# MELLVILLE'S IRONIC TREATMENT OF BIBLICAL SALVATION MOTIFS

JAY A. HOLSTEIN

The purpose of this paper is twofold. One is to demonstrate Herman Melville's ironic inversion of biblical salvation imagery in two pieces of short fiction which he wrote shortly after *Moby-Dick.* The works selected, "Cock-A-Doodle-Doo!" and "The Encantadas," involve different settings and, seemingly, different themes. Both, however, contain references to the Bible which function as foils to set off Melville's own teaching. In brief, what in the Bible represents hope and deliverance, in Melville marks out doom and incapsulating inadequacy. Secondly, an overview of Mellville's prose fiction will be presented in order to indicate the pervasiveness of his ironic treatment of biblical salvation motifs.[1]

Set in the springtime, "Cock-A-Doodle-Doo!" is a story of deliverance: the narrator, who when first met is depressed to the point of suicide, is, at the end, proclaiming boldly that he has learned how to fight "the doleful dumps."[2] The catalyst for his transformation is the glorious crowing of a cock which the narrator immediately adorns with biblical language: " *'Glory be to God in the highest!'* It says these words as plain as ever cock did in this world." In short order he hears it again: "Clear, shrill, full of pluck, full of fire, full of fun, full of glee. It plainly says—*'Never say die!'* "[3]

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JAY A. HOLSTEIN is Associate Professor of Bible and Jewish Studies at the School of Religion, University of Iowa.

[1]While no critic of Mellville has questioned his thoroughgoing knowledge of the Bible, the critical disputes as to how Melville employed the Bible are legion. One need do no more than consult the following works, each of which treats Melville's use of the Bible, to appreciate the divisiveness: W. Braswell, *Melville's Religious Thought* (New York: Octagon Books, 1973); L. Thompson, *Melville's Quarrel With God* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1952); H.B. Franklin, *The Wake o the Gods* (Stanford, Ca.: Stanford University Press, 1963); N. Wright, *Melville's Use of the Bible* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1949). These scholars differ profoundly, e.g., over whether and to what extent Melville used the Bible ironically. As a point of reference, consider their treatments of Mapple's sermon in *Moby-Dick.* In Braswell, pp. 70ff.; in Thompson, pp. 154f., 163ff.; in Franklin, pp. 69f.; in Wright, pp. 82-95. See too, A. Lebowitz, *Progress Into Silence* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970), pp. 138f.; J. Seelye, *Melville: The Ironic Diagram* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), pp. 62, 70f.; M.L. Pops, *The Melville Archetype* (Kent: Kent University Press, 1970), p. 128; J. Baird, *Ishmael* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1956), pp. 328, 333; N. Arvin, *Herman Melville* (New York: William Sloane Associates, 1950), pp. 197ff.; T. Hillway, *Herman Melville* (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1963), pp. 94-100; L. Mumford, *Herman Melville* (New York: The Literary Guild of America, 1929), p. 159; N. Canaday, Jr., *Melville and Authority* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1968), pp. 50f., 55; R.B. Browne, *Melville's Drive to Humanism* (Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Studies, 1971), pp. 50-54; M.R. Stern, ed., *Discussions of Moby-Dick* (Boston: D.C. Heath and Co., 1960), pp. 28, 30, 49f., 72, 110.

[2]All citations from "Cock-A-Doodle-Doo!" and "The Encantadas" will be from *Great Short Works of Herman Melville* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969).

[3]*Ibid.*, p. 78.

The narrator resolves to find the cock but his search is hindered by the strange fact that no one else hears it. Although its crowing continues to invigorate him, the sound now has for him a new significance: " 'Let the world and all aboard of it go to pot. Do you be jolly and never say die. What's the world compared to you? What is it anyhow, but a lump of loam. Do you be jolly!' "[4] Finally, the narrator locates the cock; it belongs to a sawyer, who, though poor and with a sickly family, is undaunted: " 'Haven't I Trumpet [the cock's name]. He's the cheerer. He crows through all; crows at the darkest; Glory to God in the highest! continually he crows it.' "[5]

