

## MELVILLE: PROMETHEAN (II)

BY LLOYD MORRIS

MELVILLE'S serious literary career commenced when, on his return from the famous South Sea Odyssey, he wrote *Typee*; a description of the earlier part of his wanderings. It dropped a stinging lash on missions and missionaries; also, it mentioned undraped human forms with an innocent naturalness that led one with equal naturalness to suppose such things really existed; which as the whole mid-Victorian world knew, they did not: the persistence of the human race being solely due to its association with gooseberry bushes, long-billed birds and other beneficent flora and fauna. The book was an immediate success, and Melville himself, also, became a sort of raree-show. A raree-show of declining attraction he remained throughout life—the man who had lived among cannibals: an exasperatingly wry compliment in later times to the author of *Mardi*, *Moby-Dick* and *The Confidence Man*. Apart, however, from the reputation and advertisement accorded it as a mild *chronique scandaleuse*, *Typee* received, and still receives wide academic praise for its freshness of outlook and frank bravery of youth expressed in a limpid, virginal and sometimes sparkling style. These qualities it shared with forgotten authors of the period: so were it not for his great works, Melville's minor efforts would not have survived even as tracts of stirring times recorded quite frequently in an equal and superior manner by rival pens.

His next book, *Omoo*, carried the narrative of his South Sea adventure to the end of its second phase. It is intrinsically a better composition than *Typee*, but found less public favor. His sharp observance, skill for character drawing, unerring ear for dialect, and his capacity for handling dialogue are definitely established in this work, from their initial promise in *Typee*. The technique

of both books shows a great advance from the *jejune Fragments from a Writing Desk*. He is somewhat the master of his craft and material now: style pleasantly free and natural; matter skillfully selected and blended; and at times an Olympian simplicity of narration and an Elizabethan majesty of atmosphere that is prophetic. Yet in itself neither book is of immortal warrant: they do but carry the seeds of immortality played over by his irrepressible spirit of the comicalness of the ironical; and exist today as valuable repositories of material for the commentator and biographer.

*Omoo* was followed by marriage and *Mardi*. Of the former much will be written of much that does not matter. Of the latter less will be written and much will matter. His own dictum concerning *Mardi* was given some two years after he had completed it,—“Had I not written and published *Mardi*, in all likelihood I would not be as wise as I am now or may be. For that thing was stabbed at; I do not say through.”

*Mardi* was Melville's first work of the imagination; but it is only partly subjective. Its theme is the pursuit of the ideal from muck to moon: the quest of the ultimate; the search for the explanation of the paradox of good and evil; for the cause behind that paradox. As a work of pure thought it is the greatest of his books: greater than *Moby-Dick*; but because it lacks the humanising breadth of the latter, it will never receive its proper recognition from the generality of critical readers. Its catalogs, collocations, reveries, analyses, reflections, irony, jest, laughter, ferociousness, and brilliant satire are threads upon which are strung dazzling concepts and illuminating facets of insight; wherein the development of empires, religions, social systems and all the story of human life with its contradictions, hideousness, aspirations, hopes, fears, accomplishments and failures is traced; and the masquerade of superstition, sin and virtue is explored and appraised.

The middle portion of the book impeaches Society and sets out to champion Truth—Truth at all costs; to strip convention and decent covering shams from the skeleton grinning beneath; to discover the responsible cause in Humanity for human woes; and discovering, disarm. The action is carried through allegory in characters typifying Philosophy, Spiritual Life, Poetry, History, Religion, Dynastic Government, Revolution, Purity, Passion, Profanity and other figments descriptive of human life and its manifold forms of

knowledge and experience. They counsel and wrangle with each other through a story whose interest holds the attention far more closely than that of Bunyan's Pilgrim or Spenser's Britomart. The concluding portion relates the struggle between the spiritual quest and the sensory temptation: between accepting the material profit and safety of the sufficiency in Pragmatism, or still following after the Rational. Humanity is forgiven as an helpless secondary cause—not in the social organism is The Ultimate, the mystery of good and evil. The indictment is shifted beyond mortality to the Arch-Principals; and despite the pleadings of Love, counsel of Wisdom, deterrents of Hatred, Taji the hero turns his back on the Pragmatic, symbolised in the safe, fair land of Mardi, and goes sailing on; pursued by Remorse, Retribution and Repentance: the three avenging sons of Priestly Power slain at Taji's hands. The book smiles, but it smiles through tears: it laughs, but it laughs through sobs whose echoes reverberate in overtones of passionate intellectual intensity throughout this concluding portion whose pages have no dying fall, but a rising crescendo of bursting, world-shaking storm that will sweep on through *Moby-Dick*, and there be stilled in the lap of age-old waters closing secretly over the *Pequod* stove by the Great White Whale.

