 1919 with the Melville Centennial, interest focused almost entirely upon Moby-Dick. This regeneration probably received considerable impetus from Carl Van Doren, editor of the Cambridge History of American Literature. Published in 1917, this work referred to Moby-Dick as Melville's best as well as

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<sup>11</sup>O. W. Riegel, "The Anatomy of Melville's Fame," American Literature, III (1931), 197.

<sup>12</sup>"The Best Sea Story Ever Written," in The Life of a Little College (Boston, 1914), pp. 179-198.

one of the best of American romances.<sup>13</sup> Interest at this time became more biographical than literary, and scholars rescued such works as Pierre, The Confidence-Man, and Clarel for clues to Melville's life.<sup>14</sup> It was not until 1921 that his reputation became great enough to inspire a full-length biography; Raymond Weaver's Herman Melville: Mariner and Mystic. To Weaver, Pierre was substantially Melville's last work; "The Bell-Tower, Don Benito Cereno, and The Encantadas show the last glow of Melville's literary glamour, the final moment of brightening of the embers before they sank into blackness and ash."<sup>15</sup>

That Melville's fame did not fade as completely nor as rapidly in England as it did in America was pointed out in the London Spectator's review of the Weaver biography: "Before I leave the subject of Melville I should like to point out that the latest biographer of the great American does not seem to realize how strong the feeling about Melville has always been in England."<sup>16</sup> The truth of this statement is born out by the consistently favorable references to

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<sup>13</sup>Parker, p. 156.

<sup>14</sup>Riegel, p. 199.

<sup>15</sup>Raymond M. Weaver, Herman Melville: Mariner and Mystic (New York, 1921), p. 348.

<sup>16</sup>Parker, p. 174.

Melville by English critics through the years. However, the general tenor of such statements was usually more restrained than that of an anonymous essayist in the London Nation of January 22, 1921, after his first reading of Moby-Dick:

I hereby declare, being of sane intellect, that since letters began there never was such a book, and that the mind of man is not constructed so as to produce such another; that I put its author with Rabelais, Swift, Shakespeare, and other minor and disputable worthies; and that I would advise any adventurer of the soul to go at once into the morose and prolonged retreat necessary for its deglutition.<sup>17</sup>

Had Melville received such encomiums during the wretched years following Moby-Dick, he might have been inspired to write more and to continue to improve his techniques.

During his early years Melville had confidence in his own ability as a writer and in the ability of the reading public to appreciate his efforts. But after the initial success of Typee and Omoo, he was doomed to continued and increasing disillusion. It must have been deeply discouraging to find that, as he said, what he felt most moved to write was virtually banned because it would not pay.<sup>18</sup> In June, 1851, he wrote Hawthorne, "All fame is patronage. Let me be infamous: there is no patronage in that. What 'reputation' H. M. has is horrible. To go down to posterity is

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<sup>17</sup>Parker, p. 174.

<sup>18</sup>Arvin, p. 200.

bad enough, any way; but to go down as a 'man who lived among the cannibals'!"<sup>19</sup> Melville did not live to see the world made aware of the depth of his creativity nor to enjoy the fruits of fame for which he longed.

Melville's special place in literary history is now clearly established. One special area of recognition that he would have understood and exulted in is his influence on other writers, both in their works and in their lives. This kind of recognition is profoundly illustrated by Hart Crane, Conrad Aiken, Malcolm Lowery, William Faulkner, Charles Olson, Ralph Ellison, and Robert Lowell.<sup>20</sup>

The more recent surge of interest in Melville has been wider in scope than ever before. All of his works are now being scrutinized and dissected, with interesting results. Although sharp differences of opinion still appear, the consensus seems to be that for all his faults, Melville is an important American writer who has been too long overlooked or too long obscured by the immensity of his white whale. The Encantadas is now receiving a goodly share of renewed interest, especially from scholars seeking to define Melville's apparently vacillating philosophy at a crucial period of his life. Others work zealously to identify the sources of the

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<sup>19</sup>Leyda, Melville Log, p. 413.

<sup>20</sup>Parker, p. xii.

material used in the sketches, while technical qualities, structure and theme occupy many scholarly interpreters of literature.

When Herman Melville wrote The Encantadas, he had already been reduced from the heights of great popularity to the depths of a literary semi-oblivion. Before drafting the galapagos sketches, he had become thoroughly disillusioned with the idea of a literary career.<sup>21</sup> And this work, like all of the works after Moby-Dick, was long regarded as the feeble aftermath of a genius in decline.<sup>22</sup> But his fame in 1854 was not yet in total eclipse. Even before the publication of the first installment, The Encantadas received a favorable notice in the February 14, 1854, issue of the New York Evening Post:

The readers of Omoo and Typee will be rejoiced to learn that their favorite Herman Melville has awakened from that uneasy sleep, during which his genius was disturbed by such distempered dreams as Mardi and frightful nightmares like the ambiguous Pierre. We are again promised a prospect of another of those Pacific elysiums, which the oriental imagination of the author of Typee can so richly produce, in a series of articles for one of our New York monthlies. It is said that the next number of Putnam is to contain "The Encantadas, or the Enchanted Isles," a reminiscence of life among a group of islands on the equator, somewhere in the wide Pacific, one of those cases of the desert sea,

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<sup>21</sup>Victor Wolfgang Von Hagen, ed., The Encantadas, or Enchanted Isles (Burlingame, Dalifornia, 1940), p. v.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. vii.

where, under the pilotage of Melville, all readers will be sure of falling in with refreshing fountains of pleasure and delight.<sup>23</sup>

When the first installment of The Encantadas appeared in the March, 1854, issue of Putnam's Monthly Magazine, it created only a very slight ripple in literary circles. The only known notice appeared in the March 10 Berkshire County Eagle, which gave it a favorable review:

The most prominent feature of the present number is however the commencement of a new work styled "The Encantadas or Enchanted Isles," by Mr. Herman N. Melville, under the nom de plume of Salvator Tarnmoor. What is more noticeable is, that the four chapters contained in the present number of Putnam, are distinguished by the same simplicity of diction, vividness of description, and power of narrative, which made Omoo and Typee two of the most charming books ever written. Mr. Melville's style is however not quite the same. It is matured by the experience, the study, and the labor of years. In The Encantadas, and other late articles in Harper and Putnam, Mr. Melville combines the excellencies of his early and later style, to the advantage of both.<sup>24</sup>

The review also included three extracts from the sketches. As subsequent installments appeared in April and May, they were followed with great enthusiasm by the Eagle, but ignored by other literary commentators, except for a single mention in the American Phrenological Journal on April 10.<sup>25</sup> The April number of the Eagle enthused: "Salvator R. Tarnmoor,

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<sup>23</sup>Leyda, Melville Log, pp. 484-485.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 485.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 486.

continues the Encantadas, and grows warm with the subject. This promises to be a work of genuine talent,--not a bit of mock turtle about it."<sup>26</sup> After the final installment in the May number of Putnam's, the Eagle continued faithful and enthusiastic: "Mr. Salvator R. Tarnmoor, concludes the 'Encantadas' and in doing so concludes a charming series of articles. May there be more of the same kind."<sup>27</sup> No other public comment on The Encantadas until after its inclusion in the Piazza Tales in 1856 has been discovered. A private comment attributed to James Russell Lowell was related by Charles F. Briggs of Putnam's in a letter to Melville on May 12, 1854:

I will take this opportunity to apologize to you for making a slight alteration in the Encantadas, in the last paragraph of the Chola widow, which I thought would be improved by the omission of a few words. That I did not injure the idea or mutilate the touching figure you introduced, by the slight excision I made, I received good evidence of, in a letter from James Lowell, who said that the figure of the cross in the ass' neck, brought tears into his eyes, and he thought it the finest touch of genius he had seen in prose. The only complaint that I have heard about the Encantadas was that it might have been longer.<sup>28</sup>

About May 20, 1856, The Piazza Tales was published in New York by Dix and Edwards.<sup>29</sup> The first review of the

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<sup>26</sup>Leyda, Melville Log, p. 486.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 487.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., pp. 487-488.

<sup>29</sup>Hetherington, p. 249.

collection of stories appeared on May 30 in the ever-faithful Berkshire County Eagle, which described it as the "most readable which he has published since Omoo and Typee."<sup>30</sup> The following day the New York Criterion commented on each of the tales, calling The Encantadas "a series of charming descriptions."<sup>31</sup> The book received at least ten American notices in June, most of them complimentary enough and none actually derogatory. The Southern Literary Messenger for June appreciated the return of an author whom the literary world had lost sight of for some time, but who

. . . "turns up" once more in "The Piazza Tales" with much of his former freshness and vivacity. Of the series collected, the preference must be given to the "Encantadas, or the Enchanted Islands" in which he conducts us again into that "wild, weird clime, out of space, out of time," which is the scene of his earliest and most popular writings.<sup>32</sup>

The highest praise The Piazza Tales received during the nineteenth century was probably the review by William Ellery Channing, Jr. in the New Bedford Mercury. The name of the "author of Typee and Omoo" aroused expectations of "something good" which were realized in the volume of

. . . tales of all descriptions--tales of the sea and of the city, some of which are told with due gravity, like that of "Benito Cereno," and others, such as "The Encantadas" with that copiousness of

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<sup>30</sup>Leyda, Melville Log, p. 515.

<sup>31</sup>Hetherington, p. 249.

<sup>32</sup>Parker, p. 480.

fancy and geniality of imagination, which resembles Melville more nearly to Charles Brockden Brown, the great novelist than to either of our other American story-tellers. Hawthorne is more dry, prosaic, and detailed, Irving more elegant, careful, and popular, but MELVILLE is a kind of wizard; he writes strange and mysterious things that belong to other worlds beyond this tame and everyday place we live in.<sup>33</sup>

After these first laudatory comments, the book received somewhat cooler treatment in the New York Tribune of June 23. The stories in The Encantadas were "fresh specimens of his sea romances, but not improvements on his earlier ones."<sup>34</sup> The book was then noticed by two Salem newspapers, the Gazette on June 24, which described The Encantadas as "more in the vein of the wondrous traveller's tales, the sober telling of which won" his reputation; and the Register on June 26, which may have intended its single sentence to be sarcastic: "The characteristics of Melville's style, and peculiar turn of his mind are known to a multitude of readers, who will recognize in these tales their true pater-nity."<sup>35</sup>

The Piazza Tales seems to have attracted less attention in July, and none of the comments singled out The Encantadas for particular notice. The same is true for the one notice in August and three in September. All these,

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<sup>33</sup>Hetherington, pp. 249-250.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 251.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

except Godey's Lady's Book, were generally complimentary to the volume as a whole. But the final word of the Democratic Review was that "the tales are perfect in themselves, and would each form the feast of a long summer's noon."<sup>36</sup>

These notices ended the American reviews of the Piazza Tales. However, in 1857, Fitz-James extolled The Encantadas in a long essay on Melville in the April Putnam's Monthly: "He balances the charm, and truth, and hazy golden atmosphere of 'Las Encantadas' against the grotesque absurdity and incomprehensible verbiage of the 'Lightning-Rod Man'!"<sup>37</sup>

A report on the sale of the book up to August 28, 1856, rendered at Melville's request by Dix and Edwards, reveals that the Piazza Tales had not then returned the expenses of publication, which amounted to \$1,048.62. Of 2,500 copies bound, 1,193 remained on hand, 260 had been given free to editors, and 1,047 had been sold at sixty cents each, a return of only \$628.00.<sup>38</sup>

The Piazza Tales was released in London at about the same time that it appeared in the United States. Sampson Low, Son and Company of London is listed on the title page as publisher in conjunction with Dix and Edwards. Writing in

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<sup>36</sup>Parker, p. 84.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 91.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 92.

1920, Mr. Michael Sadlier doubted that copies of this book were ever actually published in England, despite the fact that "Sampson, Low and Company advertised the book as in June, 1856."<sup>39</sup> Later, in the editing of the definitive edition of Melville published by Constable in 1923, Mr. Sadlier acknowledged that he had made an error and that there was an edition by Sampson, Low and Company.<sup>40</sup> Although most of Melville's other books had been popular in England, the Piazza Tales apparently did not fare very well. The London Atlas admitted that it contained "delightful stories,"<sup>41</sup> but Henry F. Chorley of the Athenaeum consigned it to adolescents:

That the Americans excel in short tales, the mention of Irving, Poe, Hawthorne, will remind our readers. That Mr. Melville might deserve to be added to the list is also possible; but in these "Piazza Tales" he gives us merely indications, not fulfillment. The author . . . must content himself with a very young public . . . The legends themselves have a certain wild and ghostly power; but the exaggeration of their teller's manner appears on the increase.<sup>42</sup>

There was only silence from other British journals, and no more was heard of Melville's book of stories until after the turn of the century.

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<sup>39</sup>Michael Sadlier, Excursions in Victorian Bibliography (London, 1922), p. 231.

<sup>40</sup>Von Hagen, The Encantadas, p. 118.

<sup>41</sup>Hetherington, p. 254.      <sup>42</sup>Parker, p. 83.

The Melville revival that began about 1917 was centered almost exclusively on Moby-Dick and earlier works. Anything written later than 1852 was either ignored completely or brushed aside with hardly a glance. Most critics who looked at The Encantadas at all probably agreed with Raymond Weaver that these tales represented a "momentary brightening" of dying embers.<sup>43</sup> And yet, there were exceptions. In an essay on "The Later Work of Herman Melville" in the January, 1922, Double Dealer, Carl Van Vechten prophesied:

In spite of all the detractors, I think . . . the day may come when there will be those who will prefer the later Melville just as there are those who prefer the later James, those who will care more for the metaphysical, and at the same time more self-revealing works, than for the less subtle and straightforward tales.<sup>44</sup>

During all the furor about Moby-Dick, one of the most enthusiastic comments ever made on The Encantadas appeared in Michael Sadlier's Excursions in Victorian Bibliography (1922). Mr. Sadlier questioned the justice of putting Moby-Dick "far above" all other Melville writing. He granted it first place, but refused to dismiss the other works:

With no desire to denigrate Moby-Dick or to deny it first place in importance among Melville's books, I would venture that his genius is more

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<sup>43</sup>Weaver, Herman Melville, p. 348.

<sup>44</sup>Riegel, p. 201.

perfectly and skilfully revealed in a volume of stories belonging to the so-called decadence. The Piazza Tales are liable to be dismissed by the critic of today, with kindly condescension as "the best of the later work," a judgment as misleading as it is easily explained.<sup>45</sup>

Sadlier believed that too much worship of Moby-Dick had brought neglect of other writing. He considered the novel tediously long and wordy, but felt that such prolixity was not implicit in the greatness of Melville's writing:

This is proved by the two chief stories in The Piazza Tales. Benito Cereno and The Encantadas hold in the small compass of their beauty the essence of their author's supreme artistry. They are profound and lovely and tenderly robust, but they are never tedious and never willful . . . These two stories cannot as literary achievement compare with their vast and teeming predecessor [Moby-Dick]. That is natural. But they may not be ignored as the last glimmer of a dying lamp. They mark the highest technical level of their author's work, and had not within a year or two of their appearance the darkness of self-distrust descended on him, might well have proved a revelation of something yet to come from the brain of Herman Melville, something destined--but for the treacherous inhibition of human frailty--to excel in power everything to which that brain had previously given birth.<sup>46</sup>

But Sadlier's was almost a single voice, overcome by the continuing clamor of praise for Moby-Dick. Most critics agreed with F. L. Lucas: "It was a barren wilderness in which Melville's spirit slept or wandered for forty years between

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<sup>45</sup>Sadlier, p. 219.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 220.

Moby-Dick and his death, and these prose sketches were clearly meant to keep their author, rather than to be kept."<sup>47</sup>

Perhaps Michael Sadlier's words did not fall entirely on stony ears. Seven years after publishing his biography of Melville, Raymond Weaver edited the Shorter Novels of Herman Melville, which contained the works he had referred to as dying embers. From The Piazza Tales he singled out Benito Cereno and The Encantadas as the two chief stories "slowly coming to be chosen as marking the supreme technical achievement of Melville as artist."<sup>48</sup> Weaver apparently had read these stories more carefully, perhaps after reading the comments of Sadlier, whom he quoted extensively. He also quoted from John Freeman's biography of Melville,<sup>49</sup> ". . . and only a little less wonderful [than Benito Cereno] is an episode in another of the series, The Encantadas, or Enchanted Isles."<sup>50</sup>

One of the earliest attempts to analyze Melville's mind through his works was made by Lewis Mumford.<sup>51</sup> He noted

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<sup>47</sup>F. L. Lucas, Authors Dead and Living (New York, 1926), p. 108.

<sup>48</sup>Raymond Weaver, ed., Shorter Novels of Herman Melville (New York, 1928), p. xxxv.

<sup>49</sup>Herman Melville (New York, 1926).

<sup>50</sup>Weaver, Shorter Novels, p. xxxviii.