Several weeks later the narrator witnesses the sawyer and his family embrace death eagerly, accompanied by the crowing of Trumpet, who also expires after one last blast. The narrator buries the family and the cock, and on the gravestone "not with skull and cross-bones, but with a lusty cock in act of crowing," he chisels these words: "*O death, where is thy sting? Oh grave, where is thy victory?*" Then the narrator declares: ". . . never since then have I felt the doleful dumps, but under all circumstances crow late and early with a continual crow. Cock-a-Doodle-Doo!—oo!—oo!—oo!—oo!"[6]

Certain it is that into his story of deliverance Melville interweaves important elements of the New Testament saga of Christ:

> —both the sawyer and the narrator interpret Trumpet's crowing by quoting Luke 2:14 ("Glory to God in the highest. . . ."), a context which contains a heavenly announcement of the birth of Christ;
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> —on three occasions, Trumpet and/or its crowing is linked with St. Paul, the preeminent human proclaimer of the reborn or resurrected Christ;[7]
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> —and the name "Trumpet," as well as the words wrought on the gravestone come from 1 Corinthians 15:51 ff. where Paul heralds the doctrine of resurrection, a doctrine which robs death of its "sting" and the grave of its "victory."

However, the contrast between the biblical contexts and Melville's story is striking. As was noted, immediately after "hearing" the cock proclaim: " 'Glory be to God in the highest,' " the narrator adds, " 'Never say die!' " This latter phrase replaces what follows in Luke, viz., " 'And on earth, peace, Good will toward man.' "

Melville's substitution is not fortuitous. Before he hears the crowing the narrator is concerned not only about the fate of man *qua* man,[8] he also cares

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 87.
[5] *Ibid.*, p. 94.
[6] *Ibid.*, pp. 96f.
[7] *Ibid.*, pp. 79, 84, 95.
[8] *Ibid.*, pp. 75, 76, 77.

enough about the individuals to give up his berth on a ferry to a sick woman,[9] and to carry with him "powder . . . [for] the sick baby in yonder hovel. . . ."[10]

From this disposition of good will toward man and mankind, the narrator moves to an attitude of belligerent indifference. The transformed narrator acknowledges the death of relatives simply by drinking "stout in preference to porter, stout being of the darker color."[11] After he hears the cock he wants to be as "stout as [the belligerent] Samson" in perfect imitation of the warlike cock.[12] The reborn narrator haughtily "challenge[s] all the world of woes," a challenge which inverts completely not simply as the deleted phrase from Luke, but also those virtues emphasized again and again in the 1 Corinthians context: morality, charity, and humility.[13]

Since the sawyer had raised the cock from the egg,[14] one is led to wonder why the narrator had not previously heard its dramatic (in fact "supernatural") crowing. And why does no one in the area hear the cock? And why do those who do hear it interpret its crowing in exactly the same way?[15] Is it not likely that the cock is an external symbol for an internal state; i.e., that only the deserving "hear" it? It is to be noted that the narrator's "soul" turns "*chanticleer*,"[16] and that the death of Trumpet in no way diminishes his ability to fight depression. And, of course, *he* is crowing at the end. Thus, whereas Paul's salvific system has man's ultimate deliverance dependent on the grace of God, in "Cock" the narrator learns how to flex his own muscles.

In the Corinthian context (15:29-32), Paul proclaims that "if after the manner of men I have fought with beasts of Ephesus, what advantageth it me, if the dead rise not? Let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we die." Melville's narrator accepts the premise which supports Paul's disjunctive argument; viz., if there is no resurrection then life is meaningless. Thus, since his advice is to " 'Let the world and all aboard of it go to pot. Do you be jolly, and never say die!' " we can conclude that he rejects the belief in resurrection. Understandable then is the fact that in his second interpretation of the cock's crowing the Luke context disappears altogether. Now from the first interpretation there remains only " 'Never say die!' "; not because death is overcome but because the reborn narrator, "in pure overflow of *self-reliance*" feels as "though I could meet Death, and invite him to dinner."[17] Death loses its "sting," the

[9] *Ibid.*, p. 78.

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 77.

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 95.

[12] *Ibid.*, pp. 80, 90.

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 86.

[14] *Ibid.*, p. 91. A fact pointed out to me by Doug Loyd, a Ph.D. student in the School of Religion.

[15] *Ibid.*, cf. pp. 78, 87 with pp. 93f.

[16] *Ibid.*, p. 86.