The criticism has been levelled against Melville that whenever he departs from the actualities of his physical experiences he fails: fails as an imaginative writer. *Mardi* has been cited in proof, as beginning somewhere and ending nowhere: opening in a practical way with a known ship setting out on a known voyage, and then ending *in nubibus*. Really, the opposite is truer. It opens specifically on the Pacific Ocean simply because the author required some jumping-off place, and naturally chose a *locale* of recent and familiar experience. This was a good selling point, also, since he had already an established reputation as a South Sea writer; and, too he may not have been without intent to fool his public with the same sour jest of appearances wherewith the world had deceived him. So far as the theme of the work is concerned it might just as well have opened on a peak in Hindu Kush; a Labrador glacier, or city slum. Commencing as it did with a ship headed for the enchanting isles below the line, the public sat down with gusto to be titilated by Polynesian maids *au naturel*. When development somewhat abruptly assumed fairy-talish aspects they were discontented, but might

have remained neutral or only damned it with faint praise as a romantic fantasy; but when the latter portion bourgeoned out into a metaphysical allegory they howled. They did not appreciate nor care that it was both sequel and prelude; that it was the tale of his spiritual adventures up to that time, which had flowered out of the sub-conscious and was being expressed in symbol and setting familiar to him, and to his public, also, through *Typee* and *Omoo* which were tales of his physical adventures. Even the opening portion of *Mardi*, concrete as it appeared, was symbolical and transitional; leading from the purely objective phenomena which had hitherto been his subject matter, to the abstract and spiritual fields in which he was hereafter chiefly to wander. The ship was not a real ship; it was his first fifteen years of protected life; innocent alike of material and spiritual stress. The sea was not a real sea; but the ocean of social life upon which his boyhood barque of life had floated; and the sharks which swam in the sinisterly bland waters about his craft, were the rigors of civilization from which he had been protected by parental care and toil. The abrupt changes from the calm opening to the fantastic satire of the middle portion, and again to the allegorical remainder are thus seen quite in order, and not indicative of confusion of thought and failure to master his material. They symbolise the abrupt transitions in Melville's own life and thought.

In *Mardi*, Melville had as previously intimated, come to the same place that his contemporary, Tennyson, had come when he wrote the *Lotus Eaters* and *Locksley Hall*. Tennyson was the great bourgeoisie poet. Butcher, baker, banker and broker could and did understand and sometimes appreciate the poet's message and music: matchless in rhythmic obviousness. Since the bourgeoisie is always with us, Tennyson will ever command a great public. *Mardi* has nothing to do with the elementary and vulgar matter of the conduct of life, but is abstruse and profound in its concernment of life's meanings and significances. *Blackwood's* over its bacon and eggs damned the book: *Dublin* peevishly poking its lenten herbs, deplored; the *Revue de Deux Mondes* twisted up its mustachios and praised—*vraiment*, but there is something here of our own good François; and Melville himself said the wisest thing when he intimated that *Mardi* was wisdom.

With the publication of *Mardi*, Melville's conscious psychological

career had brought him to the place where *Moby-Dick* should logically be his next writing; but he was not to undertake that yet. The public reception of *Mardi* shewed him they did not want abstractions even though the very abstract was made to palpate with vitality. What the public did want was more buttocks and bellies, or at least some commonplace equivalent of manners and morals; and as pater- nity was upon him, and indebtedness to his brothers and father-in-law, he essayed to boil the pot with *Redburn* and *Whitejacket*; two quite concrete novels devoted to an attack on human institutions, with sea life as a background. *Redburn* depicts his external life to his eighteenth year and specifically portrays his first voyage as ship's boy. *White Jacket* is the story of his voyage home from the South Seas as ordinary seaman on board the frigate *United States*. This book played as large a part in the amelioration of the life of U.S. naval ratings as did *Nicholas Nickleby* in the reformation of England's pseudo-educational establishments. Its character delin- iation, skilful dialog, and an unerring ability to put a merciless fin- ger on concealed sore spots, are notable. It is in no wise propagand- ist, but a critical work of art whose characters are drawn with mac- abre humour and sardonic Hogarthian satire. Because of cer- tain spiritual values it shadows, *Redburn* is the better of the two, although artistically more unequal in expression.