<sup>51</sup>Herman Melville (New York, 1929).

no evidence that after Moby-Dick Melville's

. . . literary powers were falling off, or his voice sinking to a whisper . . . The ultimate moral of Pierre, "Often ill comes from good, as good from ill," holds true of the enchanted isles. Out of its stark ugliness, he breathed beauty. With just as abhorrent an insight into the cruelties of life as he had in Pierre, Melville here had a firm hand on himself . . . Within the dark rim of the horizon, the words move, like swift white sails on grey waters. The style is again accurate, pliant, subtle, bold; but it is never hectic nor forced, nor does it smell from the mothballs of old costume chests.<sup>52</sup>

There were skeptics during the 1920's voicing warnings that the enthusiasm for Melville was exaggerated, and in the 1930's, as interest in his work declined, editors of American textbooks began to omit Melville selections from their anthologies, and Ludwig Lewisohn in Expression in America (1932) denounced Melville enthusiasts as "both deceived and self-deceived."<sup>53</sup> But the supporters continued striving to place Melville in other anthologies and histories, to provide comprehensive studies of Melville's art, and to include other works besides Typee, Omoo, and Moby-Dick. Percy H. Boynton opened his essay in Literature and American life (1936) with a quotation from The Encantadas. The piece is Melville's advice to those who attempt the difficult task of ascending Rock Rodondo. The reader is invited, after he

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<sup>52</sup>Mumford, p. 240.

<sup>53</sup>Parker, p. x.

has performed the preparatory feats, to "come and be rewarded by the view from our tower." Boynton pointed out that this was "Melville's comment to those who care to reach this vantage point and share his view."<sup>54</sup> The ascent into the towering realms of Melville's thought is indeed difficult, but numerous scholars and readers seem to find that the view from there is worth the effort.

Willard Thorp's introduction to the Melville volume of the popular American Writers Series in 1938 established Melville as a major writer to be studied in all American colleges. Thorp's introduction included the most intensive literary analysis of Melville as well as the best biographical account yet written. It helped "to end the period when one could safely write biographical essays on Melville without attention to factual evidence and write literary criticism without attention to all of Melville's works."<sup>55</sup>

Thorp's example helped to generate a revival of interest in Melville that has spread to literary circles all over the world. A number of reliable biographies and astute analytical works have appeared. With Moby-Dick secure in its place as an immortal work of romantic literature, Melville's most discerning critics began to feel that The Encantadas was among the best of his writings. Because of its increased

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<sup>54</sup>Parker, p. xi.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid.

restraint and the absence of ornate allusions and classical metaphors, The Encantadas displays effective literary vitality.<sup>56</sup>

Now that the work following Moby-Dick is receiving its rightful share of attention, The Encantadas, Benito Cereno, and Billy Budd have come to be almost universally praised by modern critics.<sup>57</sup> Ivor Winters pronounces The Encantadas "Melville's descriptive power at its best; the islands in all their barren and archaic horror are realized unforgettably."<sup>58</sup> Newton Arvin, while he considers the sketches too loosely organized and lacking in unity, admires Melville's grand images of utter desolation in the first three sketches, the deep powerful incongruity in the humor of the seventh sketch, and the mock-heroism reminiscent of Mark Twain in the picture of the hermit Oberlus in the ninth sketch.<sup>59</sup> Richard Fogle disagrees with Arvin's views concerning the unity of the sketches and supports this conclusion by a careful analysis of the whole work. He sees The Encantadas as a "travel book plus, in which the Galapagos

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<sup>56</sup>Von Hagen, The Encantadas, p. viii.

<sup>57</sup>Ben Drew Kimpel, "Melville's Philosophical Thought after 1851" (unpublished Doctor's thesis, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 1942), p. 180.

<sup>58</sup>Ivor Winters, In Defense of Reason (New York, 1947), p. 223.

<sup>59</sup>Arvin, p. 241.

Islands have been recreated in Melville's imagination and assimilated into his total vision of reality."<sup>60</sup> And he declares it "an impressive work, various, profound, and alive."<sup>61</sup>

Most critics have singled out the eighth sketch, "Norfolk Isle and the Chola Widow," as the best of the series. This is the touching story that reportedly brought tears to Lowell's eyes. Ronald Mason calls it "the life of the series . . . that has won for it its reputation and infused into the adjoining sketches so much of its own tragic and concentrated beauty."<sup>62</sup> Fogle qualifies his admiration by stating that, while it contains some of the best writing of the series, it also contains some of the worst. He bases his criticism mostly on Melville's tendency to lapse into blank verse.<sup>63</sup> Newton Arvin finds the story touching but "forcedly and self-consciously pathetic."<sup>64</sup>

One of the most enthusiastic and most beautifully expressed discussions of The Encantadas is that of Victor Wolfgang Von Hagen, who considers himself a naturalist,

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<sup>60</sup>R. H. Fogle, Melville's Shorter Tales (Norman, Oklahoma, 1960), p. 92.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., p. 115.

<sup>62</sup>Ronald Mason, The Spirit Above the Dust (London, 1951), p. 189.

<sup>63</sup>Fogle, p. 109.

<sup>64</sup>Arvin, p. 241.

rather than a writer. Von Hagen read The Encantadas while conducting a scientific expedition to the Galapagos Islands. Of the experience, he writes:

I had the pleasure of visiting every part mentioned in The Encantadas. Reading these haunting sketches in the very midst of the inferno that inspired them, I thought then, as I do now, that they are the finest descriptive pieces of writing concerning this volcanic archipelago. The bibliography of Galapagos literature is vast, and as a naturalist preparing a book [Ecuador and the Galapagos Islands] on the islands, I have had recourse to all of it . . . but in all the vast range of its literature, I know of nothing that describes the islands as poetically and, I am almost tempted to say, as realistically as Herman Melville's Encantadas or Enchanted Isles.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>66</sup>Von Hagen, The Encantadas, p. ix.

### CHAPTER III

#### MELVILLE'S USE OF SOURCE MATERIAL IN THE ENCANTADAS

Herman Melville based most of his writing on personal experience but amplified it generously with material secured from any pertinent, available source. He was an omnivorous reader, who seemed able to absorb every scrap of information and then manipulate and reshape it to fit his own creative needs. For many years the narratives based on Melville's sea voyages were used by critics to supply biographical information, but careful examination of evidence has shown that such information may often be misleading. Literary source-hunters have now discredited the earlier notion that Melville was merely reconstructing the wonders he had seen. When relating adventures that were ostensibly autobiographical, he not only altered the facts to conform to the needs of his narrative, but also borrowed freely from the writings of others. His usual method of composing was to familiarize himself thoroughly with information available on whatever subject was involved in the tale he was constructing.<sup>1</sup>

The Encantadas apparently reflects very little of Melville's own observations, although many of the incidents were probably legends that he heard at sea.

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<sup>1</sup>Herman Melville: Representative Selections, ed. by Willard Thorp (New York, 1938), p. xxvii.

The true facts concerning Melville's voyages have been largely substantiated by evidence from ships' logs and other maritime records as well as from such authentic sources as letters and newspapers. It is known that at the age of twenty-one Melville boarded the whaling ship Acushnet at New Bedford for a voyage into the South Pacific. It was on this voyage that he visited the Galapagos Islands, which later became the setting for The Encantadas. Opinions have differed as to the precise amount of time Melville spent in the vicinity of these enchanted islands, and diligent search by scholars has failed to discover a conclusive answer.

The most intensive investigation to date was done by Charles R. Anderson.<sup>2</sup> The search was an attempt either to corroborate or to disprove Melville's "autobiographical" tales such as Typee and Omoo. Anderson found proof that Melville did visit the Galapagos in the winter of 1841-42. In Mardi, Melville mentions the Rousseau as a ship that the Acushnet met at sea. The log book of the Rousseau records meeting the Acushnet on November 10, 1841, five miles from land. The land was Albemarle Island, the largest and westernmost of the Galapagos Archipelago. According to his account in The Encantadas, the Acushnet had cruised in the vicinity of the islands some months before Melville ever

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<sup>2</sup>Melville in the South Seas (New York, 1949).

went ashore there. Anderson found that the Acushnet did cruise extensively about the Galapagos Islands and concluded that Melville undoubtedly went ashore on several islands in the group. It was customary for whaling ships to send crews ashore to capture tortoises as well to secure wood and water. Sometimes they went on overnight excursions inland to capture waterfowl. Melville saw these barren volcanic islands before he saw the island paradises described in Typee and Omoo.<sup>3</sup>

Victor Von Hagen disagrees with Anderson, declaring that Melville never actually visited any of the islands, with the possible exception of the tip of Albemarle. It was here that records of the ship's log show that Acushnet was sighted by another whaler in 1841. Melville probably sailed between Narborough and Albemarle and passed near, if he did not climb, Rock Rodondo, of which he writes so vividly in Sketch Third.<sup>4</sup> Von Hagen believes that the first four sketches were written from Melville's own experiences. Such descriptions as "tangled thickets of wiry bushes without fruit and without name, springing up among deep fissures of calcined rock and treacherously masking them" and "a ceaseless sea

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<sup>3</sup>Anderson, p. 49.

<sup>4</sup>Herman Melville, The Encantadas or Enchanted Isles, introduction, epilogue, and biographical notes by Victor Wolfgang Von Hagen (Burlingame, California, 1940), p. 101.

pours a fury of foam" give an impression of authenticity, and apparently such descriptions did not exist at that time concerning the Galapagos. Nor would such descriptions have occurred to an observer with less acute powers. Melville must have walked over the lower regions of Albemarle, for "throughout the Galapagos great fissures have been opened in the rocks, into which the sea pours many yards inland, undermining the entire basalt littoral."<sup>5</sup> But such internal evidence may not be convincing enough to scholars familiar with Melville's almost incredible ability to transform prosaic facts into superb, forceful, word pictures.

Melville apparently did not get the basic idea for Sketch Eighth, "The Chola Widow," from his sea experience or from his reading. The skeleton of the sketch may have come from a true story he heard while on a trip to the Elizabeth Islands with his father-in-law. Shortly after Pierre was published, failed financially, and was soundly blasted by the critics, Judge Shaw felt that Melville needed a change of scene and an opportunity to find new material about the sea and sailing--the only material with which Herman had been successful. Shaw persuaded Melville to visit him in Nantucket, then to vacation at Martha's Vineyard and the Elizabeth Islands. Melville did not find ideas there for

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<sup>5</sup>Von Hagen, The Encantadas, p. 102.

adventure stories, but he was most impressed by the patience of the women of the islands who waited, often in vain, for the return of their husbands from far-away lands. The one tale he brought back was the now-famous "Agatha Story," given in detail in a letter to Hawthorne.<sup>6</sup> He tried to persuade Hawthorne to write a story about the incident, as he hesitated to try it himself. Melville never did, so far as is known, attempt such a story, but the theme of patience that occurs in much of his later work reflects his pre-occupation with it.<sup>7</sup> The description of the post-box that he saw on the island was used in the last sketch of The Encantadas.

It is certain that Melville borrowed heavily from contemporary literature on travel for the Encantadas sketches. In some instances he gave credit to the original author, but he silently passed over several sources which were probably used. As Von Hagen puts it:

In The Encantadas, Melville's eclectic powers can be clearly seen; he brings the poets Spenser, Collins and Chatterton into charming synthesis with such strange bed-fellows as Cowley, pilot to the buccaneers and Colnett, the "whaling ground explorer." He takes the skeleton of fact from one, some lines from another, quotes verbatim or alters

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<sup>6</sup>Von Hagen, The Encantadas, p. 102.

<sup>7</sup>Leon Howard, "Herman Melville," University of Minnesota Pamphlets on American Writers, no. 13, pp. 31-32.

lines to suit the mood he would create, all with such superb balanced artistry that most critics seem united for once in praise, and consider The Encantadas along with Benito Cereno (written in the same period) as fine as the writing in Moby-Dick.<sup>8</sup>

In Sketch Fifth Melville specifically cites three authors whom he considers "eye-witness authorities worth mentioning touching the Enchanted Isles:--Cowley, the Buccaneer (1684); Colnett, the whaling-ground explorer (1793); Porter, the post Captain (1813)."<sup>9</sup> Cowley was pilot of the Bachelors Delight, a vessel of English buccaneers which entered the Pacific in 1643. It was he who made the first chart of the islands and gave them names. Captain James Colnett, of the English ship Rattler, made new charts of the islands in 1698. Commodore David Porter commanded the U. S. S. Essex, the ship involved in the incident described in Sketch Fifth.<sup>10</sup> Melville had already mentioned Cowley in Sketch Fourth as he pointed out "Cowley's Enchanted Isle" and explained: "The name was bestowed by that excellent buccaneer himself, on

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<sup>8</sup>Von Hagen, The Encantadas, p. 102.

<sup>9</sup>William Ambrose Cowley, Voyage Around the World (London, 1699); Captain James Colnett, A Voyage to the South Atlantic and Round Cape Horn into the Pacific Ocean (London, 1798); David Porter, Journal of a Cruise Made to the Pacific Ocean in the United States Frigate "Essex" (New York, 1922).

<sup>10</sup>Von Hagen, The Encantadas, pp. xxi-xxii.

his first visit here." (72)<sup>11</sup> Melville added, with tongue-in-cheek perhaps, "Other than these you have but barren, bootless allusions from some few passing voyagers or compilers." Captain Porter's Journal seems to have been the primary source-book for the sketches, but evidence shows that Melville used some of the "barren, bootless allusions" also. Discussing the buccaneers in Sketch Sixth, Melville mentions, in addition to Cowley, "a Dampier,<sup>12</sup> and a Wafer,"<sup>13</sup> who kept journals of their buccaneering days, but Melville could have read quoted accounts of their adventures. He attributes the long quotation in this sketch to "a sentimental voyager long ago." The material resembles Captain James Colnett's account, which Melville may have read, although this passage is cited both in Captain Porter's Journal and in Captain Burney's Chronological History.<sup>14</sup> Jay Leyda believes that James Burney is probably one of the

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<sup>11</sup>Throughout this study, numbers in parentheses refer to pages in The Complete Stories of Herman Melville, ed. by Jay Leyda (New York, 1949).

<sup>12</sup>William Dampier, New Voyage around the World (London, 1699).

<sup>13</sup>Lionel Wafer, A New Voyage and Descriptions of the Isthmus of America (London, 1699).

<sup>14</sup>James Burney, Chronological History of the Discoveries in the South Sea or Pacific Ocean (London, 1803-1817).

primary sources drawn upon for this fourth sketch.<sup>15</sup>

Apparently Melville was using Burney's History concerning the accidental discovery of the Encantadas. Prior to 1563 Spanish ships traveling from Peru to Chile had great difficulty because of the many shoals and reefs along the coast. In addition they had to face continual head winds from the south. Burney wrote that ships tried "to keep close to the land from an idea that if they were to lose sight of the coast, the trade winds would render their return impracticable."<sup>16</sup> This passage Melville converted to:

It had been invariable custom to keep close in with the land, from a superstitious conceit on the part of the Spaniards, that were they to lose sight of it, the eternal trade wind would waft them into unending waters, from whence would be no return.(26)

The famous pilot, Juan Fernandez, by venturing westward away from the coast, found the winds more favorable for getting to the south. It was upon this new route, about 1670, that the Galapagos were discovered.

Melville begins Sketch Seventh: "Southwest of Barrington lies Charles's Isle. And thereby hangs a history which I gathered long ago from a shipmate learned in all the lore of outlandish life." The incidents narrated

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<sup>15</sup>Leyda, Complete Stories, p. 457.

<sup>16</sup>Russell Thomas, "Melville's Use of Some Sources in The Encantadas," American Literature, III (1932), 450.

in the sketch have a relation to actual history of Charles' Island, but it is a relationship that indicates a filter of sea-gossip, as Melville asserts, rather than the use of a printed source.<sup>17</sup>

No source has been discovered for the story of the Chola widow in Sketch Eighth, except that the theme is reminiscent of Melville's Agatha story. Jay Leyda observes that the "prompt, good fellow" of a captain sounds so like a portrait of Captain John B. Coleman of the Charles and Henry that he is inclined to believe that this ship actually rescued a Chola widow when that whaler visited the Galapagos area with Melville aboard in 1842 or 1843.<sup>18</sup>

At the end of Sketch Ninth, Melville added a note referring readers to the second volume of Porter's Voyage into the Pacific and stated that "the present writer has added to Porter's facts accessory ones picked up in the Pacific from reliable sources; and where facts conflict, has naturally preferred his own authorities to Porter's. As for instance, his authorities place Oberlus on Hood's Isle; Porter's on Charles's Isle." (112) There are two known sources for the Oberlus story. One is a brief statement in Captain Amasa

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<sup>17</sup>Leyda, Complete Stories, p. 458.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 459.

Delano's Narrative of Voyages and Travels,<sup>19</sup> ". . . and it is my opinion, from what I saw, together with the information I have obtained since I was there of the progress that an Irishman was making in cultivating the interior of this island, etc." A second source that Melville may have read is the rather lengthy narrative by John Coulter, M. D., of this same event, but with several important changes.<sup>20</sup>

Coulter's version leaves the impression that the story of Patrick Watkins was current among travelers in that part of the Pacific, and, as is the way with legends, the story was altered slightly. Melville may have heard the details from a source other than that which formed the basis for the accounts of Coulter and Porter, and it is quite possible that he received an account which differed in some details from either of theirs. Melville would therefore feel justified in changing some of Porter's statements.<sup>21</sup>

Melville also relied on Captain Porter's Journal for much of the material in Sketch Tenth, including the source for the concluding poem. Porter wrote in his Journal some thirty-five years earlier that he found the epitaph on Charles' Island. But only the first two lines are Porter's;

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<sup>19</sup>(Boston, 1817).