[17] *Ibid.*, p. 82, emphasis added.

grave, its "victory," not because man—as in the New Testament model of deliverance—has within him immutability, but because some men refuse to be intimidated by what Melville, in *Moby-Dick,* calls the "king of terrors."[18] The sawyer and his family's defiance is complete: they greet death with open arms. The narrator's audaciousness is mitigated. No longer afraid of death, he embraces life selfishly in an attempt to wring from it all possible pleasure. The narrator is a new man not because he no longer views the world as full of woe, but rather in spite of his somber evaluation.

Because of the sawyer's solemn aspect the narrator concludes that the cock's owner ". . . was of the mind of Solomon."[19] In *Moby-Dick,* Ishmael broods that ". . . that mortal man who hath more of joy than sorrow in him, that man cannot be true—not true, or undeveloped. With books the same . . . the truest of all books is Solomon's, and Ecclesiastes is the fine hammered steel of woe. 'All is vanity.' All. This wilful world hath not got hold of *unchristian* Solomon's wisdom yet."[20]

It is "unchristian Solomon's wisdom" which forms the essential core of Melville's teaching in "Cock." The underlying elements of this teaching depict man alone, deprived of heavenly support, with nothing to rely on but his own inadequate resources. No matter what the setting, no matter what the plan of action, virtually every piece of Melville's prose output contains these same elements. This holds true even for a work like "The Encantadas, or Enchanted Islands" (published in 1854, just several months after the appearance of "Cock"), which, at first glance, seems little more than a travelogue based on Melville's visits to the Galapagos Islands.

"The Encantadas" consists of ten sketches on various aspects of the Galapagos Islands. From one perspective, at least, the sketches come full circle: the first sketch describes the clinkered changelessness of the islands, while the last sketch deals with the clinkered changelessness of death. What I wish to demonstrate is that the question which regulates the sketches thematically is whether and to what extent it is possible to save oneself or be saved from "clinkerdom."

Already in the first sketch, by making the clinkered hellishness of the islands a symbol as well as a place, there is the suggestion that there may be no escape possible.[21] The narrator, though far removed now in time and space from the islands, has not been able to rid himself of their foreboding enchantment, even when he is in the most serene and happy environs. He is haunted by

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[18]*Moby-Dick* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1967), p. 166.

[19]*Great Short Works,* p. 89.

[20]*Moby-Dick,* p. 355, emphasis added. Consider, too, Melville's remarks in a letter to Hawthorne: "I read Solomon more and more, and everytime see deeper and deeper and unspeakable meanings in him." J Leyda, *The Melville Log: A Documentary Life of Herman Melville,* 2 vols. (New York: Gordian Press, 1969), I, pp. 412f.

[21]*Great Short Works,* sketch one runs from pp. 98 to 103. This first sketch joins the islands with hell and suffering by referring to the New Testament parable of Lazarus and Dives, as well as by calling the isles a "Tartarus."

the specter of the Galapagos tortoise which is itself cursed, the victim "of a penal, or malignant or perhaps downright diabolic enchanter."

The second and third sketches deepen the gloom by showing man as a rapacious devourer of what life there is on and around the islands. The narrator laments: "Poor fish . . . in your victimized confidence, you are one of the number of those who inconsiderately trust, while they do not understand human nature."[22] Which is to say that the demonic forces at work in the islands may also be active in man. Deliverance, then, would depend upon benevolent supra-human intervention in the affairs of man.

The very title of the fourth sketch—"A Pisgah View from the Rock"—raises this hopeful possibility in its allusion to Deut. 34:1 which reads: "And Moses went up from the plains of Moab unto the mountains of Nebo, to the top of Pisgah. . . ." This biblical context relates events preceding the death of Moses, in particular God's granting the great prophet a panoramic view of the Promised Land. In "the Encantadas," however, a "Pisgah view" yields not a vision of a land flowing with milk and honey, a land, moreover, which one's posterity will possess, but rather desolation where "demons of fire" are engaged in "dire mischief."[23]

After describing, in sketches five and six, a man-of-war world in which might equals right, in which, e.g., a warship makes use of her "salvation to destroy," in which that same ship "gives up the ghost" in the service of war,[24] the narrator returns, in sketch 7, to the theme of the Promised Land. In this sketch a Creole, who relentlessly uses dogs to control his followers, sets sail for the islands, his "Promised Land." Once there he establishes an autocratic tyranny in which he maintains order by killing the dissenters. But since ". . . e'er long the Nimrod king would have little or no remaining game to shoot," he reluctantly abolishes the death penalty. Forthwith he is overthrown and the rebels replace the autocracy with a "Riotocracy" in which the only norm is normlessness.

