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The Prophetic Figure in Herman Melville's Writing.

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THE PROPHETIC FIGURE IN HERMAN MELVILLE'S WRITING

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In partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of English

by

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B.A., Providence College, 1970
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May, 1976
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This study was initiated during the spring of 1971 as a term project in a seminar on Melville conducted by Nicholas Canaday, Jr. At that time I examined three of Melville's works to discover his treatment of prophetic figures. It was my feeling that a study of the way in which Melville treats prophetic figures would illuminate his depiction of man's search for God. My seminar project focused on three early works. It was my feeling that an extended study of Melville's work would reveal a wide range of responses to the prophetic figure as an indicator of how Melville characterized man in search of God. This study does in fact provide such an insight. And one can more fully understand Melville's complex response to divine nature through a knowledge of the way in which he treats prophetic figures.

I wish to express special gratitude to my dissertation director, Professor Nicholas Canaday, Jr. of the Department of English at Louisiana State University, under whose ceaseless guidance my work on Melville began and came to fruition. Special thanks are also due to Professor John I. Fischer whose critical acumen aided me greatly. Finally, I wish to extend my gratitude to Professor Lewis P. Simpson whose suggestions were helpful and appreciated.
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ABSTRACT

Clearly a central theme of Melville's writing is man's search for God. The religious quest for knowledge about an absolute divine being is an age-old one. What Melville brings to this quest is a fierce dedication to the discovery of the power and nature of God and an unyielding skeptical attitude toward any certain proclamation that God lives and works through nature and man. Central in Melville's quest to discover divine being is the figure of the prophet. The prophetic character arrests Melville's attention because of the special relationship that such a person has with regard to knowing God's will. There are basically six works in which Melville treats prophetic characters: Mardi, Moby-Dick, Pierre, The Confidence-Man, and Billy Budd. An examination of any one of these works reveals Melville's skeptical attitude toward prophetic character and knowledge. Moreover, a full treatment of the prophetic figure provides an accurate gauge with which one can measure Melville's attitude toward absolute religious truth.

The first indication that the prophet is important in Melville's search for the divinity comes in Mardi. Here Babbalanja gives up Taji's quest once the philosopher-prophet discovers God's revealed will. Babbalanja receives a special message from God that reveals the peace and happiness that a life of love can bring. Babbalanja is blessed with faith in God, and his faith allows him to use his reason to understand divine truth.
In *Moby-Dick*, the traditional stature that the prophet has to reveal God's will is not enhanced by Ishmael. In fact, it is through Ishmael that Melville reveals his own most skeptical attitude toward traditional prophecy. Ishmael is fashioned as a prophet who proclaims not the direct will of God, but the obscured and sometimes ambiguous perception of God in nature.

Even though Melville achieves his greatest artistic peak in *Moby-Dick*, and consequently his fullest treatment of the prophetic figure as an ambiguous and unreliable revealer of God's will, his later fiction is still peopled with prophetic characters. Pierre in *Pierre*, and John Ringman and Frank Goodman in *The Confidence-Man* are prophetic types whose actions undermine man's faith in God. In *Clarel*, Clarel is also surrounded by prophetic figures who offer him ineffective answers to his spiritual questions.

Finally, there is a prophetic atmosphere that surrounds the characters in *Billy Budd*. The Dansker has some vestigial characteristics of the traditional prophet in his appearance and manner. The other characters in the novel are also aware, to some extent, of Billy's divine nature. But there is no certain prophetic witness provided to Billy or his actions by anyone in the novella.

Treated in a chronological order, Melville's prophets, beginning with Babbalanja in *Mardi*, express hope, doubt, bitterness, and finally resignation in man's search for God. The prophetic characters measure Melville's success in the quest for religious truth about absolute divinity. Thus the prophet is a major figure in Melville's artistic achievement.
CHAPTER I

FAITH, KNOWLEDGE, AND THE PROPHET: MARDI

Mardi, an allegorical romance published in 1849, stands as a transitional work in the Melville canon between the early adventure fiction, i.e. Typee, Omoo, and the masterful achievement of Moby-Dick. As a transitional work, Mardi introduces many of the themes and issues that Melville later more fully explored. The book also marks Melville's initial use of the prophet as an important figure in man's search for an understanding of God and the divine nature of man and the universe. The prophetic figure in Mardi warns of the danger in claiming to know absolutely what God's will is. The Melvillean prophet embodies a warning to man in search of God. Moreover, the prophetic figure in Mardi also finds some verification for what he does proclaim to be divine will. Thus the prophet serves as a viable intermediary between God and man.