The writing of the two novels ravaged him: not only because of the actual work and shortness of production-time entailed, but the necessity of them. The acclamation of *Typee* had very sensibly raised his *morale*; and the book's comparatively good financial re- turns were an economic emollient of present worth and future promise. But *Typee* is passed; its plaudits a memory: debts, duns, wife, babies, and the discredit and monetary disappointment of his latest efforts are very present. He who recently had uttered re- sounding defiance of expediency, concessions and all other qualities of the pragmatic had been compelled to bow to it: had written his pot-boilers and the shallowly-filled pan had only simmered. The situation recalled a similar gross deference to circumstance to which he had been clubbed before his eighteenth year. That frustration- wound, scarred over by initial literary success, reopened, and dark and warning bubbles escaped to the surface from sub-conscious deeps. The physical effects of his far-journeyings combined with his unremitting literary activity to lower his defensive vitality: his

bitter past came bitterly to the present, under the strain of economic hounding and connubial stress—Now, Lizzie, you can help at need! Unstraighten that mouth, and cease your redding; it was not necessary for him to go the altar for a housekeeper—You give him clean sheets every Saturday night!—I'm sure you do; but a stranger-woman is handmaid to his fame—"true, warm-hearted, earnest, sincere, reverent, and very tender and modest." Ah! Sophia: but perhaps thou art not careful and troubled about many things.

Yet once more, Melville, spent with conflict, collected his forces in defiant gesture. Dazed and with failing sight, he drove on with his task; and in a bleak little room of a solitary farm-steading in the Berkshires, *Moby-Dick* came to literary birth. It was a last, great flaring conflagration of incarnate Will, and it passed almost unnoticed. Again we meet *Taji* metamorphosed into Captain Ahab who exemplifies Rationality carried to its logical extremity. The three avenging brothers have, also, suffered sea-change into the mates, Starbuck, Stubb, Flask and the moron negro boy. The Great Quarry is sighted; The Ultimate identified in the wry-jawed White Whale, *Moby-Dick*.

In matter and manner, the book is a demonic, titanic, fabulous dynamicism. In philosophy, metaphysic, curious dry-as-dust erudition, aphorism, fantasy, irony and shouting, bubbling, whispering, poetic reverie and bursting turbulence Ahab-Melville assails the Infinite with Promethean violence as the author of the mystery of iniquity. He acquits humanity but has no affection for it. He spurns affection—the dead must bury their dead; the blind must lead the blind; the cripples help the cripples. For himself, he renounces and denies all other obligations, and dedicates himself with insane single-mindedness to the pursuit and destruction of the Great White Whale—not perhaps altogether because he deems it the enemy of Man; but because behind the masquerade of his boyhood's Divine Ideal, it had stricken him, Ahab-Melville, even as he had worshipped: even as he worshipped had slyly, indifferently plotted his injury. Vainly, members of the crew at the risk of encountering his personal violence, display to him the danger his determination entails to himself, to the ship's company and their dependent families ashore. The three avengers, of conduct done or purposed, tear at him in vain in the guise of arguments pleaded by Starbuck, Stubb, and Flask. The mute dependence and trustful loyalty of the moron

boy, wrenches but does not deflect him. Ferociously he attacks the monster, whose wry jaw founders the Ahab-Melvillean rationalised barque of life. In his own destruction, the complete rationalist involves the whole ship's company who are bread winners, and dear to innocent souls guilty of no impieties of arrogant conduct, other than cherishing kindly thoughts and waiting in far off homes for the return of the lives and loves that were their poor all.

*Moby-Dick* might well in the style of an old broadside, be entitled *The Story of a Complete Rationalist: His Astonishing Adventures and Last Dying Confession*. Apart from Melville's great novel there are three such notable histories of sublimated Rationality: *Brand* and the Christian and Buddhist gospels. Incidentally it might be mentioned that the story of a complete Pragmatist has been unsurpassably drawn in *Peer Gynt*, and, also, *Barry Lyndon*. The philosophy of the Christ and of Ahab-Melville are diametrically opposed. Both pursue the same goal, but Ahab essays to overcome Satanism by the negative of Force: the Christ obliterates the mystery of iniquity by the positive appropriation of Good.