The biblical reference to "Promised Land" and "Nimrod" suggests hope and deliverance. Nimrod, empire builder and "mighty hunter before the Lord" (Gen. 10:8), and the occupation of Canaan by the people Israel are indicative both of might in the service of right and benevolent trans-human intervention. Even though Nimrod's empire includes Babel, which becomes the focal point of a narrative (Gen. 11:1-9) in which human power is criticized and curtailed, man's punishment is mild in contrast to the flood precisely because of God's good will towards man (Gen. 8:21). And even though the occupation of Canaan is followed by a kind of "Riotocracy" in the time of the "Judges" (see Judges 21:25), the Davidic monarchy delivers biblical Israel from that chaos.

[22] *Ibid.*, p. 110.
[23] *Ibid.*, p. 116.
[24] *Ibid.*, pp. 117, 118.
[25] *Ibid.*, pp. 121-125.

In Melville's narration, the Creole's tyranny is also replaced by anarchy, but what follows is not the Davidic monarchy with its ramifications for the Old and New Testament tales of deliverance, what follows is the most agonizing sketch in "The Encantadas." And it is precisely in this eighth sketch, the despair-ridden story of Hunilla, that New Testament salvation imagery comes to the fore.[26]

Seven weeks after Hunilla, her husband and her brother are abandoned on one of the islands she watches in helpless horror as both men drown. She buries her husband and continues to search for her brother's body (because of her "Romish Faith"), all the while praying to the Virgin Mary for deliverance. Eventually she is rescued by a ship on which the narrator is a crewman. Prior to her departure the narrator follows her to her husband's grave, where, hunched over it ". . . her hands extended to the cross-foot, with a little brass crucifix clasped between, a crucifix worn featureless, like an ancient graven knocker plied in vain." At the head of the gravesite was a cross "forlornly adroop in the silent air." The ship takes her to her former home and the narrator relates that: "The last seen of lone Hunilla she was passing into Payta town, riding upon a small gray ass; and before her on the ass's shoulders, she eyed the jointed workings of the beast's amorial cross."

The cross imagery in this sketch, together with the references to her "Romish faith" and her prayers to the Virgin Mary, keep the New Testament saga of deliverance, and therewith the possibility of decisive supra-human intervention in the affairs of man for the good of man, in the forefront.

But rather than support from the Heavens, what Hunilla does receive is "frost."[27] About the Heavens the narrator asserts: "Ah, Heaven, when man thus keeps his faith, wilt thou be faithless who created the faithful one? But they cannot break faith who never plighted it."[28]

Accordingly, in the eighth sketch the cross represents not man's best hope but a bitterly ironic ineffectiveness:

> —the cross at the grave of Hunilla's husband is "forlornly adroop;"
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> —her little brass crucifix is "worn featureless, like an ancient graven knocker long plied in vain."[29]

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[26] *Ibid.*, pp. 126-238.

[27] *Ibid.*, p. 138.

[28] *Ibid.*, p. 130. See p. 428 in *Moby-Dick* where Ahab, in defense of the woebegotten Pip, exclaims: " 'There can be no hearts above the snowline. Oh, ye frozen heavens! Look down here. Ye did beget this luckless child and have abandoned him, ye creative libertines.' "

[29] "Graven" is almost certainly a pun. See Melville's *Journal of a Visit to Europe and the Levant* (Princeton University Press, 1955), p. 89 ". . . saw a woman over a new grave—no grass on it yet. Such abandonment of misery! Called to the dead, put her head down as close to it as possible; as if calling down a hatchway or cellar; besought—'Why don't you speak to me? My God!—It is I! Ah,—speak—but one word!'—All deaf—so much for consolation—this woman and her cries haunt me horribly."