Prophetic knowledge is related to the central theme in Mardi, the search for truth.¹ The intrepid Taji, an Ishmael-like figure who serves as narrator, sails the wide world of Mardi to find Yillah. She appears to be a supernatural source of truth for him; for as Taji proclaims, Yillah is "lovely enough to be divine."² Whether Yillah is really divine or not is unclear. But she appears so to Taji, and he commits all of his will towards pursuing her. Taji is joined on his quest for Yillah by Babbalanja, a Mardian philosopher. As a philosopher, Babbalanja is interested in Taji's quest from an epistemological
standpoint because Babbalanja too is interested in knowing spiritual truth. As Merrell Davis observes, "Babbalanja would know the limits of man's knowledge and would test those limits to the uttermost. How much can man know? What is certain knowledge?" Babbalanja is thus concerned with a larger epistemological question than Taji. Taji sees Yillah as divine and wants to know her. Babbalanja wants to know how man can know anything divine.

Babbalanja's interest in divine truth is related to his prophetic character. He seeks to know how God reveals spiritual truth in this world. Because he believes that Taji's quest is for spiritual truth, Babbalanja accompanies Taji, "Your pursuit is mine, noble Taji" (p. 197). The fact that Taji pursues Yillah, and that Babbalanja pursues spiritual truth, must not be forgotten. Taji fails in his pursuit because he refuses to accept his limited understanding of what truth is. To the extent that he succeeds in his quest, Babbalanja succeeds because he recognizes the limitation of human knowledge and the limited understanding of divine knowledge that a prophet can have.

Understood in the traditional sense, the prophet is "one who spoke for God and declared the intention of the divine heart." In Babbalanja, Melville creates a prophet who very tentatively gives his witness to what he hears God say to him. Babbalanja learns to speak of divine things cautiously and only within the context of a hard-won faith. The faith that Babbalanja receives comes on his journey through Mardi with Taji.

The first third of Mardi is a South Sea adventure tale somewhat in the manner of Typee and Omoo. Then quite unexpectedly Yillah appears and changes the nature of Taji's voyage. Taji frees her from her
enslavement to Aleema by killing the priest, and Taji falls in love with Yillah. Yillah is no ordinary mortal; she has been raised by Aleema to believe that she is a god. Taji desires her as a woman and as a spiritual ideal; he encourages her to believe that he too is divine in origin. Taji confesses, "At first she [Yillah] had wildly believed, that the nameless affinities between us were owing to our having in times gone by dwelt together in the same ethereal region. But thoughts like these were fast dying out... Love, sometimes induced me to prop my failing divinity" (p. 158-159).

Taji's attraction for Yillah is a complex one. He is willing to use Yillah's belief in him as a "gentle demi-god" (p. 140) to keep her with him. Though they become lovers, Taji and Yillah do not remain together for long. The ghost of Aleema, the priest murdered by Taji, haunts them. Finally, the maiden mysteriously disappears from their hideaway on Odo; Taji believes that Yillah has either fled or been abducted from the retreat.

Yillah disappears for no apparent reason. Perhaps her loss is the punishment that Taji receives for killing Aleema. It seems, however, that Taji and Yillah were simply not meant for each other. Representing as she does the highest ideals of truth and perfection, Yillah is unattainable for man. And Taji is a mere mortal regardless of his proclamation that he is a demigod. Thus his desire to possess Yillah is doomed from the start. He cannot be perfect; she represents the perfection to which he aspires. Not willing to recognize this truth about himself and the girl, Taji pursues Yillah with an unyielding will. He becomes an absolutist bent on his obsession. And one thing is clear in Melville's writing--absolutists destroy themselves in the pursuit of their unreachable goals.
King Media, the ruler of Odo, where Taji and Yillah find refuge, consoles Taji on the loss of Yillah. Media and three other Mardians—the sage historian Mohi, the poet Yoomy, and, most importantly, the philosopher Babbalanja—join Taji on his quest for Yillah. From the outset, the Mardians are different from Taji in their attitude toward the quest. Media is sympathetic toward Taji, "I myself am interested in this pursuit" (p. 196), but not obsessed with Yillah as a source of truth. Babbalanja "had often expressed the most ardent desire to visit every one of the Mardian isles in quest of some object, mysteriously hinted" (p. 197). But this object is not stated to be Yillah, rather some more vague mystery. From Babbalanja's actions on the voyage, it becomes apparent that he is interested in probing the deeper spiritual and philosophical problems attending man's understanding of spiritual truth.

Thus from the very beginning, Babbalanja's quest is different from Taji's quest; Babbalanja seeks to understand what ways man has to know God. The philosopher tests the viability of reason, faith, and prophecy as ways of knowing divine knowledge.