<sup>20</sup>Adventures in the Pacific (Dublin, 1845).

<sup>21</sup>Thomas, p. 434.

the rest apparently is exclusively Melville's.<sup>22</sup>

An important work which Melville did not acknowledge, but from which he doubtless borrowed, is Charles Darwin's Journal concerning the scientific expedition to the South Pacific in 1839.<sup>23</sup> A copy of the volume is reported to have been on the frigate United States in which Melville sailed home from the Pacific in 1843. At any rate, Melville had his own copy, according to Merton Sealts' check-list of Melville's books. Sealts cites a statement of Melville's account with Harper and Brothers rendered as of July 31, 1847, showing "1 Darwin's Voyage[\$].72" with other purchases made by Herman and his brother Allan.<sup>24</sup> Darwin, as a naturalist, had visited the Galapagos in October, 1835, just six years before Melville was there. Darwin's graphic description of the flora and fauna found on the islands must have helped Melville to organize and classify his own observations. No doubt, Darwin's general impression of the group must have appealed to Melville's literary instinct.

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<sup>22</sup>Von Hagen, The Encantadas, p. 112.

<sup>23</sup>Charles Darwin, Journal of Researches into the Geology and Natural History of the Various Countries Visited by HMS Beagle, 1839 (Facsimile Reprint of the First Edition, New York: London: Hafner Publishing Company, 1952).

<sup>24</sup>Merton Sealts, Melville's Reading (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1966), p. 55.

Much has been written concerning Melville's veracity and accuracy. But he measures up very well as a writer of fiction, and no doubt the artistic approach took precedence over the factual. To him, facts were just foundations on which to build dreams, phantoms, drama. As Von Hagen points out, Melville did not prepare The Encantadas for a mariner's chart. A good many Melville analysts are concerned with the truth of Melville's "facts." It should always be remembered that he was a myth-maker, constantly inventing, transforming, dramatizing, and recollecting past events. To examine his work, to search out the borrowed and the fantastic, does not necessarily detract from his ability as an artist. Instead it tends to reveal more vividly his gifts for manipulating words and ideas.<sup>25</sup>

Darwin's first impression of the Galapagos was much like Melville's, but whereas Darwin was reporting facts, Melville was attempting to create an impression and to set a mood. Observe how Melville treats the material more picturesquely. From Darwin's scientific report:

Constitution of the whole is volcanic. With the exception of some ejected fragments of granite, which have been most curiously glazed by the heat, every part consists of lava, or of sandstone resulting from the attrition of such materials.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Von Hagen, The Encantadas, p. 106.

<sup>26</sup>Darwin, p. 453.

Melville creates a work of art, a fantastic wasteland:

Take five-and-twenty heaps of cinders dumped here and there in an outside city lot; imagine some of them magnified into mountains, and the vacant lot the sea; and you will have a fit idea of the general aspect of the Encantadas, or Enchanted Isles; looking much as the world might, after a penal conflagration. (49)

The huge tortoises which gave the archipelago its name have stirred the imagination of all who have seen them. Said Darwin: "These huge reptiles . . . appeared to my fancy like some antedeluvian animals."<sup>27</sup> And Melville echoed Darwin by calling them "huge antedeluvian-looking tortoises." (54) Darwin's "the other gave a deep hiss" became in Melville's imagination, "No voice, no low, no howl is heard; the chief sound of life here is a hiss." (51) Darwin's comment, "In order to secure the tortoises, it is not sufficient to turn them like turtle, for they are often able to regain their upright position,"<sup>28</sup> is reversed by Melville, perhaps to support a philosophical idea. He writes:

Every one knows that tortoises as well as turtles are of such a make, that if you but put them on their backs you thereby expose their bright sides without the possibility of their recovering themselves, and turning into view the other. But after you have done this, you should not swear that the tortoise has no dark side. Enjoy the bright, keep it turned up perpetually if you can, but be honest and don't deny the black. (56)

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<sup>27</sup>Darwin, p. 456.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

Melville apparently did not go with the landing crew to capture the tortoises, for his account concerns his observations after they were brought aboard ship.

Darwin's graphic description of the volcanic aspects of Narborough Island is reflected even more expressively by Melville.

Darwin:

. . . black cones, former chimneys of the subterranean heated fluids--were extraordinarily numerous. From their regular form, they gave the country a workshop appearance, which strongly reminded me of those parts of Staffordshire where the great iron foundries are most numerous. 29

Melville:

. . . no soil whatever, one seamed clinker from top to bottom; abounding in black caves like smithies; its metallic shore ringing under foot like plates of iron; its central volcanoes standing grouped like a gigantic chimney-stack. (69)

Melville had no doubt read Dampier's description of the islands, although he may have read the account as a quotation in Porter or elsewhere. Dampier described them as

. . . rocky, barren, hilly, producing neither Tree, Herb, nor Grass, but a few Dildoe-trees, except by the Seaside. The Dildoe-tree is a green prickly shrub, that grows about ten or twelve foot high, without either Leaf or Fruit. It is as big as a Man's Leg, from the root to the top, and it is full of sharp prickles, growing in thick rows from top to bottom; this shrub is fit for no use, not so much as to burn.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Darwin, p. 455.

<sup>30</sup>Victor Wolfgang Von Hagen, Equador and the Galapagos Islands (Norman, Oklahoma, 1949), p. 189.

Melville describes the islands as having "tangled thickets of wiry bushes, without fruit and without a name, springing up among deep fissures of calcined rock, and treacherously masking them; or a parched growth of distorted cactus trees." (51)

Melville's "little but reptile life is here found; tortoises, lizards, immense spiders, snakes, and that strangest anomaly of outlandish nature, the iguana." (51) echoes several earlier observers. Darwin found that "The rocks on the coast abounded with great black lizards."<sup>31</sup> And Dampier reported that the only animals he saw were the huge tortoises, the "Guanas," some green snakes, and "no other land animal."<sup>32</sup>

Captain James Colnett of HMS Rattler was an important source for The Encantadas. Melville apparently used Colnett's map. The date which Melville placed after Colnett's name corresponds to the date of an edition of Colnett's book. However, the map was reprinted in the 1822 edition of Porter's Journal.<sup>33</sup> A comparison of Melville's finished product with his source reveals his technique as an artist. Note the effective changes in these lines from Colnett:

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<sup>31</sup>Darwin, p. 458.

<sup>32</sup>Von Hagen, Equador, p. 189.

<sup>33</sup>Thomas, p. 453.

Colnett:

. . . a large quantity of dead shells, of various kinds . . . also bamboos and wild sugar canes, with a few small coconuts . . . some burnt wood that might have drifted from the continent, been thrown overboard from a ship, or fired by lightning on the spot.<sup>34</sup>

Melville:

Those parts of the strand free from the marks of fire, stretch away in wide level beaches of multitudinous dead shells, with here and there decayed bits of sugarcane, bamboos, and coconuts, washed upon this other and darker world from the charming palm isles to the westward and southward; all the way from Paradise to Tartarus; while mixed with the relics of distant beauty you will sometimes see fragments of charred wood and mouldering ribs of wrecks. (51)

Colnett was also the source for Sketch Sixth, "Barrington Isle and the Buccaneers," and Melville used quotation marks to show that he had borrowed most of the material. As always, however, Melville added the imaginative touch. Colnett's "This isle appears to have been a favorite resort of the buccaneers as we not only found seats, which had been made by them of earth and stone"<sup>35</sup> became

What do you think I saw? Seats which might have served Brahmins and presidents of peace societies. Fine old ruins of what had once been symmetric lounges of stone and turf . . . One had been a long sofa as the poet Gray might have loved to throw himself upon, his Crebillon in hand. (77)

After citing Colnett's description, Porter reported, "We neither found his delightful groves, his rivulets of water,

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<sup>34</sup>Thomas, p. 448.

<sup>35</sup>Von Hagen, The Encantadas, p. 104.

nor his seats formed by the buccaneers of earth and stone, where we might repose after our fruitless search for them."<sup>36</sup> Melville no doubt saw this observation, but could not resist giving way to a meditative mood.

Melville erred in Sketch Sixth by describing Barrington Isle as being "well sheltered from all winds by the high land of Albemarle," (77) for Barrington is almost out of sight of Albemarle, being at least fifty miles away. In Colnett's account, which Melville used, the island so described is James' Isle. Colnett's reference is vague and misleading. "On reaching the South point of James Isle, I got sight of three other isles which I have not seen before--I named them after the Admirals Barrington, Duncan, and Jarvis--We did not land on either of them." By saying "either of them," he gave the impression that he was on the first of the three, which was Barrington, while actually he was still on James' Isle.<sup>37</sup> Colnett's account continued, "At every place where we landed on the Western side we might have walked for miles through long grass beneath groves of trees." Melville used this description for Barrington Island.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>Thomas, p. 449.

<sup>37</sup>Von Hagen, The Encantadas, p. 105.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

Much of Sketch Seventh is probably from yarns and sea-gossip that Melville heard during his voyages. However, in Darwin's Journal, mention is made of the inhabitants of Charles' Island, which had been visited regularly, first by the buccaneers and later by the whalers. He noted that it was only within the last six years that a small colony had been established on it. He described the colonists as people of color, between two and three hundred in number, banished for political crimes from the Republic of Equador. He mentioned houses and a flat piece of ground on which grew sweet potatoes and bananas. "The inhabitants, although complaining of poverty, gain, without much trouble, the means of subsistence from the fertile soil."<sup>39</sup>

This sketch, "Charles's Isle and the Dog-King," is about a Cuban Creole who was given a deed to Charles' Isle for his services to Peru in its war for independence. Actually the man was General Jose Villamil, who was a Creole, born in New Orleans, not in Cuba. He fought for Ecuador, not Peru, in its war against Spain. Villamil was given power by President Vincente Roca to annex the islands in the name of Ecuador and to colonize them.<sup>40</sup> He gathered together some of the best families of Guayaquil to accompany him and the

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<sup>39</sup>Darwin, p. 456.

<sup>40</sup>Von Hagen, The Encantadas, p. 106.

colony prospered for a time. They had imported domestic animals and built homes, planted corn, potatoes, and sugar cane. Then the situation began to deteriorate. Lawlessness and anarchy became widespread. The colony disintegrated, and Villamil kept a pack of dogs, ostensibly for his own protection.<sup>41</sup>

According to Melville's version, the Creole arrives with "a disciplined cavalry company of large grim dogs." (81) Historical evidence shows that apparently the dogs were already there. In 1684 the viceroy of Peru had dogs placed on several of the islands. This was part of an effort to restrict the activities of the buccaneers who were playing havoc with Spanish shipping. It was hoped that the dogs would kill off the goats that had been placed there by the English for a reserve food supply.<sup>42</sup>

At any rate, Villamil's colony of Floreana soon degenerated into a most degraded penal colony, and the only livelihood the prisoners could make was gained by selling vegetables which they raised on their small patches of soil to the whalers who called frequently. A few members of the penal colony stole an American ship and headed for the mainland. The incident became the cause of a protracted exchange of diplomatic correspondence between the United States and

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<sup>41</sup>Von Hagen, Equador, p. 210.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 187.

the Republic of Ecuador.<sup>43</sup>

Norfolk Island, the setting for Sketch Eighth concerning the unfortunate Chola widow, is now Indefatigable Island. It is not, as Melville has it, "sequestered from the rest."<sup>(86)</sup> Actually, as a look at a map of the Galapagos will show, it is in the center of the group. Melville attempted to fit a story into each of the islands named in the last sentence of Sketch Fourth. In doing so, he took "considerable geographical and chronological license, yet since The Encantadas is not a Baedeker, the matter is of no great importance."<sup>44</sup> No authority has ever been able to pin-point a source for the incidents of the story, but Melville seems to have framed it to fit the theme of patience in the Agatha story which he had previously described to Hawthorne.

Sketch Ninth tells the story of a strange, diabolical "Oberlus" named Patrick Watkins. For whatever distinction it may be, Watkins was the Encantadas' first resident.<sup>45</sup> Watkins was a figure well-known in whaling circles in the early part of the nineteenth century, and Melville weaves fancy with legend, basing his story recognizably on Porter's version. One account has Watkins placed on the island at his own insistence, after he had quarreled with the captain

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<sup>43</sup>Von Hagen, The Encantadas, p. 107.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 108.

<sup>45</sup>Von Hagen, Equador, p. 201.

of a British ship on which he was serving. According to Melville, he deserted there. Here Watkins made himself a cave in the lava and planted potatoes and tobacco in a patch of fertile soil. These he sold to whaling ships that anchored in Post Office Bay.<sup>46</sup>

The note reportedly left by Oberlus (Watkins) when he slipped away from the island, though shortened and changed by Melville, is essentially Porter's version, but, as with most Melville adaptations, the masterly hand of the literary creator may be seen. A comparison of the postscript reveals the artistic touches. Porter has "Fatherless Oberlus" write: "note: do not kill the old hen; she is now sitting and will soon have chicks."<sup>47</sup> But Melville enlarges the concluding note and turns Oberlus into a homely philosopher:

P. S.--Behind the clinkers, nigh the oven, you will find the old fowl. Do not kill it; be patient; I leave it setting; if it shall have any chicks, I hereby bequeath them to you, whoever you may be. But don't count your chicks before they are hatched.(111)

Most of the details of Sketch Tenth are borrowed from Porter. Melville relates several instances of death on the islands. He pictures the horror of deserting or being left on one of the islands where water is scarce and the sharp-pronged lava makes walking painful. The story of a man

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<sup>46</sup>Leyda, Complete Stories, p. 460.

<sup>47</sup>Von Hagen, Equador, p. 202.

crazed by thirst who killed a seal and drank its blood is authenticated by the logbooks of whalers.<sup>48</sup> The inscription over the grave of a lieutenant of the United States frigate Essex is said to be that of Lieutenant Cowan, who challenged a brother officer, Lieutenant Gamble, to a duel. "On the shores of King James Island, at dawn, with only land iguana as witnesses, a single shot broke on the beach and Lieutenant Cowan dropped dead."<sup>49</sup> Porter describes the duel and says that he erected the fingerpost to point out the grave of Lieutenant Cowan.<sup>50</sup>

The post office consisting of a stake and a bottle is probably a weaving of facts with Melville's memory of a rotting post box he had seen while visiting the Elizabeth Islands. In relating to Hawthorne his ideas for the Agatha story, he described the post box where young Agatha goes daily for seventeen years looking for a letter from her husband. Gradually the post decays, becomes surrounded by grass, and eventually falls.<sup>51</sup> There actually was a sort of post office established on Charles' Island when traffic among the Galapagos became rather frequent. Someone set up an

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<sup>48</sup>Von Hagen, The Encantadas, pp.111-112.

<sup>49</sup>Von Hagen, Equador, pp. 200-201.

<sup>50</sup>Thomas, p. 447.

<sup>51</sup>Hugh W. Hetherington, Melville's Reviewers, 1846-1891 (Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1961), p. 157.

upturned barrel that became, in effect, the whalers' post office. This informal post office played an important part in the War of 1812. American whaling ships guided Commodore Porter to the Galapagos and to Post Office Bay. There, in the barrel, waiting to be picked up by British whalers home-ward bound, Porter found precise intelligence concerning the ships cruising among the islands. Within a few weeks, Porter had captured eleven British ships.<sup>52</sup>

The concluding poem for Sketch Tenth was drawn from Porter's Journal, but Melville used only the first two lines and made slight changes in those. It seems significant that in his version Melville eliminated the heavenly hope.

Porter:

Gentle reader, as you pass  
by,  
As you are now, so wonce  
was I;  
As now my body is in the  
dust  
I hope in heaven my soul  
to rest.<sup>53</sup>

Melville:

Oh, Brother Jack, as you pass  
by,  
As you are now, so once was I,  
Just so game, and just so gay,  
But now, alack, they've stopped  
my pay.  
No more I peep out of my  
blinkers,  
Here I be--tucked in with  
clinkers! (117)

The quotations which begin each sketch are a presentation in poetic form of the impressions and moods which Melville wished to create in prose. Of the twenty-four quotations, twenty-one are from Spenser, one is from Chatterton,

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<sup>52</sup>Von Hagen, Equador, p. 200.

<sup>53</sup>Leyda, Complete Stories, p. 461.

one from William Collins, and one remains unidentified. The Spenser quotations are from The Faerie Queene, "Mother Hubberds Tale," and "Visions of the worlds Vanitie." The second quotation for Sketch Eighth is an adaptation of the second stanza of Chatterton's "Song from Aella." The third quotation for the same sketch is from the "Dirge" for Cymbelline by William Collins. Melville made slight changes in most of the quotations to make them correspond more nearly to the scenes he was creating in The Encantadas. A few of the changes have no artistic purpose apparently and may be due to a misreading, perhaps by a copyist.<sup>54</sup> As these passages seem closely related to the theme and unity of The Encantadas, they will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter IV.