Hunilla's story is one of passion without deliverance, just as would be the account of Christ if the last seen of him was of his entry into Jerusalem. In such a world man's best hope would be diminished greatly. And, in fact, in "The Encantadas" man's best hope is reduced to avoiding burial at sea. Only in this sense do the clinkered islands offer hope to man, i.e., as a "convenient Potter's field."[30]

The latter reference is to Matthew 27 where the priests use money returned to them by a repentant Judas to purchase "the potter's field, to bury the stranger in." Death, of course, is not the last word in Matthew as that biblical text goes on to recount the miraculous events following the death of Jesus, a narration which culminates in the triumphant resurrection of Christ. The Gospel of Matthew's last words are the very essence of security as the resurrected Christ asserts: " 'And be assured, I am with you always, to the end of time.' "

In "The Encantadas" what follows the mention of "Potter's field" and that which constitutes Melville's last word is a gravestone poem which Melville borrowed and transformed significantly. The original poem appeared in a work Melville had referred to in a note appended to the ninth sketch.[31] That poem reads:

> Gentle reader, as you pass by
> As you are now, so once was I,
> And now my body is in the dust
> I hope in heaven my soul to rest.

Melville's version goes:

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

In "The Encantadas" all hope of deliverance has been discarded; "clinkerdom" reigns supreme.

In "Cock" and "The Encantadas" Melville inverts biblical salvation imagery in a consistently coherent fashion; in doing so he replaces the elemental security of the biblical vision with ultimate insecurity. The cross, for instance, perhaps the most dramatically hopeful salvation image, is, in both stories, overwhelmed by death.

Melville's ironic treatment of biblical salvation texts is everywhere ap-

[30] *Great Short Works,* p. 150.
[31] *Ibid.,* p. 146.

parent in his prose fiction. In his first novel, *Typee,* the slaughter of a cock named Peter ushers in a story of deliverance which inverts the biblical schema at virtually every turn. The ship's crew views the cock's death which impels the captain to make for land to procure fresh food, as "the signal for our deliverance."[32] To be sure, however, it is a corporeal deliverance, as debauchery and gluttony ensue; activities which bring down upon the pagan natives pain and suffering.

Throughout *Typee,* which tells of the narrator's decision to jump ship, of his life among the Typee natives, and of his escape from them, and its sequel *Omoo,* which describes his wanderings throughout Polynesia, the same refrain recurs: tractable, innocent, and humane pagans are set upon by double-dealing religious and secular representatives of Christendom. In short, in *Typee* and *Omoo* Melville describes an Edenic Polynesia which is defiled by the serpentine entry of Christian civilization.[33]

Peter's church, which in the Gospel of Matthew (16:18-19) is projected as a vehicle for salvation is, in *Typee* and *Omoo,* in the vanguard of a process which brings damnation.[34] In *Typee* and *Omoo,* Melville's irony is for the most part confined to exposing the hypocrisy of professing Christians and to contrasting their deceit to the decent simplicity of the pre-Christian pagans who are ". . . more humane than many who study essays on virtue and benevolence, and who repeat every night that beautiful prayer breathed first by the lips of the divine and gentle Jesus."[35] This level of irony would seem not only to leave untouched the validity and grandeur of the biblical message, but also to enhance it by ridiculing those who fail to live up to the ideals of the "divine and gentle Jesus." The immediate introduction to the biblical context in which Peter's Church is put forward as a salvific vehicle describes efforts by Christ to direct the disciples away from material to spiritual considerations. This would serve further to strengthen this level of irony.

But even in these first works there may be the beginning of a hidden agenda which is directed at the biblical worldview itself. The narrator, for instance, is unstinting in his praise of the natives' worship of what can only be called the pleasure principle. The ultimate concern of the natives for physical gratification pushes aside any and all interest in theology, belief, or sensual restraint. In the Typee valley, and in all of pagan Polynesia, a "religious" festival is an occasion to increase the eating, drinking, and merrying.[36]

It hardly needs to be pointed out that the biblical base of Christianity (ex-

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[32]*Typee: A Peep at Polynesian Life* (New York: Signet, 1964), p. 16.

[33]*Ibid.,* pp. 64, 77, 145, 194, 221f., 228, 238; *Omoo: A Narrative of Adventures in the South Seas* (London: Constable, 1922), pp. 205, 207, 223, 228, 353.