The wild and lofty extravagance of *Moby-Dick*; its sheer beauty of terror, has no equal in literature except Marlow's *Faustus*. Much could be written in praise of the exhaustive consistency with which its symbolism is carried throughout the book; and many allusions made revealing the subtle, minute and delicate touches wherein this treatment is harmonized with what exteriorly is a rattling, good seayarn. Many authors have been preeminent in one particular literary style: Pater with his cold purity of classical outline; Stevenson's agglomerate latinity; Wilde's exoticism; Browne's tapestried richness; Hugo's florid rythms; Milton's sonorousness—but in *Moby-Dick*, Melville was everything: he played every instrument in the polyphonic orchestra of prosody. The book was dedicated to Hawthorne who blenched, and by way of acknowledgment wrote *Ethan Brand*; in which he pointed out in paraphrase that the chief defendant in a witch-hunt is the informer.

Of Melville's state of mind at this time we have his own epistolatory remark that until the age of twenty-five he had no development at all. From his twenty-fifth year, the year of *Typee*, he dates his life which was thenceforward a continual unfolding of his unconscious growth during years which had seemed arid. But now he feels he has come to the utmost leaf of the bulb, and that shortly

the flower must fall to the mould. The very torrent of ideas in that turbulent onrush of development climaxing in *Moby-Dick*, wearied him now; as a baffled man is wearied. How could he ever achieve the ultimate when there seemed no end to the flashing facets of thought. "If only a man could do something and then say it is finished: not that one thing alone; but all others; and that he has reached his uttermost and can never exceed it." On that note he commenced *Pierre*; with the ink of *Moby-Dick's* last page scarce dry.

Though autobiographical of his youth, *Pierre* is the psychological sequel of *Moby-Dick*, in that it is the continuation of his pursuit of the Ultimate he had deemed achieved in *The Great White Whale*. But *Moby-Dick* done, the fresh thought surged over him that it, also, even as *Mardi*, was only *an* ultimate; and that heretofore he had quested through the external world but had not yet explored the subjective—the Self: perhaps there was The Final Reason. His perusal of *Ethan Brand* may have had some prompting in the matter. Forthwith he who had fished for the Great Fish in the ocean of objectivity, let down his line into the subliminal pool of Self, and drew up *Pierre*: a psycho-analytical triumph. Looking back from his noon of years, he thinks to see the awful shadow of the Ultimate in that infantine morass known to nomenclature as libido. There the once idealised parental figures shrined in his boyish pantheon, now lay rotting. The iconoclastic factors involved have already been partly indicated; their study as a whole is beyond the compass of this brief notice. The injury to his psyche was profound; and added to by his consented Bowdlerization of the second edition of *Typee*, endured throughout his life; being the theme of a short poem written in about his seventy-second year. In the stilted caste *milieu* imposed upon the impressionable years of an unusually impressionable childhood, he discerned, too, the ancestry of all his ills of social mal-adjustment; of which he achieved in his collisions with environment some degree of external alignment and internal compensation. But the patrician in him never trusted Democracy any more than plebian 25 Wall Street does. Of his painful social readjustments, *Redburn*, *White-Jacket* and *The Confidence Man* are the record. *Pierre* is the story of a misfortunate warp that was never rectified.

The book was execrated: its matter damned; its manner derided. His critics overlooked the fact that both were indissolubly bound

together; and that the particular thrasonical style employed was the only correct vehicle for the material carried; and that in employing it, Melville had, also, done it in savage scathing mockery of the times depicted. Influenced by the enormity of the Melvillean metaphysic, Criticism has not yet appreciated that Melville was, also, a subtle satirist.

Recoiling from himself and the critical response to *Pierre*, and perhaps satisfied that in the loathly worm of libido he has attained finality, Melville turned savagely on Society and wrote *The Confidence Man*; in which Society derisively refused to recognise its own likeness. The social philosophy of the book is acrid and mordant; its satire picturesque and trenchant. It contains passages of profound and original thought; and the brilliant shadow of a metaphysical truth that is exhilarating. It goes deeper than *Gulliver*; is more universal and less contemporary: not even Rabelais wields a keener scalpel; and it is as true of Society today as before Babylon was builded.