The Encantadas contains a number of allusions that may be traced to Milton, to Paradise Lost in particular. Melville's "Apples of Sodom, after touching, seem these isles"(53) was derived from Milton's treatment of Hell. The first sketch of The Encantadas is a general introduction which stresses the desolate and forbidding nature of the group of islands. Melville mentioned the apples to emphasize the "spell-bound desertness" of the islands. In the same sketch, Melville remarked that the "chief sound of life

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<sup>54</sup>Thomas, p. 433.

here is a hiss." (51) This is similar to the occasion in Paradise Lost when, as they tasted the forbidden fruit, Satan and his followers were plagued by "long and ceaseless hiss."<sup>55</sup> A few lines later, Melville added, ". . . vitrified masses . . . present a most Plutonian sight. In no world but a fallen one could such lands exist." And in the next sentence he itemized debris which had been washed "all the way from Paradise to Tartarus." Milton used Tartarus as a synonym for Hell. "Apples of Sodom, hisses, Plutonian sights, a fallen world, Paradise, and Tartarus combine to make the Encantadas hellish enough to one who can recall Milton."<sup>56</sup>

In Paradise Lost Milton used these similar lines three times:

"Thrones, Princedoms, Powers, Dominions"  
 "Thrones, Dominations, Princedoms, Virtues, Powers"  
 "Thrones, and Powers/ Princedoms, and Dominations"<sup>57</sup>

Melville used the same thought:

As we still ascend from shelf to shelf, we find the tenants of the tower serially disposed in order of their magnitude,--gannets, black and speckled haglets, jays, sea-hens, sperm-whale-birds, gulls of all varieties;--thrones, princedoms, powers, dominating one above another in senatorial array. (63)

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<sup>55</sup>Paradise Lost, X.

<sup>56</sup>H. E. Pommer, Milton and Melville (Pittsburgh, 1950), p. 67.

<sup>57</sup>Paradise Lost, III, V, X.

Melville also used "one of the princes of the powers of the earth" to describe the Creole Dog-King.(81) In Sketch Ninth Melville's "selfish ambition, or the love of rule for its own sake, far from being the peculiar infirmity of noble minds is shared by beings which have no minds at all"(105) apparently repeats a familiar quotation from "Lycidas":

Fame is the spur that the clear spirit doth raise  
(That last infirmity of noble mind).<sup>58</sup>

Melville's ability to create a multiple image with a single allusion is well illustrated by his comment on his view from the top of Rock Rodondo: "Much thus, one fancies, looks the universe from Milton's celestial battlements. A boundless watery Kentucky."(66) One image that he probably had in mind was Mulciber's being thrown "Sheer o'er the crystal battlements." But he may also have recalled Satan's seat in heaven "with pyramids and towers/ From diamond quarries hewn." and Satan's distant sight of ". . . the empyreal Heaven extended wide . . . with opal towers and battlements adorn'd." There was also the region from which Satan had obtained that sight, part of the "boundless deep" and "watery calm" of Chaos.<sup>59</sup>

To Melville the special curse of the Encantadas was "that to them change never comes; neither the change of seasons nor of sorrows." Another feature that he stressed

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<sup>58</sup>Pommer, p. 24.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., p. 65.

was "their emphatic uninhabitableness." (50) Melville's words have proved to be prophetic. Well over a hundred years after The Encantadas was written, there are still only two of the islands inhabited, Albemarle (renamed Isabella) and Chatham (renamed San Christobal). There are still more volcanoes than people, some two thousand craters, though only a handful are active. Scarcity of fresh water still plagues settlers. Pools or streams of fresh water are a rarity, although the inland heights of the islands trap passing rain clouds and support lush, junglelike vegetation. Both crops and livestock thrive on the misty uplands, but these areas are not easily accessible.<sup>60</sup>

Although of little commercial importance, the islands are of great interest to scientists, for on them are found specimens of animal life unknown elsewhere in the world. Several types were pointed out by Melville in Sketch Third. Rock Rodondo, he says, is the "resort of aquatic birds for hundreds of leagues around . . . No land-bird ever lighted on it." And, Melville adds, "I know not where one can better study the Natural History of strange sea-fowl than at Rodondo." There is the "outlandish" penguin, which Nature "as if ashamed of her failure keeps hidden away at the ends of the

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<sup>60</sup> Irving and Eleeta Johnson, "Lost World of the Galapagos," National Geographic, CV (May, 1959), 684-686.

earth, in the Straits of Magellan, and on the abased sea-story of Rodondo." Then there is the woebegone pelican, "a penitential bird, indeed, fitly haunting the shores of the clinkered Encantadas," and "the mysterious hummingbird of ocean"--Mother Carey's chickens. (63) The waters at the base of Rock Rodondo were peopled with swarms of "fairy fish . . . all were strange . . . Nothing was more striking than the complete novelty of many individuals of this multitude. Here hues were seen as yet unpainted, and figures which are unengraved." (64) Charles Darwin's investigations of the wildlife of the Galapagos provided the foundations for the great naturalist's theories of evolution.

Only a few of the huge tortoises survive, and they are edging toward extinction. Depredations of the whalers decimated the defenseless galapagos; entire islands were stripped. The tortoises are now protected by Ecuadorean law, but the islanders still slaughter them for the oil.<sup>61</sup>

At Post Office Bay on Charles' Island the wooden barrel still serves as a nautical mailbox after more than a hundred years. Mariners deposit their letters in the barrel; the next passing vessel picks them up and posts them at the first port. Through the years, grateful sailors have refurbished and renewed the post office when necessary. Members

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<sup>61</sup>Johnson, p. 688.

of a National Geographic expedition to the Galapagos Islands in 1959 tested the efficiency of the post office by leaving mail in the barrel. Two months later the letters had reached their stateside destination. Herman Melville would not have been surprised to learn that in all essentials, the Galapagos still stand, defying the centuries, as they have for thousands of years.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>62</sup>Johnson, p. 703.

## CHAPTER IV

### ANALYSIS OF STRUCTURE AND CONTENT OF THE ENCANTADAS

Numerous critics have assumed that Melville had exhausted his literary powers when he finished writing Moby-Dick. Such an assumption fails to consider the artistic development shown in his shorter fiction. True, a break-down in his romantic method is evidenced by the failure of Pierre. The same structural problems that plagued Melville when he wrote Pierre are present to a lesser degree in Moby-Dick. Both lack any unifying structure; both break into blocks of narrative material. Melville attempted, through rhetoric, to carry the burden of characterization, action, and theme. This overburdening, plus the lack of a consistent point of view, weakened Moby-Dick and turned Pierre into a failure. Perhaps Melville was aware of these failings; perhaps he was not. Nevertheless, he turned, after Pierre, to the shorter forms of fiction. And he did grow as a creative writer.<sup>1</sup>

It was natural for any American writer of the nineteenth century to consider writing short stories. Surviving scraps of notes written in the blank pages or margins of books show that Melville often jotted down ideas for stories. The impression that Hawthorne's tales made upon

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<sup>1</sup>Charles Hoffman, "The Shorter Fiction of Herman Melville," South Atlantic Quarterly, V (1932), 414-416.

him probably helped to increase his interest in the form. Additional incentive was provided when, shortly after the dismal failure of Pierre, Melville was invited to submit short pieces for Putnam's Monthly and for Harper's New Monthly Magazine.<sup>2</sup>

The "Agatha" letter to Hawthorne shows that Melville was seriously interested in writing short stories. As far as is known, he never wrote that story, but the elements of it appear in his later work. The letter shows that he understood and could use the artistic ingredients necessary in the short prose form. He mentions especially the need for concentrated action and the importance of setting the mood. As he outlined the story to Hawthorne, the storm, with its preceding calm, would establish the mood. Melville was aware that the story must have a definite structure to enclose the action, to give an underlying significance to the events, and to provide a pattern that would round it off into a complete unified whole. He emphasized several key moments and images, persistently stressing "significances."

Melville realized the value of symbolism and imagery in giving significance to events and characters. He would use the sea, the remains of a wrecked ship embedded in the sand,

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<sup>2</sup>Herman Melville, Complete Stories, ed. Jay Leyda (New York, 1949), p. x.

and the decaying mailbox as symbols and images. Agatha's shawl would be an emblem of Robinson's concealment of his sin. Agatha's father, driven away from the sea by repeated disaster, "now tends a lighthouse to warn people from those very perils from which he himself suffered."<sup>3</sup>

The Encantadas may not fit into a rigid definition of a short story, for it lacks a single line of action or plot. But it is a carefully organized work with a compact structure, a carefully sustained mood, thematic unity, and an underlying significance strongly emphasized through symbolism and imagery. The Encantadas is unified by two major themes that dominate the work, while related minor themes also contribute to the unity of the whole. There is an explicit theme--this is a fallen world--and an implied theme concerning the complex nature of reality. These themes are developed through description, mood, and imagery. Although ostensibly told by Melville, as an observer who visited the islands as a seaman, the reactions and comments seem more that of a nineteenth century romantic than of Melville. Whenever Melville's voice creeps in, it is usually in the form of stereotyped platitudes that, at first glance, seem to be straightforward comments of the naive narrator. A closer look at such comments, within their context, reveals

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<sup>3</sup>Hoffman, p. 423.

a subtle irony directed toward some aspect of Melville's search for truths concerning the nature of man, the nature of God, or the ambiguity of good and evil in the world.

The ten sketches that make up The Encantadas are all set within the framework of the Galapagos Islands. Each sketch is a complete unit, yet there is a distinct pattern that contributes to the final effect of the whole. Each focuses on a different part of the island group or presents them from varying points of view. Each is dominated by a particular symbol or other such device that contributes to the unity. Sketches one and two set the mood with a general description of the mysterious islands as a whole. Three and four go to towering Rock Rodondo, where the viewer can see the group in perspective. Sketches five and six focus attention on visitors from the outside world who resist the evil enchantment of the islands. Seven, eight, and nine deal with the disintegrating and corrupting effect which some "diabolical enchantress" has on human life. Sketch ten, a summary of observations and legends concerning the Enchanted Islands, ends appropriately with an epitaph found inscribed on a gravestone on Chatham Isle.<sup>4</sup> To create the atmosphere of enchantment for The Encantadas, Melville prefaced each

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<sup>4</sup>I. Newberry, "Encantadas: Melville's Inferno," American Literature, XXXVIII (March, 1966), 51.

of the sketches with bits of poetry, mostly from Spenser. Some of the passages were altered to bring about a closer unity between the poetry and Melville's prose. These literary allusions serve to emphasize the feeling of enchantment, which seems to signify the omnipotence of evil.<sup>5</sup>

Sketch First describes the group as a whole and sets the mood of mystery and enchantment and desolate emptiness that characterizes them all. The residue of ash and clinkers from long-extinct volcanoes gives the islands a barrenness and dreariness unequaled anywhere else in the world. The most provocative aspect, to Melville, is their changelessness. Due to their position on the Equator, their climate never varies. The islands, for the most part, are uninhabitable, strangely lacking in animal life and vegetation. The capricious winds and unpredictable currents surrounding them add to the atmosphere of eerie enchantment. For many years, as the narrator points out, navigators attempting to chart that part of the Pacific failed to pinpoint the islands accurately on their maps. Because of the strange currents, the islands, when observed from aboard ship, often appeared to be moving. But to one ashore, they "appear invariably the same; fixed, cast, glued into the very body of cadaverous death." (53) The epigraph for this sketch, taken from

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<sup>5</sup>I. Newberry, "Encantadas: Melville's Inferno," p. 51.

Spenser's Faerie Queene, is as fitting a prelude to the prose that follows as if Melville had composed it himself. The lines conform to Melville's dominant purpose of surrounding these islands with a peculiar atmosphere consisting of a mixture of enchantment, desolation, and inhospitality:

For those same islands, seeming now and than,  
 Are not firme land, nor any certain wonne,  
 But stragglng plots, which to and fro do ronne  
 In the wide waters; therefore do them shonne;  
 Darke, dolefull, dreary, like a greedy grave;  
 On top whereof ay dwelt the ghostly owle,  
 Shrieking his balefull note, which ever drove  
 Far from that haunt all other cheerful fowle;  
 And all about it wandering ghostes did wayle and howle.<sup>6</sup>

Here are islands that are deemed enchanted because they move about in the waters, as early navigators believed the Enchanted Islands did.<sup>7</sup> And the Encantadas, though dark, doleful, and dreary, have a hypnotic effect upon the romantic narrator, causing his fancy to conjure up visions of these scenes many years after the experience.

Sketch Second describes the Galapagos tortoises for which the archipelago is named. To Melville these creatures, having no beauty of face or figure, became an emblem of eternal hopeless endurance.<sup>8</sup> An old superstition among mariners

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<sup>6</sup>Book II, Canto xii, Stanzas 11 and 12.

<sup>7</sup>Russell Thomas, "Melville's Use of Some Sources in The Encantadas," American Literature, III (1932), 444.

<sup>8</sup>R. H. Fogle, Melville's Shorter Tales (Norman, Oklahoma, 1960), p. 94.

saw the grim "convict tortoises as wicked sea-officers malignantly transformed and condemned to drag themselves for ages over the scorched volcanic rock." The introductory lines for the sketch are from the Faerie Queene, beginning with "Most ugly shapes and horrible aspects,/ Such as Dame Nature selfe mote feare to see."<sup>9</sup> Melville made changes in several lines to make them conform to the tortoise sketch. The Faerie Queene lines are quoted below, with Melville's version following. Words and phrases that were changed are underlined.

Spenser:

Ne wonder, if these did the Knight appall;  
 For all that here on earth we dreadfull hold,  
 Be but as bugs to fearen babes withal,  
 Compared to the creatures in the seas entrall.

Melville:

Ne wonder if these do a man appall;  
 For all that here at home we dreadfull hold,  
 Be but as bugs to fearen babes withall,  
 Compared to the creatures in these isles entrall.

Sketch Third, aptly titled "Rock Rodondo," describes this huge tower-like rock which rises some two hundred fifty feet high. Located ten miles from land, it seems to overlook the rest of the islands, and because of its height, is the first to be seen by approaching ships. It is invariably mistaken for a sail, the narrator explains, thus adding to

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<sup>9</sup>Book II, Canto xii, Stanzas 23, 25, 26.

the sense of strangeness and enchantment. The rock rises in uniform layers that form shelf-like projections at intervals. Each of the rocky ledges is inhabited by numerous sea-fowl. Melville's prose description of the strange birds living on the rock seems to echo the lines from Faerie Queene used to introduce the sketch:

For thy this hight the Rock of vile Reproch,  
 A daungerous and dreadfull place,  
 To which nor fish nor fowle did once approach;  
 But yelling mewes, with seagulles hoars and bace,  
 And cormoyrants, with birds of ravenous race,  
 Which still sit waiting on that dreadfull clift.

With that the rolling sea resounding soft,  
 In his big base them fitly answered;  
 And on the Rock the waves breaking aloft  
 A solemne mean unto them measured;  
 Suddenly an innumerable flight  
 Of harmefull fowles about them fluttering cride,  
 And with their wicked wings them oft did smight,  
 And sore annoyed, groping in that griesly night.  
 Even all the nation of the unfortunate  
 And fatall birds about them flocked were.<sup>10</sup>

The Encantadas' huge rock which looks like a sail in the distance is "transformed apace into a craggy keep." (61)  
 The rocky ledges were "alive with sea-fowl," which created "a demoniac din." No land-bird ever lighted here. Instead there were predatory birds described as "locust-flights of strong bandit birds, with long bills cruel as daggers." (62)  
 Penguins occupy the lower ledge--"truly neither fish, flesh, nor fowl . . . without exception the most ambiguous and

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<sup>10</sup>Book II, Canto xii, Stanzas 8, 33, 35, 36.

least lovely creature yet discovered by man." On the next shelf above are pelicans, "a penitential bird, indeed, fitly haunting the shores of the clinkered Encantadas." Succeeding shelves are inhabited by the "unsightly, unpoetic" goney, or gray albatross; and gannets, black and speckled haglets, jays, sea-hens, sperm-whale birds. "Sprinkled over all . . . the stormy petrel or Mother Cary's chicken sounds his continual challenge and alarm . . . whose chirrup under the stern is ominous to mariners." (63)

Melville made a few minor changes in the quotations for this sketch and one important change. In the second line above, the "dreadful place" was "detestable place" in Spenser's poem. Melville did not see the Encantadas as detestable.<sup>11</sup> To him they were dreadful in a way that inspired fear and awe, as did Milton's descriptions of Hell.

Sketch Fourth, "A Pisgah View from the Rock," is introduced by two short lines from the Faerie Queene.<sup>12</sup> This is a good example of Melville's technique in the use of source material. Taking the first line of two different stanzas, he combined them into a couplet suitable for introducing this sketch, which is a description of the view from

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<sup>11</sup>Thomas, p. 439.

<sup>12</sup>Book I, Canto x, Stanzas 53, 55.

Rock Rodondo.<sup>13</sup>

That done, he leads him to the highest Mount,  
From whence, far off he unto him did shew . . .