[34]And, of course, in several New Testament contexts Peter's denial of Christ is linked with the crowing of a cock, a linkage which Melville himself refers to in *White-Jacket* (New York: Grove Press, 1952), p. 69. See Mark 14:66-72; Luke 22:56-72; John 18:12-18.

[35]*Typee,* p. 228.

[36]*Ibid.,* pp. 109, 110, 111, 144f., 153, 172, 174, 177f., 185-191, 194ff., 197; *Omoo,* pp. 205f., 207f., 210, 211, 283.

cepting, perhaps, the Book of Ecclesiastes) does not trumpet forth the pursuit of pleasure as the *sine qua non* of life. This second level of inversion, which we uncovered in "Cock" and "The Encantadas," is much more in evidence in Melville's third novel, the allegory-laden *Mardi.* In that work the most intelligent character subjects Christianity to an historical and philosophical critique, all the while paraphrasing and using arguments from the Book of Ecclesiastes. The force of his critique, which is never called into question by the narrator, is apparently blunted when he himself converts to Christianity near the end of the book. But on examination it turns out to be a Christianity stripped of its ethical urgency, to say nothing of its creedal framework. For good reason is the "Christian" land called "Serenia:" it is a place whose definitive attribute is the pursuit of pleasure; a land where the most urgent maxim is to live and let live; a land where—in keeping with Melville's depiction of pagan Polynesia—"no custom is strange, no creed absurd."

As for the narrator of *Mardi,* he piles doubt upon doubt, and rejection upon rejection, and like the narrator of *Typee* and *Omoo* is at home nowhere save on the boundless, chaotic ocean.[37] No serious reader of Melville needs to be told that the sea is Melville's great symbol of alien formlessness which underlines the elemental insecurity of human destiny.[38]

*Mardi* was both a popular and a critical failure, facts which may have spurred Melville to return to the biographical-adventure format of *Typee* and *Omoo.* In one summer's time he turned out *Redburn,* the story of his first sea voyage, and *White-Jacket,* the tale of his return home on a man-of-war from his wanderings in Polynesia.

More than anything else *Redburn* is about a youth's maturation process. Of interest to us is the fact that Melville encases the process in a biblical model of deliverance. The narrator, unprepared for the rigors of shipboard life ". . . looked like an Indian baby tied to a plank, and hung up against a tree like a crucifix."[39] The crucifixion imagery anticipates his passion-filled and purgative experience: he endures his trials and is delivered. But as in *Typee,* the deliverance is markedly corporeal: no longer does he shun material pleasure.[40] More importantly, his intellectual stance toward his faith changes and his "faith [is given] . . . a severe shock."[41] In the fog off Liverpool he hears "the dismal sound of a great bell. . . . I thought I had never heard so boding a sound, a sound that seemed to speak of judgment and the resurrection, like belfry-mouthed Paul of Tarsus." As in "Cock," however, the sound sym-

[37]*Mardi,* 2 vols. (London: Constable, 1922), I, pp. 59, 65f., 224, 277f., 289f., 306, II, 31ff., 123, 154f., 214, 244, 296, 298f., 301.

[38]See, e.g., the following pages in *Moby-Dick:* 18, 154, 227, 235, 272, 378, 405, 413, 442, 478. See my "Melville's Inversion of Job in *Moby-Dick,*" *The Iliff Review* XXXVII (Winter, 1980).

[39]*Redburn: His First Voyage* (New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1957), pp. 70-72.

[40]*Ibid.,* cf. pp. 45ff. where Redburn is contemptuous of his crewmates' corporeal dispositions with 263f.

[41]*Ibid.,* pp. 92, 135-154.

bolizes not resurrection to life eternal but a "warning [to] marineers to flee . . . it seemed fuller of dirges for the past, than of monitions for the future and none can give ear to it, without thinking of the sailors who sleep far beneath at the bottom of the deep."[42] Not surprisingly, the delivered narrator comes to believe that death is "oblivion."[43] He sees not simply that the world is dominated by the sword, but that the sword will never be transformed into a pruning hook.[44] This thought is completed in *White-Jacket* when the narrator observes that not the Bible but rather the Articles of War are "gospel" and "infallible."[45]

Redburn's "insights" appear again and again in Melville's prose fiction and, repeatedly, these perceptions—which are decidedly unbiblical—are adorned with biblical imagery. In *Moby-Dick,* e.g., Ahab's hunt for the white whale begins on Christmas day and a whole series of allusions link Ahab with Christ.