As Merrell Davis notes, Babbalanja is a babbler who indulges himself in philosophical argument. Still Babbalanja's questioning and skepticism must be seen as much more than just idle speculations; he, more than any other character in the book, rationally considers the possibility of understanding God and truth in this world. Babbalanja's philosophical stance through most of the book is that of a skeptic who insists that whatever is accepted as truth must pass the hard test of his rational examination. Babbalanja allows that the gods understand things in ways that men cannot, but Babbalanja asserts that reason is the only human way of knowing. Furthermore, Babbalanja expresses this belief clearly in his
conversation with Yoomy about the mystery of fate and free will in human experience. Yoomy thinks that Babbalanja examines the relationship between fate and free will too rigorously, for only the gods can really know what is ordained and what is free for man to do. Babbalanja disagrees. "No need have the great gods to discourse of things perfectly comprehended by them, and by themselves ordained. But you and I, Yoomy, are men, and not gods; hence is it for us, and not for them, to take these things for our themes. Nor is there any impiety in the right use of reason, whatever the issue" (p. 426). Babbalanja's respect for reason comes from the belief that knowledge acquired through reason is the closest that man can come to divine knowledge.

Babbalanja learns his respect for reason from the sayings of old Bardianna, an ancient thinker whose philosophy bears a resemblance to Seneca's work. Quotations from Bardianna's writings punctuate Babbalanja's speech. Of chief significance to Babbalanja is Bardianna's teaching on man's knowledge of Oro (God). Babbalanja quotes Bardianna, "The soul needs no mentor, but Oro; and Oro, without proxy. Wanting Him, it is both the teacher and the taught. Undeniably, reason was the first revelation; and so far as it tests others, it has precedence over them. It comes direct to us, without suppression or interpolation; and with Oro's indisputable imprimatur" (p. 576). Bardianna propounds that man can find God through his reason; Babbalanja thus finds support for his understanding of reason's importance in previous philosophers.

Bardianna serves to give Babbalanja a faith in reason that Babbalanja can not always maintain in his journey through Mardi. Babbalanja discovers reason sometimes imperils faith; men often abuse reason and slant it to their selfish ends.
On Maramma, the faith that Babbalanja sees is contradicted by the reasons that men use in support of their belief. Marammans believe that Hivohitee (a thinly disguised Pope) is Alma's (Christ's) chief representative in this world (Chapter 108). In order to benefit from the love and faith that Alma espouses, the Marammans conclude that everyone must conform to Hivohitee's (i.e. the Pope's) teaching. A central teaching of the Maramman church, as of the Catholic Church, is of course that only Hivohitee (Pope) can interpret how best Alma is served in this world (p. 333). This teaching is self-servingly rational and hypocritical; Hivohitee's dictum also undercuts the individual's faith in God by making individual belief subordinate to the reasoning of men. By insisting on allegiance to their Church's teaching, Hivohitee and the Marammans are absolutist in their way of worshipping God.

The contradiction between what the Marammans profess to believe and what they do as a consequence of their belief is objectionable to Babbalanja. A young boy accompanies the travelers on their journey through Maramma to see Hivohitee. When the boy seeks to speak directly to Oro himself, he is seized and punished by the Marammans who profess that only Hivohitee can directly speak to Oro (p. 347). The Marammans allow that Hivohitee can have access to God, but not the boy; this discrimination is self-serving hypocrisy because Oro is for all men. Babbalanja reflects on this hypocrisy and laments the partial realization of Alma's principles in this world. "The prophet [Alma] came to guarantee our eternal felicity; but according to what is held in Maramma, that felicity rests on so hard a proviso [i.e. complete allegiance to the leader, Hivohitee], that to a thinking mind, but very few of our sinful race may secure it. For one, then, I wholly reject your Alma" (p. 349). Babbalanja cannot
embrace the teachings of Alma because of the Marammans' hypocritical reasoning.

Babbalanja's rejection of Alma must not be seen as a permanent rejection of faith. The absolutism of the Marammans with regard to how Alma is known and worshipped on Mardi causes Babbalanja to dissociate himself from a church which controls man's knowledge of God in this world. Babbalanja seeks a faith in God which allows for more personal, rational response to God than does the Maramman church. Thus Babbalanja rejects the Maramman church but not the possibility of knowing God directly through his reason.

Babbalanja's belief in the primacy of reason as a way of knowing God is reasserted when the Mardians leave Maramma and travel to the island of Padulla; here they visit an antiquary which contains the manuscript writings of Bardianna and other ancient Mardian sages. Babbalanja peruses these writings with much satisfaction because they reaffirm his belief that man can best know God through human reason: "Undeniably, reason was the first revelation; and so far as it tests others, it has precedence over them. It comes direct to us, without suppression or interpolation; and with Oro's indisputable imprimatur" (p. 576). One of the ancient writings that Babbalanja particularly enjoys is a pamphlet entitled "A Happy Life." This work supports much of Babbalanja's objection to the Maramman church: "Out of itself, Religion has nothing to bestow. Nor will she save us from aught, but from the evil in ourselves. Her one grand end is to make us wise; her manifestations are reverence to Oro and love to man; her only, but ample reward, herself" (p. 389). The pamphlet attests to the role that religions should play as a servant of man in search of God, not as a control on man's thought about God. The
ancient writings of Bardianna and the other sages give Babbalanja a further assurance that reason is the most reliable way that man can know God.