In the sketch the narrator invites the reader to take an imaginary climb with him up Rock Rodondo. From the top he points out the positions, not only of the visible world nearby, but also the invisible worlds touched by the same waters of the Pacific: to the south, the "Antarctic Pole;" to the west, the Polynesian chain of islands; to the east, the continent of South America. Melville relates a little of the interesting history of the Galapagos, beginning with their discovery about the year 1670. He also points out and names several of the islands and bays, giving their locations relative to each other and descriptive information about each of them. He then calls special attention to four "rather notable isles--Barrington, Charles's, Norfolk, and Hood's," and announces that "succeeding chapters will reveal some ground for their notability." (73)

The very short Sketch Fifth, which recounts an incident involving the United States frigate Essex, is introduced by four lines from Spenser's "Visions of the Worlds Vanitie," stanza 9:

Looking far foorth into the ocean wide,  
A goodly ship with banners bravely dight,

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<sup>13</sup>Thomas, p. 439.

And flag in her top-gallant I espide  
Through the maine sea making her merry flight.

One morning in 1813, according to Melville's version, while the Essex lay becalmed near Rock Rodondo, a strange sail was descried. Believing it to be an enemy ship, an English whaler, the Essex attempted to give chase, but was drawn into the rapid current and came near to foundering on Rock Rodondo. The pursued ship disappeared and, to the sailors on the Essex, could only have been an enchanted ship. Actually, according to Porter's version, the strange ship was captured later, but Melville ignored this fact in order to enhance the effect of enchantment.<sup>14</sup>

This abbreviated sketch does not seem to fit very well into the organization of The Encantadas. Melville may have had in mind the legend of the Flying Dutchman, a phantom sea captain who sailed without rest upon the high seas. In life the captain swore during a violent storm that he would round the Cape of Good Hope if it took him until Judgment Day. As punishment he was forced to sail the Southern seas forever. In addition to the enchantment aspects, the sketch seems related to the predatory motif which underlies all of the sketches. For no sooner did the Essex escape destruction on the rocks, than she made use of that salvation to attempt to destroy the other vessel.

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<sup>14</sup>Thomas, p. 446.

"Barrington Isle and the Buccaneers" is the title of Sketch Sixth. This island, unlike most of the others in the group, has good water, a sheltered harbor, and tortoises to provide food. There are evidences of long-ago pirate inhabitants: old cutlasses and daggers, broken wine jars, and the remnants of a once-fine old sofa. Most of the sketch is in the form of a quotation attributed to "a sentimental voyager long ago." This sentimental narrator, who reflects the romanticism of Melville's day, describes a stroll around the island, observing and commenting on the variety of items left by the pirates. He is struck by the incongruity of cutlasses and daggers found in shady groves where the pirates had made seats of stone and turf "which might have served Brahmins and presidents of peace societies." These sights lead to philosophical pondering upon the probability that among these robbers and murderers were "some gentlemanly, companionable souls, capable of genuine tranquility and virtue." (76)

The epigraph opening the sketch consists of eight lines from Spenser's "Mother Hubberds Tale" plus three lines from an unidentified source, possibly Melville's own composition.<sup>15</sup>

Let us all servile base subjection scorne;  
And as we bee sonnes of the earth so wide,

Lords of the world, and so will wander free,  
Where so us listeth, uncontrol'd of anie.

How bravely now we live, how jocund, how  
near the first inheritance, without fear, how  
free from little trouble!

The lines would serve quite well as a motto for the buccaneers. They are from the section of the "Mother Hubbard's Tale" in which the Fox and Ape grow weary of their lot and begin, by thievery and fraud, to seek their fortunes in far countries.<sup>16</sup>

Melville likens the pirates to the Fox and the Ape, misfits in the everyday world, who were disgruntled because most of the world's wealth was held by a few while others had nothing. As the Fox and Ape blame society for their lack of worldly goods, Melville's narrator charitably suggests that the buccaneers may have been forced into such a life by "persecution, or adversity, or secret and unavenged wrongs . . . driven from Christian society to seek the melancholy solitude or the guilty adventures of the sea." (75) Here Melville seems to be making a two-fold attack, not only upon the ills of society, but also upon the evil in man's nature. The two forces combine to produce such a philosophy as the epigraph shows and which causes men to become "hermits, castaways, and solitaries."

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<sup>16</sup>Leon Howard, Herman Melville, A Biography (Berkeley, California, 1951), p. 210.

The Seventh Sketch, "Charles's Isle and the Dog-king," tells the interesting history of one man's attempt to colonize the islands. A Creole adventurer from Cuba, who received title to the island for his help in the Peruvian revolution from Spain, settled on the island with some eighty colonists and a company of large dogs. The colonizing experiment proved unsuccessful, due perhaps to the unsavory character of many of the settlers. The Creole ruler eventually had to declare martial law and set his dogs to guard the rebellious subjects. Many men died or were killed while a few managed to escape. To gain new recruits, the crafty monarch cajoled sailors from passing whalers into deserting and joining him. But mutiny broke out among the new subjects, and the king of Charles' Island was de-throned and carried away to Peru. The first epigraph for the sketch adequately describes the motley crew in their mutiny:

Loe with outragious cry  
 A thousand villeins round about him swarmd  
 Out of the rockes and caves adjoyning nye;  
 Vile caitive wretches, ragged, rude, deformed,  
 All threatning death, all in straunge manner armd;  
 Some with unweldy clubs, some with long speares,  
 Some rusty knives, some staves in fier warmd.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Edmund Spenser, Faerie Queene, Book II, Canto ix, Stanza 13.

The second epigraph, which is the creed of the Fox and the Ape in Spenser's "Mother Hubberds Tale," seems a fitting motto for the outlaws in the "riotocracy" they established after the overthrow of the Creole Dog-King:

We will not be of anie occupation,  
 Let such vile vassals borne to base vocation  
 Drudge in the world, and for their living droyle,  
 Which have no wit to live withouten toyle.

In Melville's account the island "became Anathema--a sea Alsatia." Certainly it was "Anathema" to captains of passing ships from which many sailors deserted. But it was "Alsatia" to sailors tired of life of servitude aboard ship. As citizens of this universal nation, they could, in the name of liberty, do just as they pleased. But the narrator notes that many of them soon tired of life on the island and returned to the drudgery of the sailor's life.

Sketch Eighth, "Norfolk Isle and the Chola Widow," relates the story of a Cholo, or half-breed Indian woman of Payta, Peru, who with her young husband and her only brother, were left on the island by a French whaler. The object of their expedition was to procure tortoise oil. The captain of the ship agreed to return for them in four months. Some seven weeks later, the woman, Hunilla, saw her husband and brother drown when their frail boat capsized in the capricious waves. After almost three years of hardships and heartaches, the widow was rescued by the crew of a ship that

had stopped at the island to hunt tortoises. The tale is told by a narrator who says that he was a crewman on the ship and a member of the rescue party. To create the proper atmosphere for the somber narrative, Melville combined passages from Spenser, Chatterton, and William Collins. The first epigraph becomes a perfect picture of the widow when first sighted by one of the sailors aboard ship:

At last they in an Island did espy  
 A seemely woman, sitting by the shore,  
 That with great sorrow and sad agony  
 Seemed some great misfortune to deplore,  
 And lowd to them for succor called evermore.<sup>18</sup>

In the second line, Melville substituted "woman" for "maiden." The woman who was rescued was a widow, so he could not use the word "maiden." These lines set the mood and become the motif for the first part of the narrative. As a motif for the Chola woman's pathetic tale of the death of her husband and brother near Norfolk and of how she buried them, Melville quotes from Thomas Chatterton's "Mynstrelle's Songe from Aella." In turning the last of Chatterton's verse to his purpose, Melville makes a necessary change:

Gone to hys deathe-bedde  
 All under the Wyllowe tree,

became

Gone to hys deathe-bedde,  
 All under the cactus-tree,

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<sup>18</sup>Faerie Queene, Book II, Canto xii, Stanza 27.

No account tells of willow trees growing on the Galapagos, but the littoral is interspersed with large cactus.<sup>19</sup> The third epigraph for Sketch Eighth, from William Collins' "Dirge for Cymbeline," is in keeping with the tone at the close of the sketch, with Hunilla "passing into Payta town, riding upon a small gray ass . . ."

Each lonely scene shall thee restore  
 For thee the tear be duly shed;  
 Belov'd till life can charm no more,  
 And mourn'd till Pity's self be dead.

The hermit Oberlus and his life on Hood's Isle is the subject of Sketch Ninth. Melville's portrait of the wild, malign creature who lived there among the clinkers is unparalleled in descriptive writing. The evil Oberlus cultivated the thin, unproductive soil and raised a few degenerate potatoes and pumpkins, which he sold or traded to passing whalers. Obtaining an old blunderbuss by barter or theft, Oberlus kidnapped unsuspecting seamen who came ashore for water or food. These unfortunates he set to work digging and cultivating the soil for his meager garden. After a while, Oberlus and his small army seized a boat and escaped from the island. The story ends with his being thrown into jail in Payta, Peru, as a suspicious character. For this portrait of the strange Oberlus, Melville found an excellent

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<sup>19</sup>Herman Melville, The Encantadas, or Enchanted Isles, ed. Victor W. Von Hagen (Burlingame, California, 1940), p. 109.

parallel in the Faerie Queene:

That darksome glen they enter, where they find  
 That cursed man, low sitting on the ground,  
 Musing full sadly in his sullein mind;  
 His griesie lockes, long growen and unbound,  
 Disordred hong about his shoulders round,  
 And hid his face; through which his hollow eyne  
 Lookt deadly dull, and stared as astound;  
 His raw-bone cheekes, through penurie and pine,  
 Were shronke into his jawes, as he did never dine.  
 His garments nought but many ragged clouts,  
 With thornes together pind and patched was,  
 The which his naked sides he wrapt abouts.<sup>20</sup>

Melville's hermit seemed "beast-like," with "rags insufficient to hide his nakedness . . . all bepatched," hidden under an old black tarpaulin hat. His strange nature was so warped and crooked that "the very handle of his hoe seemed gradually to have shrunk and twisted in his grasp." (103) It was the hermit's custom to turn his back and avert his face whenever he encountered a stranger. The narrator finds no redeeming qualities in this misanthrope, describing him as more degraded than his only companions, the tortoises, which lack even the intelligent will of an Oberlus.

Following the stories concerning specific incidents and characters in sketches five through nine, the tenth returns to the general and briefly mentions several legends about "Runaways, Castaways, and Solitaries" on the islands. The sketch is introduced by a short epigraph from the

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<sup>20</sup>Book I, Canto ix, Stanzas 35, 36.

Faerie Queene which does not seem relevant to the prose material. However, it effectively sets the mood for this final look at the blighted isles:

And all about old stocks and stubs of trees,  
Whereon nor fruit nor leafe was ever seen,  
Did hang upon the ragged rocky knees;  
On which had many wretches hanged beene.<sup>21</sup>

Melville depicts the Encantadas as an "other and darker" world than ours, yet it is a part of our world, too, for "in no world but a fallen one could such lands exist." This place of "penal hopelessness" is useful only as a refuge for outcasts from the outer world.<sup>22</sup> Symbolic of the human derelicts cast upon these dead shores are the decayed "bits of sugar-cane, bamboos, and cocoanuts . . . charred wood and mouldering ribs of wrecks" (51) brought by the tide from a better, lovelier world, or so concludes the optimistic narrator. Simply by their existence the barren, fire-blasted Encantadas seem to prove the fall of man and of the world.<sup>23</sup> The utter desolation of the uninhabited and uninhabitable Galapagos attests to the reality of evil, as seen here in the eternity of barrenness and drouth. They are utterly accursed: "Apples of Sodom, after touching, seem these isles." (53)

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<sup>21</sup>Book I, Canto ix, Stanza 34.

<sup>22</sup>Warner Berthoff, The Example of Melville (Princeton: The Princeton University Press, 1962), p. 77.

<sup>23</sup>Fogle, Melville's Shorter Tales, p. 93.

In The Encantadas, Melville's explicit theme of a fallen world is woven together with his implied theme concerning the nature of reality, and both themes are supported and expanded by the use of symbolism and imagery. The spirit of enchantment that pervades the islands is carefully woven into the sketches. Appropriately introduced by Spenser's "enchantments drear," the sketches are full of examples of complexities and ambiguities. Melville fuses a myriad of scenes into a composite picture of a bleak, fallen world, filled with evil enchantments.<sup>24</sup>

Sketch First describes the islands as a hell, inhabited by the damned. "They are cracked by an everlasting drouth beneath a torrid sky." Their likeness to hell is emphasized by the allusion to Lazarus and Dives. "'Have mercy on me,' the wailing spirit of the Encantadas seems to cry, 'and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame.'" (50) Part of the horror of the Encantadas is in their absoluteness, the curse of changelessness. Being in a state of complete ruin already, time cannot affect them. Complete desolation cannot become more desolate. The hellishness is magnified by the air of hopelessness and despair which surrounds them in this

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<sup>24</sup>Harry Levin, The Power of Blackness (New York, 1960), p. 189.

gloomy and forsaken world. The islands, in helpless passivity, "lie open to the ills which are heaped on them."<sup>25</sup>

Melville deliberately separates the islands from the outside world which changes and has associations with humanity. In this isolated, fallen world, the effect of evil on life can be examined in all its complexity and horror. The "enchantment" theme emphasized in the sketches signifies the omnipotence of evil. I. Newberry states that Melville's analysis of this malevolence falls into a distinct pattern. The first four sketches trace the impact of this evil on plant and animal life. Here evil is pictured as a primal force which seems to dispel the possibility of God's divine plan. In the fifth and sixth sketches, attention centers on the fortunate few who escape the diabolical influence of the islands. This section suggests that evil can be mitigated under certain conditions and offers possibilities of at least a temporary escape. Sketches seven through ten show the effects on individual wanderers who are unable to resist the wicked enchantments. These also point out instances of man-created evil, a force which affects men's relationships with each other.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Fogle, Melville's Shorter Tales, p. 95.

<sup>26</sup>Newberry, pp. 51,54.

The geographical features of the islands are adapted to the moral vision. There are three clearly-defined circles. In the center or innermost circle, are Albemarle and Marlborough where "toil the demons of fire" and throw "their strange spectral illumination for miles and miles around." (71) According to Newberry, this is where the evil curse originates--the curse of changelessness. That Melville intended to show that evil originated in this inner circle seems probable, but Newberry neglects to explain how the toiling "demons of fire" are related to the curse of changelessness. Next there is a semihabitable outer ring, which includes Barrington, Charles', Norfolk, and Hood's Isles. The sketches concerning this outer ring show the power of evil lessening. With the loss of some of the evil power, these islands have become semihabitable. Yet, when man appears here, another, even more satanic, curse operates. Evil circumstances combined with human corruption "make the inhospitable islands into a new hell, in which man's efforts to establish a society (the Dog-King), a family (Hunilla), and finally a 'hermitage' (Oberlus) are doomed to failure."<sup>27</sup>

The third ring is the outside world; Quito, the Polynesian chain, Kingsmill, and the Antarctic Pole. This outside world, not visible in the sketches, is conjured up

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<sup>27</sup>Newberry, p. 59.

in the imagination of the narrator from the top of Rock Rodondo. This "Mount Pisgah" view is reminiscent of Milton's "celestial battlements." Both these references suggest that the unseen world is a better one, Mount Pisgah referring to Moses' view of the promised land and the celestial battlements to heaven.<sup>28</sup> But these are the words of the naive narrator, not necessarily reflecting Melville's beliefs. They may instead be an ironic comment on the general optimism of the times. Newberry presents a convincing explanation, but in view of Melville's increasingly pessimistic outlook, the unseen world may be no better than the visible one.

Newberry believes that the crew of the Essex and the buccaneers evade the evil enchantments of the islands because they have a prior commitment to some other establishment, or to some other world. This commitment prevents their surrendering themselves to the influence of the islands. The Essex crew remains aboard ship, while the buccaneers, more closely related to the evil world, sometimes live there for months, but they never build dwellings, are never without their ships, and presumably sleep aboard ship rather than ashore. It appears from this that the only way to avoid the evil spell of the islands is by some kind of group involvement. For man the only protection against such evil lies in

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<sup>28</sup>Newberry, p. 60.

the purely human sphere, through participation in a society of fellow men.<sup>29</sup> Although this theory is stated often in Melville's work, he never seemed willing to become deeply involved with others. Possibly Hawthorne's influence is reflected here, for one of his favorite themes is the need of humans for one another, stressing the sin of isolation. Melville seemed to agree, but after his close association with Hawthorne ended, this theory seemed only another of his shattered ideals.

The last section of The Encantadas deals with characters who, lacking the protection of involvement, fall victims to the evil spell. The Dog-King, Hunilla, and Oberlus are all representative of mankind. "Yet they are the outcasts, the forlorn of this world, who come here as a last resort, with approximately the same considerations as prompted Satan to live in Hell."<sup>30</sup> Their attempts to civilize this inhospitable world fail. The Dog-King "who found it better to rule in Hell than serve in Heaven" illustrates two extremes man should avoid--anarchy and one-man tyranny. The Dog-King failed to realize that only devils would live in Hell, and if they were not already devils, they would become so in a hellish environment. The first premise of the fall obviates

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<sup>29</sup>Newberry, pp. 60-61.