—Ahab has a "crucifixion in his face";

—Ahab lies like a dead man for three days and nights in his cabin which is "as a tomb";

—Ahab wears the "Iron Crown of Lombardy";

—Ahab "sleeps with clenched hands; and wakes with his own bloody nails in his palms."

But Ahab is able to save no one, himself included; he hurls defiance at the Heavens and goes defiantly to his death giving up not the "ghost" but his "spear."[46]

In *Pierre* the protagonist's quest for truth involves him in an attempt to "gospelize" the world, but his "agony," although putting him in the role of ". . . the heaven-begotten Christ," leads to despair and death for himself and for those he loves whom he succeeds only in tying to his "stake." In a letter to Hawthorne Melville had hinted that *Moby-Dick,* which he claimed to have "broiled" in "hell-fire," had a demonic motto.[47] If *Pierre* may be said to have a motto it is, "Oh, not long will joy abide when truth doth come . . ." and, accordingly, the most highly praised work in *Pierre* is *Hamlet,* which is said to teach that "hopeless gloom" is at the heart of things.[48]

[42]*Ibid.,* pp. 120f.; cf. *Moby-Dick,* p. 241.

[43]*Redburn,* pp. 277, 281.

[44]*Ibid.,* p. 186.

[45]*White-Jacket,* pp. 228, 308, 376.

[46]*Moby-Dick,* pp. 95, 111, 112, 147, 194, 468.

[47]Leyda, *Log,* I, p. 415.

[48]*Pierre* (London: Constable, 1923), pp. 20, 123, 125, 127, 149, 209, 248f., 257, 281, 284, 381, 394, 417.

In *Israel Potter* the hero has an "advent;" he is entombed for three days after which some think him a dead man come back to life; he is described as being "the bescarred bearer of a cross," and near the end of the work is "resurrected." But his story is one of tragicomic irresolution with not a hint of resolution or reconciliation.[49]

In *The Confidence-Man* the con man's first appearance is linked explicitly with Isaiah 53 and is, moreover, called an "advent." But although his "message" is from 1 Corinthians it becomes evident that his task is not to save but to deceive. The lamb-like imagery which Melville employs to embellish the con man's portrait is double-edged: the confidence man "fleeces" a mankind so desperate for something in which to have "confidence" that in the last scene a man is induced to place his faith in a chamber pot.[50]

In "Daniel Orme," Orme has a crucifix tattooed on his chest, but the design is cut by a slash from an instrument of war and Orme is found dead on Easter day.[51]

In "Apple-Tree Table" an insect's "resurrection" convinces one of the characters that man too can look forward to transmutation, but the bug dies the next day. This sequence calls to mind the philosopher's response in *Mardi* to the proposition that the transformation of a chrysalis into a butterfly leads to the inference that man will be resurrected: " 'No for the analogy has an unsatisfactory end. From its chrysalis state, the silkworm but becomes a moth, that very quickly expires. Its longer existence is as a worm. All vanity, vanity . . . to seek in nature for positive warranty to these aspirations of ours. . . . if not against us, nature is not for us.' "[52]

In "Benito Cereno," a story based on an actual revolt on a Spanish slaver, the principal biblical allusion is to Ezekiel's vision in the Valley of Dry Bones (Ezek. 37), a biblical context whose paramount image is of resurrected deliverance. In Melville's story, however, there is no deliverance whatsoever. Whites brutalize blacks; blacks then brutalize whites, who, in the end, regain control and once again brutalize the blacks. The only "resurrection" in Melville's story pertains to the skeleton of the slave owner—whose flesh has probably been cannibalized by the blacks—which is nailed to the ship's figurehead three days after the body's disappearance. The bones replace the original figurehead which was *Christ*opher Columbus.[53]

In "Bartleby, the Scrivener: A Story of Wall-Street," the narrator joins together Bartleby and Christ in ways which are by now familiar:

—Bartleby's appearance is an "advent";

—he is described as a Man of Sorrows;

—he changes radically after three days in a tomb-like office.

[49]*Israel Potter* (London: Constable, 1923), pp. vi, 87ff., 222f.

[50]*The Confidence-Man,* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1971), pp. 1-3, 8, 108, 115, 148, 206-217.