With *The Confidence Man* his literary career was practically ended; he passed from public notice. But still buffeted by fresh thought, he wrote the short story, *Bartleby, The Scrivener*; a classic approaching in conception Shakespeare's *Richard The Second*; and rivalling Gogol's *Cloak* and Maupassant's *A Piece Of String*. The theme of *Bartleby* is the opposite of *Moby-Dick* in illustrating a doctrine of staticism or non-resistance. Melville is no longer a critic of the Christ-method of eternal Yes; but he has abandoned his own everlasting No. He is neuter. His ability to create atmosphere had been established in the great chapter describing Ishmael's embarkation on the *Pequod*. *Bartleby* is truly a tale of terror; terror of atmosphere; terror of idea; for it is that most appalling of tragedies; the spectacle of a dead Will. The Scrivener's final words had been, "*I know where I am.*" Melville now knew where he was—hovering on the meridian of his calendared life. He realised what he had long seen foreshadowed; that he could not pursue a literary career and support his family. He had battled with *The Great White Whale*; he had grappled with the Loathly Worm. Prometheus was broken: who or what now will keep the Jovian vulture from the Promethean liver! He will make no more advances to life; no treaties with infinity; he is Timon and will accept in "the hellish society of men" what comes. So without exterior

sign he accepted at the hands of a chance acquaintance of travel, a place in the Customs Office.

In Melville's remaining years lie for him and those who would interpret him, unplumbed and little regarded deeps where certain integrations occurred which dictated the comparative repose of his final utterances and turned him from being a thinker, into a musing, reflective man watching with a speculative eye the world go by; and brooding reminiscently over the spectacle of his own life. In *Carrel*, an epic poem of nearly six hundred pages faintly suggestive of *The Canterbury Pilgrimage*, he depicts his own spiritual pilgrimage, imaginatively treated with his Jerusalem visit as physical background. The characters in this poem are sometimes still instinct with skill of characterization; but often merely dummies of ventriloquial dialog. Its thought, sometimes distinguished and wonderful, frequently mediocre and occasionally commonplace, often anticipates its future and has in part become valid today by progress. His philosophy, and that of his last poems, intimates that he submits to the White Whale of the universe; but is still the rebel Lucifer who wrestles fitfully with God and will not be friends with man. He adopts pragmatism, but his practice of it partakes of the cold, calculated and unsympathetic cruelty of the baffled idealist. The reflex of fatal earlier years is still exhibited in ironic and pungent symbolism of thwarted magnanimities. Despite shews to the contrary, Melville's altruism never sprang from any depth of human tenderness, but was the expression of an intellectual dissatisfaction. Its passion against the apparent cruelty in the tragedy of Man's destiny and his desires; and its bitter scathing of the man-eat-man spectacle he viewed around him, were the reactions of a poet against the ugliness of mortality; of an intellectualist against a logical unsoundness and economic waste in the social structure; of an ethicist against the revealed inconsistencies of human profession and conduct. No warm human emotion of constructive sympathy mellowed its corrosive intent. Yet the operations which common opinion terms destructive thought are inherently constructive; and he who clears a site may be of equal merit with one who covers it.

Where most great men are less than their works; Melville was a great writer who was, also, a great man. Should the unhappiness and tragedy of his family be brought in evidence against him; it must also be witnessed that a greater character, and one whose every

act has received the approved sanction of Christendom, refused to support his parents by his handicraft, and to delinquency added the stigma of penal death. Gotama had kissed Ysadora and their infant son cradled in sleep; and deserted them to don the yellow robe and proffer the begging bowl in an emaciated hand. Ideals of Bolshevism had not all their birth in twentieth century Russia: the family as the unit of society was damned two thousand years ago beside the waters of Geneserath. Judged by the example of these two great figures, Melville was a deficient and sinning failure. Judged by conventional standards, which deny in practice theoretical ideals, he was a greater citizen than they; for to the best of his economically feeble ability, he cherished those dependent upon him.