<sup>30</sup>Fogle, Melville's Shorter Tales, p. 105.

a failure in such an attempt.<sup>31</sup> Hunilla's failure is a result of "victimized confidence" and "inconsiderate trust." Her experience is foreshadowed in Sketch Three by the fearlessness and tameness of the fish around Rock Rodondo: "Poor fish of Rodondo! in your victimized confidence, you are of the number who inconsiderately trust, while they do not understand human nature." (65) Hunilla's crowning spiritual achievement is her endurance, which elevates her above the curse of environment. The Encantadas are evil and piteous, but there is no evil in Hunilla. She becomes an example of an important force for good, not founded in a belief in God or Divine Providence, but which is due to the human action of spiritual self-conquest. "We might be tempted to conclude that the only hope for good depends on humanity and man's spirit."<sup>32</sup>

Oberlus committed himself completely to the evil of the islands and became the epitome of human bestiality, yet even so he is pitiable. Severing all genuine ties with mankind, he becomes more and more like his "mother," Sycorax. A victim of enchantment, he symbolizes the Encantadas at their worst. His intimacy with his island accentuates his resemblance to the distorted landscape, for he is familiar

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<sup>31</sup>Fogle, Melville's Shorter Tales, p. 106.

<sup>32</sup>Newberry, p. 66.

with every part of it. He knows all the secret hiding places, and there he takes refuge.<sup>33</sup> In committing his evil deeds, he seems to "act out of mere delight in tyranny and cruelty, by virtue of a quality inherited from Sycorax, his mother." (105) At last he becomes, in the philosophy of the narrator, "a creature whom it is religion to detest, since it is philanthropy to hate a misanthrope." (112)

Melville's implied theme concerning the nature of reality is bound up with the idea of "enchantment" that surrounds the Enchanted Isles. Efforts to break through the visible evil to find the truth are thwarted at every turn by the frightening enchantments and ambiguities that engulf this dark, condemned world. "Tangled thickets of wiry bushes" produce no fruit, and they "treacherously mask" the deep fissures of calcined rock." Conflicting currents eddy through nearly all the wide channels of the entire group. "Nowhere is the wind so light, baffling, and every way unreliable, and so given to perplexing calms." At times a ship trying to approach the islands may be swept away by the currents. "And yet, at other times, there is a mysterious indraft, which irresistibly draws a passing vessel among the isles, though not bound to them." These capricious currents, along with the light and variable winds,

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<sup>33</sup>Fogle, Melville's Shorter Tales, p. 112.

resulted in the belief that there were two clusters of islands about a hundred leagues apart. "This apparent fleetingness and unreality of the locality of the isles was probably one reason for the Spaniards calling them the Encantada, or Enchanted Group." (52)

The term "enchantment" may also be applied to the tortoises found on the islands. A superstition has grown up among mariners that all wicked sea-officers are transformed into tortoises. After his first sight of these weird creatures, the narrator relates that he dreamed of them as Brahmin, but reverence for the tortoise was no deterrent to eating him next day. Thus, Melville emphasizes the inhumane nature of the islands.

The great tortoise seems to be the true symbol and protagonist of the Galapagos, and even their deity.<sup>34</sup> Although the islands are likened to a hell, their lord (unlike Satan, the figure of eternal defiance) is an emblem of eternal, hopeless endurance, dragging himself sluggishly over the vitreous rocks of these islands. There is dignity in the traditional Satan, especially the Miltonic version, but here the god of evil lacks any real dignity and can be admired only for his endurance. However, unlike the orthodox Satan, he is found to have a light as well as a dark

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<sup>34</sup>Fogle, Melville's Shorter Tales, p. 101.

side, although ordinarily the dark side is uppermost.<sup>35</sup> The implication is that the bright side is not all of reality any more than is the dark upper surface, but the tortoise must be turned into an unnatural position to expose the bright side. Even this island hell may be found to have a bright side concealed beneath the visible dreariness.<sup>36</sup> But the degree of brightness depends upon the point of view and is often deceptive. Among the pleasanter aspects the narrator cites are the delicious steaks provided by the lowly tortoises and the objects of usefulness and beauty which may be carved from their shells. Elsewhere he mentions the beautiful fairy-fish that swim around the base of Rock Rodondo and describes the appealing aspects of Barrington Isle, where the buccaneers find good water and anchorage, food, fuel, and shelter. But the tortoise is useful only in death, the lovely fish are caught for sport, and Barrington Isle is used as a base and a hiding-place for outlaws bent on murder and thievery. From a distance, Rock Rodondo appears to be a tall lighthouse or a gay sailing ship, but the near observer knows that it is a dead desert rock.

R. H. Fogle describes The Encantadas as "a single image, a unified experience."<sup>37</sup> But within the framework

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<sup>35</sup>Fogle, Melville's Shorter Tales, p. 94.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 97.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 92.

of the larger image, Melville uses a myriad of images, all of them related to the image of the fallen world. He often uses contrasting images and multiple images which, through their interrelationships, enhance their individual effect.<sup>38</sup> Contrasting pictures are projected to make a light one brighter, and a dark one darker. Such extremes as heat and cold, and fire and ice stimulated Melville. Part of the attraction which the story of Lazarus and Dives had for him was the contrast it represented between the coolness of Abraham's bosom and the infernal fires. The islands of Galapagos are personified in the image of Lazarus crying out for water.<sup>39</sup>

Color, often important in literary imagery, is almost completely absent from The Encantadas. The landscape of the islands is described almost entirely in shades of black and gray. Green, ordinarily a symbol of life, is almost non-existent. Melville mentions the "furry greenness" of the moss growing on the backs of the venerable tortoises and "mantling the rude peelings and healing the fissures of their shattered shells." (57) Thus nature maintains life in order

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<sup>38</sup>John Paul Runden, "Imagery in Melville's Shorter Fiction," (unpublished Doctor's Dissertation, Indiana University, Bloomington, 1952), p. 1.

<sup>39</sup>Hershel Parker, ed., The Recognition of Herman Melville (Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1967), p. 269.

that these condemned creatures may continue their dateless, indefinite penitential servitude.

In Sketch Eighth green is mentioned for its absence. On her husband's grave, Hunilla "planted a rude cross of withered sticks--no green ones might be had." (92) And when the narrator visited the grave, he found it "a bare heap of finest sand, like that unverdured heap found at the bottom of an hour-glass run out." (99) In both examples absence of green enhances the dreariness of the region.<sup>40</sup> All the desolation of the Encantadas is made more poignant by an emphasis on what is absent, by their starkness contrasted with the familiar settled world.<sup>41</sup>

John P. Runden describes Melville's use of the concept of time as both an image and a structural device. The most striking examples are found in sketches one, two, and eight. The usual concept of time is as a series of layers, beginning with the thin uppermost layer of the present and the recent past. The next layer includes the Renaissance and Medieval periods, and beneath them the classical period. Farther down lie the time strata of the Old Testament and Hindu mythology. Still deeper may be found the primitive ages and prehistoric monsters, and ultimately the creation

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<sup>40</sup>Runden, p. 33.

<sup>41</sup>Berthoff, p. 77.

of earth itself. Anticipating Darwin, whose theories had not yet been published, Melville, through these images of time, presents a striking review of evolution. The ease with which he moves from one period to another in his imagery creates much of the unusual effect.

The first and second sketches range through all the levels of time. At first the period is indeterminate. The present desolation is like that of "abandoned cemeteries of long ago, old cities by piecemeal tumbling to their ruin." Then time acquires a frame of reference in the oldest historical period. The isles are exalted in desolation "above Idumea;" the spirit of the Encantadas cries out in the words of Dives calling on Lazarus for water to relieve his thirst. "The wastes of weedy Babylon," the haunt of jackals, is less solitary than the Enchanted Isles. With their burned out appearance they "present a most Plutonian sight;" in their ashiness they seem "apples of Sodom, after touching." The unbelievable longevity of the gigantic tortoises make them apt symbols of the antiquity of the islands.<sup>42</sup>

In Sketch Second Melville slips even farther into the past, to the deepest layer of time, then advances to an indeterminate period and returns to the present, a present which has been subtly changed by the imagistic review of past

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<sup>42</sup>Runden, p. 129.

eras. The "ante-deluvian looking tortoises, mystic creatures, suddenly transplanted by night from unutterable solitudes to our peopled deck" seemed "new crawled forth from beneath the foundations of the world." (57) Through imagery the tortoises have become the same age as the world. From this deepest layer of time, the creation, the succeeding images move to later and later layers returning to the present.<sup>43</sup>

The tortoises seem to be the identical ones "whereon the Hindoo plants this total sphere." The narrator examines them more closely. Now they are no longer tortoises; they have expanded and become transfigured. "I seemed to see three Roman Coliseums in magnificent decay." Then he addresses the tortoises themselves: "Ye oldest inhabitants of this or any other isle, pray, give me the freedom of your three walled towns." In the sequence of images merging rapidly one upon another, like a montage, the tortoises first become one with the undergirding of the world, then three coliseums, and finally, inhabitants of three walled towns. The idea of their shells as towns is emphasized when the narrator asks, "What other bodily being possesses such a citadel wherein to resist the assaults of Time?" (57)<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>Runden, p. 130.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 131.

As he examines the strange old scars, the narrator feels "like an antiquary of a geologist, studying the bird-tracks and ciphers upon the exhumed slates trod by incredible creatures whose very ghosts are now defunct." (57) For a brief moment the narrator returns to the simple present as he lies in his bunk listening to the ponderous creatures dragging themselves across the deck and butting futilely against immovable objects, enduring "their crowning curse . . . their drudging impulse to straightforwardness in a belittered world." (58) But from the present he sinks again into the past, and moves from the definite area of the Enchanted Isles into an indefinite, almost indefinable land. The logic is no longer that of the conscious world, but becomes instead that of a dream encompassing all of time and space:

Listening to these draggings and concussions, I thought me of the haunt from which they came; an isle full of metallic ravines and gulches, sunk bottomlessly into the hearts of splintered mountains, and covered for many miles with inextricable thickets. I then pictured these straightforward monsters, century after century, writhing through the shades, grim as blacksmiths; crawling so slowly and ponderously, that not only did toadstools and all fungus things grow beneath their feet, but a sooty moss sprouted upon their backs. With them I lost myself in volcanic mazes; brushed away endless boughs of rotting thickets; till finally in a dream I found myself sitting cross-legged upon the foremost, a Brahmin similarly mounted upon either side, forming a tripod of foreheads which upheld the universal cope. (58)

In this brief passage, Melville, in a series of smoothly

transitional images moves from a geographically fixed spot, the isles, to a mystic dream world, and from the present time to a time beyond measured time, one computable only by mystics.<sup>45</sup>

Runden points out that the time images in Sketch Eighth are concerned, not with the sense of distant time in relation to the present, but with the painful passing of time. Of the drowning of Hunilla's husband and brother, Melville writes, "With half a mile of sea between, how could her two enchanted arms aid those four fated ones: the distance long, the time, one sand. After the lightning is beheld, what fool shall stay the thunderbolt?"(91) Here time and distance are fused. "The time one sand" is ambiguous. It may imply an hourglass image, meaning that the sand of the hourglass is all in the lower half--that is, the time is gone for the men. Or it may mean that it is all in the upper half for Hunilla, since the months that follow are so long for her. Discussing her attempts to keep track of time, the narrator says, "Time was her labyrinth in which Hunilla was entirely lost."(93) Thus time becomes concrete, a labyrinth.<sup>46</sup>

The metaphor of time as a labyrinth then becomes a synecdoche suggested by Hunilla's crude calendar made from a

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<sup>45</sup>Runden, pp. 131-132.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 133.

hollow cane: "Long night of busy numbering, misery's mathematics, to weary her too-wakeful soul to sleep; yet sleep for that was none." (95) The image is different, but the essence is essentially the same. In the second instance time becomes a portion of time particularized first by darkness and then by its abstract appositive, "misery's mathematics."

Later, the calendar becomes a material object as an image of time and its slow passing to Hunilla in her grief, who countless times "traced her finger over the bamboo--dull flute, which played on, gave no sound--as if counting birds flown by in air would hasten tortoises creeping through the woods." (95) The chief image of Hunilla passing her fingers over the bamboo reflects a mental state involving time that is enriched and modified by the vehicle, "counting birds in air." The anguish of waiting is underscored in the first image; the futility of noting the time passed rather than the sense of time itself, is thrown into relief.<sup>47</sup>

The final image occurs near the end of the sketch. The narrator follows Hunilla to the grave of her husband and notes: "The mound rose in the middle; a bare heap of finest sand, like that unverdured heap found at the bottom of an hourglass run out." (99) The idea of time past is dramatically introduced. Time for the dead husband is utterly past.

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<sup>47</sup>Runden, p. 134.

The sand of the grave is unverdured--has nothing green and thus alive growing upon it--just as the sands of an hour-glass produce nothing of life.<sup>48</sup>

The ten separate but related pictures presented in The Encantadas are built up image after image to a single flaming point of man's sins toward man. This "archipelago of aridities" presents images of isolation, desolation, punishment, deception, knavery, tyranny, endurance, despair, and hopeless struggle. In the words of Jay Leyda, "The whole smouldering penal image of the clinkered Galapagos, once conjured up, remained a permanent symbol in Melville's imagination."<sup>49</sup> In Israel Potter he compared the tramping London crowds wearing down the flagging of the streets, to the "convict tortoises" crawling over the vitreous rocks in the cursed Galapagos. And nearly twenty years later in "The Island" section of Clarel, Melville again expressed his haunted sense of those unearthly landscapes:

In waters where no charts avail,  
Where only fin and spout ye see,  
The lonely spout of hermit-whale,  
God set that isle that haunteth me,  
There clouds hang low, but yield no rain--  
For ever hang, since wind is none  
Or light; nor ship-boy's eye may gain  
The smoke-wrapped peak, the inland one  
Volcanic; this, within its shroud  
Streaked black and red--by day the cloud  
Shows leaden all, and dull and sealed.

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<sup>48</sup>Runden, p. 135.

<sup>49</sup>Leyda, Complete Stories, p. xx.

The beach is cinders.

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With amaze  
 Into the dim retreats ye gaze,  
 Lo, 'tis the monstrous tortoise drear!  
 Of huge humped arch, the ancient shell  
 Is trenched with seams where lichens dwell.  
 Or some adhesive growth and sere;  
 A lumpish langour marks the pace--  
 A hideous harmless look, with trace  
 Of hopelessness . . .<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup>Clarel, Volume II, Part IV, Canto 111.

## CHAPTER V

### REFLECTIONS ON MELVILLE'S IDEAS AND PHILOSOPHY

There is much disagreement among critics concerning Herman Melville's philosophy. Part of the controversy is due to the prevalence of ambiguity seen within the works, making interpretation difficult. To assume that any particular work clearly reflects his philosophy is to risk reaching fallacious conclusions. Evidence of the vast amount of borrowed material found in Melville's works should warn the reader that apparent statements of philosophy might have been borrowed and adapted to his artistic purpose. There is conclusive evidence that he was fascinated by the ideas of many of the great philosophers and that he often incorporated these ideas into his work. He did not necessarily accept any one or even a composite of such philosophies as his own, but he often found them useful as themes.

Another difficulty faced by scholars attempting to interpret Melville's philosophy stems from his apparently intentional deceptiveness. Early in his career, he realized that unorthodox statements of philosophy or religion antagonized the majority of his readers. The public refused to accept his criticism of established social and religious concepts. Since his individualism would not permit him to surrender, he turned to various forms of subterfuge. In his review of Hawthorne's Mosses from an Old Manse, he asserts

that Hawthorne used literary devices to deceive the "superficial skimmer of pages." These tactics adopted by Melville are first apparent in Mardi, and he felt that his really astute readers would pierce the riddles, symbolism, and allegory. The efforts were largely unsuccessful in his life-time, and many of the hints, suggestions, and hidden meanings are still unsolved ambiguities to modern scholars. In The Encantadas Melville is disguised behind the mask of a romantic, probably transcendental, narrator. The real voice of Melville is heard only occasionally when the narrator puzzles over some apparent ambiguity concerning the nature of God or of man that violates his naive, conventional viewpoint.

Studies based on factual evidence show that Melville was a conscientious skeptic with an instinctive faith and idealistic illusions. His passionate determination to discover a reality modeled after his illusions led eventually to feelings of bitterness and defeat--feelings that he dramatized with realism and artistry in The Encantadas. Evidence from the works, from letters, from family records, and other sources shows that he went through a number of phases in his efforts to find a philosophy or a religion that he could accept with complete conviction. Due to the ambiguous nature of most of Melville's writing, it is not easy to define the

nature, the depth, and the authenticity of the philosophical thought expressed in the work. It is apparent, however, that drastic changes of thought did occur during the course of his literary efforts, a period which extended from the writing of Typee in 1846 to the posthumously published Billy Budd, written between 1888 and Melville's death in 1891.