[51]*Great Short Works,* pp. 424-428.

[52]*Mardi,* p. 224; *Great Short Works,* pp. 368-382.

[53]*Great Short Works,* pp. 238-315, emphasis added.

And, he adds a new touch:

> —he is paraded to the scene of his death where he is surrounded by thieves.

But again, Melville's character saves no one; he is immobilized by despair, and to the extent that the narrator learns anything from his experience with Bartleby, it is that "good tidings" are overwhelmed by death.[54]

No survey of Melville's prose fiction should ignore Melville's last work, the justly celebrated *Billy Budd.* The simple plot of *Billy Budd* belies its great complexity. Guileless Billy Budd, impressed into service on an English frigate, unwittingly ignites a flame of hatred in Claggart, the master-at-arms. Claggart falsely accuses Billy of mutiny in the presence of the captain (Vere), and Billy, who is reduced to stuttering impotence, lashes out with a blow that kills the master-at-arms. Vere, knowing that Billy is innocent, nonetheless has him executed, believing that the maintenance of law and order makes necessary the sacrifice of one who is by nature an innocent. Not long after Billy's execution, Vere is himself mortally wounded in battle.

Congregated around each of the three main characters are biblical referents. We will confine ourselves to the role and function of two biblical allusions in regard to Billy: Adam and Christ.

On several occasions, Billy's physical beauty as well as his essential innocence are compared with those aspects of the pre-fallen Adam.[55] The similarities with Jesus are more numerous:

> —when one of Claggart's underlings attempts to involve Billy in a sham conspiracy it is reminiscent of Christ's temptation;[56]
>
> —the hastiness of Billy's trial and conviction, his refusal to defend himself, and his calmness in the face of death call to mind corresponding events in the New Testament;[57]
>
> —Billy's last words—" 'God bless Captain Vere' "—are in conformity with the last words of Jesus as recorded in Luke.[58]

Even the most careless reader is unlikely to miss the narrator's remark that a piece of the spar from which Billy was executed became for the sailors ". . . as a piece of the cross."[59]

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[54]*Great Short Works,* pp. 39-74.

[55]*Billy Budd, Sailor (An Inside Narrative),* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970), pp. 52, 53, 78, 94.

[56]*Ibid.,* cf., pp. 81f. with Matt. 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13; Mark 1:12-13.

[57]*Billy Budd,* cf. pp. 104, 105-107, 124, 127 with Matt. 26:57-68; 27:1,2,11-56; Mark 14:53-65; 15:1-5; Luke 23:1-7,13-18; 23:33-44; John 18:12—19:6.

[58]*Billy Budd,* cf. p. 123 with Luke 23:32-46.

[59]*Billy Budd,* p. 131.

Nowhere, perhaps, is Melville's use of the Bible more corrosive; in the cases of Adam and Christ, the explicitness of the surface connections between them and Billy makes more powerful the ironic inversions. Simply put, unlike biblical Adam, Billy does not survive his "fall," and unlike Christ, Billy does not really "rise."

While Adam's fall is figurative (and, in fact, a kind of rise; thus, see Gen. 3:22: "And the Lord God said, 'Now that man has become like one of us, knowing good and bad. . . .' "), Billy falls irrevocably, "fathoms down, fathoms down."[60]

And although Billy's ascension at death—". . . Billy ascended; and, ascending, took the full rose of the dawn"—and subsequent fall into the depths are accompanied by events which some sailors interpret supernaturally, the narrator ascribes these events to "chance" and to "animal greed."[61] Moreover, the peculiar texture of the sky at the time of Billy's execution, with its "vapory fleece hanging low in the East . . . shot through with a soft glory as of the fleece of the Lamb of God" is shortly "licked up by the sun. . . . and the circumambient air in the clearness of its serenity was like smooth white marble in the polished block not yet removed from the marble-dealer's yard."[62]

In view of Melville's consistently ironic treatment of biblical salvation imagery, it seems altogether appropriate that in one of his last biblical allusions, a symbol of death (a gravestone) obliterates a symbol of salvation (Jesus as the Lamb of God).

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[60] *Ibid.*, p. 132.

[61] *Ibid.*, p. 124, 127.

[62] *Ibid.*, pp. 124, 128.