In his deepest deep, Melville never lost the salvaging aid of his sense of cosmic irony, against a contemporary appraisal of abject failure. When his affairs are touching bottom he comes to the sardonically oblique conclusion that in some such way as consuming a certain amount of oxygen that otherwise by excess might be detrimental to the balance of nature, he is of some use in the world. In this wry quip he evidences some insight into the place of evil in the cosmic composition, for which no niche had hitherto been vacant in his philosophy. But he never really acquiesces because his insight had not the clarity of The Great Teachers. The Christ sought God; Melville tried to cast out the Devil: two very different aspects of the same thing. Melville dug, he did not climb. Faith, Inspiration, Illumination, may competently be defined as a state of freedom from mental contradictions. This was never Melville's; for he never conceived philosophical relativity; failed to appreciate that Being is not a finished spectacle, but an unfolding; a becoming; that any individual life or a season of it, is not a complete curve but only a parabolic segment.

Towards his closing days, exhausted by spiritual, mental and economic conflicts, his intellectual courage sometimes faltered, but his intellectual honesty never wavered. He remained sceptical of religion; sceptical, also, of its scientific substitutes as a satisfaction for other than material life; seeing them, perhaps, of even less efficiency than the superstitions, myths, and religions that had brought Man thus far. His years drawing to an end, he came more and more to an enthusiastic admiration of Koheleth—*Vanitas, vanitas, vanitatem*. The past was what it was; the present to be con-

tended with; and the future a repetition of the Edenic symbol. Whatever Science, Democracy, Progress, might build; still "the shark would glide white through the sulphurous sea;" just as the serpent undulated through the umbrageous groves of Eden. For the principle of destruction and evil was as eternal as the principle of creation and good; and would menace and supersede whatever Utopias Man erected. He saw no parabolism in historic continuity; but only a recurrent cycle of mingled good and evil. He failed to appreciate that the question is always greater than the answer; that the universe is as eternal as man's thought of it; its mode as irrefragable as human senses; and its God too great to be of conceptual importance in human affairs.

Much literature will grow up round the life and works of Herman Melville. His character and place in the literary firmament will be the subject of research and controversy. He will be god, he will be devil; Shelleyan Prometheus, Milton's Lucifer, fallen star of the morning. His writings will be matter of interpretation, contention and disparity of verdict. But the stature of the man, and the quality of his work will grow heroically under the revelation; especially as criticism appreciates that the only way to a proper understanding of Melville is to take his works in their constructive psychological sequence; not in order of their calendared dates of publication or composition. By so doing we parallel his growth and experience. In this manner the order of reading is *Redburn*, *Typee*, *Omoo*, *Whitejacket*, *Mardi*, *Moby-Dick*, *Pierre*, *The Confidence Man*, *Bartleby*. It will be observed that the sequence is not that of material experience. The factual stuff of *Pierre* was prior to that of *Typee*, but Melville's conscious rationalization of it did not take place until it was brought to the surface from the subconscious by the accumulated tensions of later life which formed the subject matter of earlier writings.

Contemporary reputations have laid down their tribute of that "funeral flower of fame," Melville knew would be his. Mr. Robert Louis Stevenson as a professed latinist described *Moby-Dick* as a "howling cheese." The intended meaning of this critical flower was appreciative. As however Mr. Stevenson's monographs on his compatriot Robert Burns, and on Francois Villon were written while the Shorter Catechist was yet fresh from consorting with the Edinburgh stews; confidence in his critical values is prejudiced, and his

regard a doubtful compliment. The poet-laureate has supplied an exegesis of *Moby-Dick* that partakes of a cross between the blurb of a small-town circus barker and a middle-west gospel wrangler. Melville has, also, been described as Mariner and Mystic. Raphsodical he always was; but the ecstasy of the pure mystic was alien to his penetrating observance and pungent critical nature. He was only a sailor in the sense that to be an adventurer in the spacious way of an Elizabethan gentleman upon the high seas, was more in keeping with his early environment of ancestral pride than counter-jumping. To this engrafted outlook was added an upstriving, restless spirit whose monitions he did not yet understand; but which directed his earliest years prophetically forward; rejected the constricted arena of sale and barter for the receding horizons of the circumambient sea; and drove him after blind satisfactions that perhaps lay over land and sea in the physical gardens of the elsewhere.