In his youth Melville was taught the Calvinistic dogmas of the Dutch Reformed Church in America. Apparently he accepted and explicitly believed the truth of his religious heritage until he left home at the age of eighteen. On his first sea voyage he met disillusionments and doubts concerning God and man which increased enormously during his later voyages. But he did not completely rebel against Calvinism.<sup>1</sup> About the time he started to write Typee, Melville began thinking critically about all religions. These inquiries, combined with a new realization of the evil in man, brought him to a suspicion that the world was primarily evil, that even God was evil or indifferent. While he was writing Mardi, Melville seems to have reached a crisis in the struggle between his beliefs and his doubts. Through the character of Taji in this story he does make a statement

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<sup>1</sup>Laurence Thompson, Melville's Quarrel with God (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952), pp. 4-5.

of mystical religious affirmation, but this profession was short-lived because it failed to satisfy his need for a more solid foundation of belief. Almost every thought in Moby-Dick is contradicted, either by implication or by an opposite idea. When Melville began to write Pierre, he had reached a stage in which he felt that man's only possible course was either rebellion against the universal evil in the world or stolid acceptance of a meaningless existence. He was beset by uncertainties. At this point, however, the conflict between gloom and faith was usually qualified in his works by a statement of faith, or at least one of hope.<sup>2</sup>

Most of Melville's works beginning with Mardi are concerned with his search for answers to the same problems that have disturbed philosophers through the ages. But the problem that Melville poses in his works chiefly concerns the presence of evil in the universe and man's response to it.<sup>3</sup> This enigma takes three forms: the question of the nature of God, the question of society and man's relation to his fellow-men, and the question of the nature of man himself. Melville's ideas on this subject are neither new nor complicated, but they are

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<sup>2</sup>Ben Drew Kimpel, "Melville's Philosophical Thought after 1851" (unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 1942), p. 264.

<sup>3</sup>Rudolph von Abele, "Melville and the Problem of Evil," American Mercury, LXV (1947), 593.

profound ideas which, when strongly presented, form excellent bases for literature.<sup>4</sup>

Mardi is the first of Melville's works to particularly stress the theme of the search. Melville, in the character of the seeker Taji, rejects the proposals of all, still hoping to find a more magnificent role for man in the world. All of his works after Mardi contain notes on the progress of the search. White Jacket ends with a plea for men to resist conflict with each other and to trust that there must be a purpose behind the universe.<sup>5</sup> Moby-Dick has a dual theme which combines the search for fundamental truth and the painful necessity for compromise. Ahab represents the hero of man's determined quest for the Absolute, while Ishmael is the cautious interpreter of the unattainable. In Pierre the search becomes a theme of cautious expediency as the unfortunate hero attempts to do everything on the highest plane with the purest motivation; yet he fails more miserably than the eager Taji or the defiant Ahab.<sup>6</sup> The Encantadas seems to represent a static phase in Melville's search. The universe is represented by the cracked, parched

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<sup>4</sup>Kimpel, p. 264.

<sup>5</sup>Hugh McEniry, "Some Contrapuntal Themes in Herman Melville," in Essays in Modern Literature (DeLand, Florida: The Stetson University Press, 1936), p. 18.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., pp.19-20.

images of waste and desolation that he found in the Galapagos Islands.<sup>7</sup> Evidence in Clarel, published in 1876, indicates that Melville may have given up the search without finding any firm belief for himself.

At no time in his search does Melville state specifically that man is fundamentally evil, but beginning with Pierre and continuing through Clarel his works certainly leave this impression. The emphasis on evil is there, although it is not philosophically consistent.<sup>8</sup> The search seemed to lead Melville irrevocably toward a theme of acceptance and expediency, though he continued, through his characters, to urge his readers to resist these compromises. However, his last protagonist, Billy Budd, is the expedient man, accepting that which "Taji would have none of, that Ahab spurned magnificently, and that Pierre equated with baseness."<sup>9</sup>

Most people go through a phase of disillusionment with their inherited beliefs and, as a rule, can work out some kind of readjustment without being permanently scarred. Melville could not. Nor could he modify his inherited

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<sup>7</sup>Ronald Mason, The Spirit above the Dust (London, 1951), p. 189.

<sup>8</sup>KimpeI, p. 268.

<sup>9</sup>McEniry, p. 21.

beliefs to a concept of God that would be acceptable to his temperament. He experimented with several different theories but was never able to find a resolution to the problem that would afford any lasting comfort or consolation. Inclined to be somewhat of a mystic, he wanted a kind of personal, benevolent God to whom an individual could speak directly. This his Protestant heritage had taught him to expect.<sup>10</sup> When he called attention to the discrepancy between the ideal and the actuality as demonstrated by the missionary enterprises in the South Seas, he revealed his yearning for an idealistic, personal belief beyond his narrow Calvinistic heritage.<sup>11</sup>

In Mardi, Moby-Dick, and Pierre, Melville dramatized his failure to find an answer other than Hamlet's "The rest is silence" to the philosophical questions that disturbed him. In these novels he also dramatized three phases of his spiritual life and revealed his metaphysical thought during the most important years of his literary life. These three novels probe and analyze the nature of reality, of religion, and of morality. None of them arrive at answers acceptable to the questions posed.<sup>12</sup> The conflict

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<sup>10</sup>Thompson, p. 5.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 54.

<sup>12</sup>Tyrus Hillway, Herman Melville (New York, 1963), p. 111.

in Melville's mind was between the idealistic viewpoint, which is most prevalent in his early work, and the pessimism which almost overtook him in Moby-Dick, and which is completely expressed in Pierre.<sup>13</sup>

In Mardi there is evidence of a suspicion that God could not possibly be what Melville would like him to be. The story is told in the first person and Taji, the narrator, is undoubtedly Melville. It shows the confidence and determination of a young man who, though surprised by his defeat, refuses to accept it as final, thus asserting the independence of the human soul.<sup>14</sup> Melville probably felt that he had eliminated some of the possibilities and narrowed his search. But the alternatives offered Taji continued to haunt Melville and became important themes in his later work. The conclusion of the book apparently states that the best mortal man can do on earth is to live up to the teachings of Christ, with particular emphasis on forbearance, tolerance, and love for one's neighbor. But Melville suggests that there is something in us which is never quite content with this, which insists on driving on after the unattainable, ultimate truth.<sup>15</sup> It was this dogged persistence

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<sup>13</sup>Kimpel, p. 263.

<sup>14</sup>Hillway, p. 111.

<sup>15</sup>Kimpel, p. 61.

which was symbolized later by the tortoises in The Encantadas.

Melville's innate idealism was weakened by doubts arising out of his experiences. Increasingly embittered by a conjunction of unfortunate experiences during and after the writing of Mardi, Melville came to a crisis in his belief. Still clinging to his faith in the Calvinistic God, he began to resent and hate this tyrannical, harsh, even malignant Divinity. Part of Moby-Dick's theme seems to be an examination of man's role in such a universe. During this time Melville hinted strongly that he believed that man should declare his independence from God.<sup>16</sup> Throughout Moby-Dick he kept his belief in the goodness of man and in the fact that man's soul is essentially noble and god-like, a belief that was characteristic of the romantic movement.<sup>17</sup>

Melville's two major themes in his search, the desire for the ultimate and the depressing necessity to settle for less, are clearly embodied in Ahab and Ishmael. Ahab refuses to compromise, accepts no quarter, and relies only on his own will as a final authority. Ishmael, the compromiser, looks on and makes comments based on the conventional notions of his time. He calls Ahab a maniac and remarks on his fatal pride. When Ahab sinks into the ocean, it is

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<sup>16</sup>Thompson, pp. 5, 12.

<sup>17</sup>Kimpel, pp. 18-19.

Ishmael who lives to tell the story. To both, the whale symbolizes the Infinite they must both confront, but they do not see the Infinite in the same light. Ahab sees the whale as "the monomaniac incarnation of all those malicious agencies." But to Ishmael the whale represents "the heartless voids and immensities of the universe . . . a colorless, all color of atheism . . ." Ahab's theme of faith in man's possibilities is nobler, but Ishmael's cautious regard for the expedient wins out in the end.<sup>18</sup>

In Pierre, the Ishmael of cautious expedience predominates. This novel concerns a man who honestly tries to make his actions acceptable to the Infinite's absolute pattern. He fails, and in spite of the defiant conclusion, the work seems to give approval to the familiar idea of expediency.<sup>19</sup> The reasons for Melville's doubts and tribulations are shown in the chapter on Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Here he found the kind of sincerity, purity, and spirituality he wanted in a religion. But these teachings clashed violently with the traditions and customs of the church.<sup>20</sup> This realization seemed the ultimate disillusion

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<sup>18</sup>McEniry, pp. 18-19.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>20</sup>Walter Weber, "Some Characteristic Symbols in Herman Melville's Works," English Studies, XXX (October, 1949), 223.

and marked the beginning of Melville's darkest period. In Pierre Melville disclosed his frustrating experiences as a writer. Perhaps The Encantadas reveals his feeling of emptiness and artistic barrenness. He feels burned out; nothing is left of the creative spirit but clinkers and ashes. Now he can say with conviction about the desolate Encantadas, "In no world but a fallen one could such lands exist." (51)

In the tales that follow Pierre are found constant symbols of ruin, negation, death--wild wastes, deserted islands, leaden-gray skies, the dismal clinker-bound landscape of the Encantadas, dead blank walls, rotting wood piles, all sorts of emblems of decay and death. All of these stories seem to reflect the inner conflict Melville suffered as he tried to exorcise himself of the bitter, self-destructive nihilism exhibited at the end of Pierre.<sup>21</sup> At this point he seems to have reached a dead end in his search for truth. The Encantadas reveals a skepticism that asserts only that the world is unbelievably complicated and that any experiments in search of total, indivisible knowing through imagination, metaphysics, and science must be only tentative and cautious. The only real knowledge is the visible. The Encantadas sketches are strongly visual as

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<sup>21</sup>Newton Arvin, Herman Melville (New York, 1950), p. 234.

Melville consistently uses seeing as a physical symbol for knowing.<sup>22</sup>

In the stories published between 1852 and 1856, there are several indications that Melville had reached a stage of resignation, or at least an absence of discontent, as one who has seen the evil of the world and accepted it. In The Encantadas Melville seems to be using the Galapagos Islands as symbols of the dead, dreary, burnt-out life which follows pessimism. Among the other symbols used in describing them, Melville refers to the Dead Sea and to the bitter Apples of Sodom, both of which are used later in Clarel to represent emptiness and disillusion. The islands are described as dangerous and profitless, yet they have an irresistible quality, symbolized by the strange currents, by which many are drawn unwillingly towards them and are wrecked on their shores. This seems to hint clearly that Melville recognized the barrenness of the pessimism into which he was being drawn, but was unable to extricate himself.<sup>23</sup>

When Melville began to experience disillusion, he turned to religion for confirmation of his idealistic beliefs. Failing to find any solid foundation there, he went

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<sup>22</sup>Richard H. Fogle, Melville's Shorter Tales (Norman, Oklahoma, 1960), p. 93.

<sup>23</sup>Kimpel, p. 460.

through a stage of bitterness during which his works often criticized organized religion. After 1852, becoming more resigned toward his fruitless search, he wrote no more extended satires on the churches, although slight mentions and innuendos that appear throughout his later work show that his opinion of them never changed. "The Two Temples," which was rejected by Putnam's in 1854 to protect the "religious sensibilities" of the public, hints quite plainly that the author found more real Christianity in a London theater than in an American church, with its snobbish catering to the wealthy and its scorn for the poor.<sup>24</sup> In The Encantadas, the narrator's remark that Hunilla, the long-suffering and much-mistreated widow, carried a "crucifix worn featureless, like an ancient graven knocker long plied in vain," (99) seems to reflect Melville's religious disillusionment. The description of the bird-life on Rock Rodondo bears similar ironic religious imagery. The lugubrious penguin reminds him of "Friars of Orders Gray," As the day advances, the wild birds "celebrate their matins" and new flights constantly join the "aerial choir."

Melville's never-ending search for an acceptable, meaningful faith reveals his desperate yearning for belief in a divine being. Any materialistic answer which left God

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<sup>24</sup>Kimpel, p. 406.

out was meaningless to him. At times he affirmed an instinctive, unreasoning faith, and often expressed a strong hope, but he never rested in either.<sup>25</sup> Such expressions may often be interpreted as ironic, aimed at the Calvinistic God whom his intellect renounced. Certainly such affirmations and expressions are not consistent. He pictures the symbolic god of the Encantadas, the Galapagos tortoise, as an impotent creature, concerned only with its own undeviating purpose. Describing Hunilla's drowned husband as "true to her even in death's dream," the narrator poses the unanswerable question: "Ah, Heaven, when man thus keeps his faith, wilt thou be faithless who created the faithful one?" Then the voice of Melville intervenes to supply his hopeless answer: "But they cannot break faith who never plighted it." (91) Later as the puzzled narrator marvels at the widow's fortitude, he describes her as having "a heart of yearning, frozen by the frost which falleth from the sky." (101)

Melville's most urgent problem apparently concerned the origin and nature of evil, although he expressed deep interest in other philosophical questions. It seems obvious that Melville was not a philosopher in the sense that Kant and Spinoza were philosophers. Neither was he a "convinced" thinker like Emerson, nor an atheist, nor a true mystic, but

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<sup>25</sup>Kimpel, p. 457.

philosophical values are to be found in the intellectual content of his later work.<sup>26</sup> Melville was a thinker, in the same sense that Dante was a thinker, who "clothed his thoughts in poetic vision."<sup>27</sup>

Mardi contains evidence of Melville's staggeringly extensive reading in literary, philosophical, and theological literature.<sup>28</sup> But Melville was not truly concerned with problems that absorbed the practicing philosophers. His reading reveals that he was more interested in expressions of pessimism and disillusion with his fellow-men, with society, and with religion than in anything else.<sup>29</sup> He sought to find justification for the prevalence of evil and an explanation of the destruction of the good, the innocent, the beautiful while the bad, the guilty, the deformed were spared. Melville's favorite reading always seemed to pose these same questions. "This is what Job asked, it is what Hamlet contended with, and it is Dante's problem."<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Kimpel, p. 260.

<sup>27</sup>Lewis Mumford, Herman Melville (New York, 1929), p. 107.

<sup>28</sup>Thompson, p. 63.

<sup>29</sup>Kimpel, p. 265.

<sup>30</sup>Abele, p. 593.

By the time he wrote The Encantadas, Melville had concluded that the world was either "a fallen world" or that it had been created evil. There seems to be evidence for both points of view in the Encantadas sketches. The imagery of warfare used in the description of the tortoises, who are "the oldest inhabitants of this or any other isle" and who "seemed newly crawled forth from beneath the foundations of the world" seems to proclaim a battle. Such terms as "impregnable armor," "citadel," "walled cities," "ancient scars," "battering rams"(57) tell of a primal struggle dating back to a timeless past when there was already a conflict between the forces of good and evil. So far as The Encantadas reveals, the ancient struggle had been won by evil forces. Sketch Fourth goes back to the origin of the world, not to the Paradise of Genesis, but to a place where the forces are described as "demons of fire."<sup>31</sup> Most of the islands are "an archipelago of aridities, without inhabitant, history or hope of either in all time to come."(73)

Melville points out that the tortoise, symbolic god of the Encantadas, as well as a symbol of reality, has two sides, but it is the darker side which is usually and naturally uppermost. Examination of this dark side shows,

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<sup>31</sup>I. Newberry, "Encantadas: Melville's Inferno," American Literature, XXXVIII (March, 1966), 56.

according to Melville's judgment, that the world of nature is a fallen world, haunted and diabolically possessed, filled with hidden demonisms and nameless evils.<sup>32</sup>

The evil force, the ruling spirit, is referred to as "evil enchantment," "sorceress," "diabolical enchanter," its infernal nature further emphasized by allusions to Spenser, Milton, and Dante. Thus by their very existence the islands seem proof of the existence of an original force of a diabolical nature. It is a cosmic force which "feline-like" plays with human destiny. Not only is it a basically destructive and evil force, but it is a malignant power which does not cleanly destroy, but dallies and plays with its victims, bringing depravity and corrosion.<sup>33</sup>

The proper role of man in an evil or fallen world occupied Melville's thoughts to a profound degree. Just as he searched for an ideal God and an ideal society, he also hunted for an ideal man. Though far from being a recluse, there seemed to be a certain aloofness in Melville's nature that kept him from a really close association with his fellow men. It is clear that he had a certain sense of superiority to, or at least an isolation from, the masses.

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<sup>32</sup>Merlin Bowen, The Long Encounter (Chicago, 1960), p. 74.

<sup>33</sup>Newberry, p. 58.

While it is not unusual to find him scorning the common herd and isolating himself from their hypocrisy and narrowness, he still felt the need for a Christian brotherly love.<sup>34</sup> He found little evidence of such love on the Encantadas. Only hermits and transients stopped there, and the needs that sometimes led them to band together were physical, not spiritual. The captain and crew of the ship that rescued Hunilla seem kindly and sympathetic, but in relating the mate's decision to leave all but two of the dogs behind, the narrator states that in most things "simple utility was his leading motive." And Hunilla leaves the dogs without protest and without a backward glance. At Payta, when the captain gives her the money obtained from the sale of the tortoise oil and includes a contribution from the crew, she accepts it silently, not knowing what the mariners have done. Self-interest seems to be the chief motivating force of the characters in The Encantadas.

Chronologically, Melville's perception of the evil in external nature may have preceded his perception of the evil in man. In The Encantadas the evil enchantment of the islands was present before man arrived, and there are suggestions that this diabolism brought about the evil in man. A brave soldier of fortune, the Dog-King, degenerates first

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<sup>34</sup>Kimpel, p. 386.

into a petty tyrant, and then into a deceitful, lawless killer. The hermit Oberlus appears to be "the victim of some malignant sorceress;" nevertheless, Melville's narrator condemns him completely.

Before his disillusionment began, Melville had confidence in mankind in general, although he showed an awareness of the ambiguous depths of the human mind.<sup>35</sup> Continuing failure in his career as well as in his search for truth, caused him to lose much of his faith in America and in himself. His belief in the world and in men waned as his own creative powers waned, although he recovered both as time went on. During the darkest period of his depression, he continued to find good in individuals.<sup>36</sup>

Even in the apparently cynical Confidence-Man, Melville does not show any hatred for mankind. His pessimism comes from too high an ideal of what human nature ought to be, and from too much original love of man. For the brutal Oberlus, the evil and loathsome misanthrope of The Encantadas, Melville's condemnation is unreserved. Clearly he did not approve of hatred of mankind. In the sketch "Barrington Isle and the Buccaneers," Melville's narrator sees

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<sup>35</sup>Kimpel, p. 305.

<sup>36</sup>Van Wyck Brooks, The Times of Melville and Whitman (New York, 1947), p. 160.

good even among these outcasts, some of whom he admits were cut-throats. But among them were men "whose worst reproach was their desperate fortunes--whom persecution, or adversity, or secret and unavengable wrongs, had driven from Christian society to seek melancholy solitude or the guilty adventures of the sea."(78) The narrator concludes that "among these adventurers were some gentlemanly, companionable souls, capable of genuine tranquility and virtue."(79) Whether Melville felt as charitable as his narrator remains in question. While apparently blaming society for the circumstances of the buccaneers, he offers no such extenuation for the hermit Oberlus.

While Melville showed distrust for mankind through the words and actions of the Confidence-man, he urged trust and charity, not because he had any firm belief in human goodness, but because he felt that such a belief, however mistaken, is the only possible basis for human society.<sup>37</sup> Captain Delano in Benito Cereno is trustful of others, which trustfulness, says Melville, implies a good heart, but a bad head, "in view of what humanity is capable." This is similar to the passage in The Encantadas in which Melville speaks of the easily-hooked fishes whose trust in man indicates a lack of understanding.<sup>38</sup> And when Hunilla

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<sup>37</sup>Kimpel, p. 277.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 282.

resolves to stand firm in her belief that the captain of the French whaler will return for her as promised, the narrator exclaims, "See here Hunilla, this lone shipwrecked soul, out of treachery invoking trust." (94)

Melville's apparently ambiguous attitude toward his fellow men represents only one of a number of ambiguities found in his work. Much of the controversy concerning the nature of his philosophy may be attributed to these dichotomies. A discussion of a series of important ambiguities is relevant to a study of Melville's philosophy. The Encantadas contains several apparent contradictions that parallel or reinforce similar dualities in other works. In some instances the problem may be resolved by determining whether the attitudes reflected are Melville's or those of his innocent narrator, who usually responds to a given situation in a conventional manner.

The largest stumbling-block that Melville encountered in his search for truth was the ambiguity of good and evil. It seemed inconsistent to him that "Often ill comes from the good as good from ill." (93) He read and admired the wisdom of Solomon, and a passage of importance to Pierre (as well as to Melville) was taken from Ecclesiastes 3:16: "And moreover I saw under the sun the place of judgment, that wickedness was there; and the place of righteousness, that

iniquity was there." This statement of the ambiguity of virtue and vice applies as well to The Encantadas.<sup>39</sup> The gigantic tortoises which are like the woebegone spirits of wicked sea-captains have an upper surface that appears dark and melancholy, but their underside is of a faint yellowish tinge, and this underside is as real as the other: "The tortoise is both black and bright." While discussing the relative good and evil of the buccaneers, Melville's narrator suggests that they were driven out from the Christian world by "persecutions, or adversity, or secret unavengable wrongs." He cites evidence to indicate that many of them may have been peaceful and kindly by nature. As the "sentimental voyager" of long ago meditates over the relics of the buccaneers, he concludes charitably that there may have been philosophers and poets among the murderers and robbers. The statement seems ironic in view of Melville's early experiences aboard ship among rogues of all nations and colors where he saw unbelievable examples of wickedness and villainy.

Some problems of ambiguity can be solved. The Encantadas are difficult to find and fix, but men have done so. At a distance, Rock Rodondo takes on a protean variety of shapes, but on close approach, its real nature becomes apparent. So too, in Moby-Dick the carcass of the peeled

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<sup>39</sup>Kimpel, p. 224.

whale is likely to be mistaken for shoals or breakers and even charted as such by some timid mariner. "And for years afterwards, perhaps, ships shun the place." (Ch. 69, "The Funeral")

The awareness of his own ambiguous nature probably distressed Melville as much as did the other dualities he found in the universe. Since his basic honesty would not let him deny an observed truth, no matter how personally unpleasant, Melville split his psychological nature in Moby-Dick and showed the reader two major sides of his personality. Ishmael is the Melville who is cautious, timid, admittedly cowardly. On the other side is the idealized, independent, rebellious, defiant hero, Ahab. Ishmael is more the real Melville; Ahab the artistic daydream wish-fulfillment.<sup>40</sup>

The Ishmael nature and its corresponding theme of banishment runs through all of Melville's work. He always seemed to consider himself an outcast both in the natural creation and in the social world. He appeared haunted by the idea that he was, like Ishmael and Hagar, driven out into the desert. To Melville, the symbol of banishment was more than a myth; it was a deeply felt philosophical truth, although the reason for the exile remains obscure.<sup>41</sup> The

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<sup>40</sup>Thompson, p. 85.

<sup>41</sup>Weber, p. 220.

themes of desolation and emptiness reflect the pathos of his personal isolation and loneliness. His writings are filled with representations of the orphan, the outcast, the disinherited son. All of the characters of The Encantadas are outcasts of one kind or another, sometimes by choice, more often by fate. In one sense, these figures should not be considered exceptional. To accept the scriptural account of the fall is to accept the belief that the entire race of man lives in this world in exile and penal degradation. The Galapagos tortoises symbolize men malignantly transformed and condemned to penal degradation forever.<sup>42</sup>

To such a nature as Melville's, the moral ambiguities are unbearable. He never relaxed his determination to separate right from wrong as clearly as in Genesis day is separated from night. Refusing to acknowledge obstacles, he drove himself relentlessly, like the Galapagos tortoise, against whatever impediments appeared in his path.<sup>43</sup> Melville's "crowning curse" seemed to be the same "drudging impulse to straightforwardness in a belittered world." (58)

Another ambiguity with which Melville wrestled was the question of the true nature of God. Was he the loving Christ of the New Testament or the stern judge, Jehovah, of the Old? Melville stressed the loving aspects in Mardi, but

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<sup>42</sup>Bowen, p. 128.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 137.

Moby-Dick presents the revengeful, jealous, Old Testament nature symbolized by the whale. The dual picture of God, as good and as evil, reappears in much of Melville's later work.<sup>44</sup> But in The Encantadas he is neither. Instead, the Divinity of the Encantadas, the tortoise, is an impotent creature, condemned to an eternity of penal degradation. In the Hunilla story, the narrator addresses "faithless" heaven, but immediately adds, "But they cannot break faith who never plighted it." (91) He refers to Hunilla's God as if He were as featureless as her worn crucifix. Her heart is "frozen by the frost which falleth from the sky." (101) In the concluding epitaph of Sketch Tenth, adapted from one in Porter's Journal, Melville omitted the line, "I hope in heaven my soul to rest." He makes no positive statement, but leaves the reader to conclude that for the desolate Encantadas there is neither an ambiguous God nor an ambivalent one. If there is a God at all, He is completely indifferent to the needs and sufferings of man.

Unable to find a solid foundation for faith in an orthodox God and withdrawing further from the Calvinistic teachings of his youth, Melville often pondered the question of fate. In the Moby-Dick chapter called "The Mat-Maker," he

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<sup>44</sup>Kimpel, p. 440.

clearly states that fate, chance, and man's will all play shaping parts in the course of events. There are numerous references to fate in Pierre.<sup>45</sup> In the rebellious state he had reached in Pierre, Melville could see only an evil God against whom men should rebel, or an indifferent God, against whom even rebellion was futile. With this God, he associated the idea of a fate which controlled not only the actions, but also the characters, of men. Under such a God, there could be no hope of an immortality of the soul.<sup>46</sup>

Melville's sense of an evil God seemed to grow less prominent in the books after Pierre, and the references to fate grew fewer. His markings in the books in his library show his continued interest in the idea, and there are occasional remarks like the one in The Encantadas, that it is "terrible to see how feline fate will sometimes dally with a human soul." (93) Hunilla, to whom these lines refer, was a victim of the sea; that is, of sheer chance, of forces over which she had no control. The young husband of Hunilla and her brother who are drowned before her eyes are referred to as "fated ones."<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>Kimpel, p. 448.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 457.

<sup>47</sup>Ivor Winters, In Defense of Reason (New York, 1947), p. 223.

Although well equipped for the quest which dominated his life, Melville's search was doomed to end in shattering disillusion. He was born with a vigorous imagination, a constitution full of vitality, and a zest for life. He began the search full of naive and faithful innocence and maintained a passionate determination to discover a reality modeled after his illusions. Within the thirty-two years spent in pursuit of his ideal, he accumulated a tremendous volume of experience. One by one, the impervious rock of reality transformed his flaming ideals into cinders of despair, aptly represented by the rocks and cinders of the Encantadas.<sup>48</sup>

Melville never seemed to learn that happiness is elusive and that many questions are as unravellable as the Cretan labyrinth. He eventually arrived at the conclusion that there is no solution at all and that God himself is unable to account for His creation.<sup>49</sup> Melville expressed a suspicion to this effect in a letter to Hawthorne in 1851:

And perhaps, after all, there is no secret. We incline to think that the problem of the universe is like the Freemason's secret, so terrible to children. It turns out, at last, to consist in a triangle, a mallet, and an apron,--nothing more! We incline to

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<sup>48</sup>Herman Melville, Shorter Novels, ed. by Raymond Weaver (New York, 1928), p. xxix.

<sup>49</sup>Weber, pp. 217-218.

think that God cannot explain his own secrets, and that He would like a little information upon certain points Himself. We mortals astonish Him as much as He us.<sup>50</sup>

Yet Melville could not accept his own conclusion that the problem was insoluble. The haunting memories of the tortoises may symbolize the way uncertainties continued to haunt him:

For often in scenes of social merriment . . . I have drawn the attention of my comrades by my fixed gaze and sudden change of air, as I have seemed to see, slowly emerging from those imagined solitudes, and heavily crawling along the floor, the ghost of a gigantic tortoise, with "Memento \* \* \* \* " burned in live letters upon his back. (54)

In the light of evidence found in The Encantadas and supported by historical facts and critical opinions, pertinent conclusions may be drawn concerning Melville's ideas and philosophy. The preponderance of Melville scholarship has shown that he never wrote anything that was not in some way allied to his consuming search, and that the total volume of his work contains a continuing record of his investigations into possible solutions of the puzzle of his existence.<sup>51</sup> Bartleby, the Wall Street scrivener, and Hunilla, widowed by the treacherous currents around the Encantadas, are

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<sup>50</sup> Merrell R. Davis and William H. Gilman, eds., The Letters of Herman Melville (New Haven: The Yale University Press, 1960), pp. 124-125.

<sup>51</sup> McEniry, p. 14.

stubborn, dignified searchers for firm ground in a bog of doubt.<sup>52</sup> Unlike most writers of his century, Melville never based his work on formulated theories. His search for truth relied on hard-headed, courageous observations of the world as he saw it, and not on preconceived ideas of what it should be like. He never found any certain answers to the momentous questions about religion which disturbed him. The value of his religious thought to his literature must be judged by the importance and universality of the problems which he assailed and by the vividness with which he presented these problems.<sup>53</sup>

In the Moby-Dick chapter entitled "The Lee Shore," Melville metaphorically compares deep earnest thinking and the unknown with the stormy ocean and equates convention and tradition with the safety of land. Those who prefer the safety of land, the visible truth, may find it treacherous and slavish. "But as in landlessness alone resides the highest truth, shoreless, indefinite as God--so, better it is to perish in that howling infinite than be ingloriously dashed upon the lee, even if that were safety!" All around the Encantadas are treacherous currents that sweep the unwary toward the cliffs of destruction, and at times there is "a

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<sup>52</sup>Herman Melville, The Portable Melville, ed. by Jay Leyda (New York, 1952), p. xiv.

<sup>53</sup>Kimpel, p. 456.

mysterious indraft, which irresistibly draws a passing vessel among the isles, though not bound to them."(52) Less mysterious, but far more dreadful, are the land areas of the islands. The wanderers who land there find neither a firm foundation upon which to build nor the means to maintain a fullness of life. None of these derelicts wish to remain permanently upon the islands, and if they do not perish there, as many have done, they eventually return to the uncertainty of the sea. There the soul, though buffeted by the "wildest winds of heaven and earth, can keep its independence." Hunilla, in the end, returns to the security of land, but it no longer matters; there is nothing for her but to endure.

With the Hunilla story and the statement in it, "humanity, thou strong thing, I worship thee, not in the laureled victor, but in this vanquished one," Melville, with bitter irony, accepts failure and its caustic consequences. The simple will to survive, shown by Hunilla, does not really elevate humanity. Instead it lowers it to the level of the tortoise, which simply endures, apparently without purpose except satisfaction of basic needs. Retreating, in his works, from dilemmas that at least represented life, Melville had

now turned to solitudes emblematic of death and symbolized by the clinkered, parched images of waste and desolation.<sup>54</sup> He was bowing to the inevitableness of obscurity and anonymity, particularly the anonymous heroism that goes unnoticed by the world.<sup>55</sup>

In an attempt to convert his bitterness to resignation and thereby accept life as he found it, Melville appears to be looking at his own past as he describes the tortoises, picturing them as damned souls. These unhappy creatures are entirely unable to get around any object in their paths; they persist fruitlessly in trying forever to go straight through. Their most significant quality is their endurance, which may show Melville's changing attitude toward the inscrutable. He must have realized that the only course for him to follow was to get around the insoluble questions which tortured him by ignoring them and becoming resigned to life. But like the tortoise, he was never able to do this. He proposes the Bartleby solution of rejecting life, and the Chola widow's solution of endurance, but he cannot completely accept either.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup>Mason, p. 189.

<sup>55</sup>William E. Sedgwick, Herman Melville: The Tragedy of Mind (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1954), p. 184.

<sup>56</sup>Kimpel, p. 461.

The wavering uncertainties and the dreadful barrenness of the Encantadas reflect Melville's life as a seeker after truth who continues his search even after realizing that the knowledge he is seeking is limitless.<sup>57</sup> Both Moby-Dick and Pierre hint that resignation is man's only possible sane course, but in neither does Melville show much willingness to adopt it. Hawthorne's words concerning Melville in 1856 show that even by that time he still was not ready for resignation:

It is strange how he persists--and has persisted ever since I knew him, and probably long before-- in wandering to-and-fro over these deserts, as dismal and monotonous as the sand hills amid which we were sitting. He can neither believe nor be comfortable in his unbelief; and he is too honest and courageous not to try to do one or the other.<sup>58</sup>

Melville was always a seeker who never found his answer because, although introspective, he paid too much attention to reason and not enough to intuition.<sup>59</sup> His instinctive faith kept asserting itself as it did in "Cock-a-Doodle-Do" and again at the end of Clarel. This faith could be satisfied only with the freedom of man's will, with a personal immortality, and with a just and

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<sup>57</sup>Fogle, p. 99.

<sup>58</sup>Nathaniel Hawthorne, The Portable Hawthorne, ed. by Malcolm Cowley (New York, 1948), pp 588-589.

<sup>59</sup>Kimpel, p. 259.

human God like Christ. In Clarel he simply asks for faith in the essential things of religion, in a just God, and an after-life. But there is no evidence that he was ever able to have a confident belief in anything.<sup>60</sup>

In his later life, Melville no longer exhibited bitterness and defiance, but his attitude never became one of resignation, either. "At the last, like the tortoise, god of the Encantadas, it signifies simply endurance."<sup>61</sup> He remained unshaken by failure and defeat, however final. God was still a Sphinx, despair at times still haunted him, but a sort of natural, unquenchable faith affirmed "the spirit above the dust." That he could not help believing what his reason denied is shown in these lines from Clarel:

Conviction is not gone  
Though faith's gone; that which shall not be  
Still ought to be!<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup>Kimpel, p. 458.

<sup>61</sup>Fogle, p. 115.

<sup>62</sup>Clarel, Part IV, Canto xxx.

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