In closest definition Melville was a foiled Narcissist. To the professional psychologist the phrase is illuminating and exhaustive: explains everything and leaves no ragged edges over. To the literary critic he is satirist of Man and challenger of God. But before he scarified Humanity he had warmed himself at its fires; before he murderously quested the Infinite he was Its lover. Whoever is near Truth is near Man. Melville is far from Humanity and impatient of human inter-indebtedness. His passion is to be himself; no expediencies, qualifications, modifications, concessions, bowings—himself and nothing but himself. He would have the whole world itself; would rive all bonds of Man to Man and creation to its God. There are many who to their life's end endeavor to calculate the incalculable, account for the unaccountable, and circumscribe infinity. Not the least among these was Melville. There are many who fling a gauntlet on the high altar. Among the foremost was Melville. Hawthorne tasting evil vicariously in respectable play with his conventional Teutonic bogey-bo's, was frightened when brought into contact with the terrific reality of Azzageddi-Melville looking demonically out from the eyes of Ethan Brand.

To no refuge can we fly from the ways of Being; also, is it useless to defy, entreat, or covenant with it. Melville, too, had come to some such conclusion when he wrote,—

*“Yea and Nay,  
Each hath his say,*

*But God, He keeps the middle way,*

.....  
*Wisdom is vain and prophesy."*

He was an untrained but acute and energetic thinker destitute of ordered knowledge like Shakespeare; and like Shakespeare, an informal philosopher and metaphysician. His Behemoth is not comparable with Locke's Leviathan, but is more greatly true; for facts are but the dead husk of a contained truth; and only by their emotionalization can the living verity that gave them birth, be reproduced. But Melville never perceived that there is a theoretical truth and a practical truth; and that the survival of material existence demands compromise. Many words can be employed to describe what Melville was not; one will describe what he was—Promethean.

Purists will find in Melville's style much to depreciate. His prose is not exceptionably cadenced, but it is polyphonic, and if he discards prosodic rule and classic convention it is because he is superior to them. His control over his material sometimes inclined to distinct weakness; but it is difficult to take up *Moby-Dick* and without injury to the whole book criticise this or that passage as redundant, or stilted rhetoric. His capacity for construction was uncultivated; but a tendency to diffusion is far outweighed by the worth of his matter, and he is never incoherent. There is an Aeschylean quality in his utterance which redeems its exuberancies, jubiliations and messianic rhapsody from detraction by their very majesty of power. Except for the loftiness of departed Elizabethans there is nothing in literature quite like the great arabesques of *Moby-Dick*, and the grotesques of *Mardi* and *The Confidence Man*. Their tumbled profundities, great horizons, jumbled erudition, and even their savage grotesqueries of characterization, banalities, and rare *demode* sentimentality are the range and depth of a great mind manifesting in a Doric prose, a deep sincerity whose impetuous power could make no stay for nicely elaborated balances of style.

Melville's poetry is unequal; but it contains many quotable lines of great beauty—sonorous, wistful, hauntingly delicate as a Chinese fragment; and wedded to close thought and original imagery. Some day cringing literary America will discover that all the songs of simple sailor-men were not hymned by Kipling and Maesfield; nor all the mirrors of the sea polished by Conrad. They will quote *The*

*Ballad of Tom Deadlight* as the peer of any Barrack Room Ballad; they will take up *Benito Cereno* and with quiet assurance hold it up beside the Polish Mariner's Malayan pictures. They will speak in belated regret of their own Melville they have neglected; and where the talk goes round about the Seven Seas, they will set before all journalese seascapes, the superb *Haglets*, so little less than the *Ode to a Grecian Urn*; the filagree delicacy of *Crossing the Tropics*; *Pebbles*; and *The Maladive Shark* with their simple clarity of line and repressed human emotion. And for *The Recessional* they will speak *The Canticle* with its undisciplined rhymes and broken metres prevailing by sheer power.

In the century when the Good Gray Poet was maundering his unpunctuated prose to an applauding public, and the pantheons of the world were being stuffed with vulgar mediocrities whose voices are now only failing echoes, Prometheus was reborn in America. He raised it up from subservient prostitution to Old World culture, and in his own work set the Western Hemisphere a cultural stature unexcelled by Classical Europe. And America stoned him; called him the cannibal man; and lost him in memory and mark to the tribute of alien nations. And now she she makes him into a movie show; gives Ahab a sweetie, and over the air Hyperion explains Yillah to Hautia.

Prometheus would smile at it; for in the end none more readily appreciated with grim humor the ironic jest of the Cosmic Spirit in the spectacle of the High Gods sitting beyond the menace of weapons that recoiled upon their wielder. Melville's very virtues of intellectual honesty and courage were his ruin; and only that wayward ebullience of jocosity which so irritated his family, saved him from that utter destruction which lies in wait for all frustrated Narcissists.

THE END