The reasonable good sense that these writings offer for a man in search of God impresses Babbalanja so deeply that he proclaims a special significance for them: "This book ["A Happy Life"] is more marvelous than the prophecies. My lord [Media], that a mere man, and a heathen, in that most heathenish time, should give utterance to such heavenly wisdom, seems more wonderful than that an inspired prophet should reveal it" (p. 388).

Babbalanja can see little difference between prophetic knowledge, a knowledge based on faith in God, and human, rational knowledge, a knowledge not based on faith in God. However, human knowledge cannot be the same thing as divine knowledge. Babbalanja makes such a foolish mistake because he lacks faith in God and places too much faith in human reason.

Babbalanja's claims for reason's ability to reveal knowledge about God is questioned by Media. Media cautions Babbalanja to be careful about proclaiming a "heavenly wisdom" (p. 388) in the pagan writings of Bardianna and the other ancient authors. The king warns that Bardianna was a pagan, and not a worshipper of Oro through Alma, Oro's chief prophet on Mardi. As Media states, "Mardi's religion must seem to come direct from Oro" (p. 389). Media thus stymies Babbalanja in his assertions that reason alone best reveals divine knowledge. The king's warning beclouds Babbalanja's claims for reason's revelatory power and leads Babbalanja to doubt in his own ability to correctly know God through reason alone.

Babbalanja's self-doubt comes in the form of Azzageddi, an imaginary demon that Babbalanja believes lives within him. This demon periodically floods Babbalanja's speech with irreverent and irrational chatter and
serves to amuse occasionally the other Mardians and Taji. Furthermore, Azzageddi is the result of Babbalanja's extreme faith in the primacy of rational inquiry. Quite simply, when pushed too far by Babbalanja, his reasoning faculty turns around on itself and becomes nonsense. Azzageddi plagues Babbalanja's rational life after the visit to Padulla wherein Babbalanja foolishly asserted that reason and faith held the same reliability in revealing God. This assertion is false as well as foolish; Babbalanja's reasoning power snaps under the strain of such an irrational claim. After the travelers leave Padulla, Azzageddi colors much of Babbalanja's speech because Babbalanja will not relinquish his belief in reason's absolute reliability to know divine knowledge. It is not until the Mardians arrive on Serenia and Babbalanja experiences a real faith in God through religious conversion that he is freed from Azzageddi and freed from the illusion that reason alone best reveals God to man.

Serenia is that Mardian isle where, as Babbalanja relates, "Mardians pretend to the unnatural conjunction of reason with things revealed; where Alma, they say, is restored to his divine original" (p.622-623). It is of great significance to Babbalanja that the Serenians can unite reason with divine revelation and faith because Babbalanja has not seen such a union in all of Mardi. What enables the Serenians to make such an alliance is their belief: God speaks directly to every man. A Serenian guide speaks, "We hold not, that one man's word should be a gospel to the rest; but that Alma's words should be a gospel to us all.... We are apostles, every one" (p. 629). The Serenians equate their own understanding of God with the truthful understanding of God. Such identification is based on love and trust: "The Master's [Alma's] great command is Love; and here do all things wise, and all things good, unite.
Love is all in all" (p. 629).

The Serenians believe that they can know God directly through their reason: "Right reason and Alma are the same" (p. 629). But this rational understanding must exist within the context of faith in an Alma who speaks directly and rationally to them. In the Serenians, Babbalanja encounters a group of people who hold reason and faith in high regard. The Serenians base their understanding of God's will on belief in Alma, not solely on their rational understanding of Alma. Thus they can proclaim, "In him [Alma] is hope for all; for all, unbounded joys. Fast locked in his loved clasp, no doubts dismay. He opes the eye of faith, and shuts the eye of fear" (p. 630). In short, the Serenians' faith is based on their belief that God's will is one that is open to man and one that directs man to love; the Serenians do not believe simply because of their rational understanding.

Babbalanja has sought such a rational understanding of God; he has of course lacked such faith in God as the Serenians have. On Serenia, Babbalanja embraces a faith in God. And the philosopher comes to understand that faith in God is a necessary prerequisite to any prophetic knowledge that man can have about God. Babbalanja realizes the limitation of reason in a world without faith. Such a limitation consigns him to the plaguings of Azzageddi. As Babbalanja attests, "I have been mad. Some things there are, we must not think of. Beyond one's obvious mark, all human lore is vain...Reason no longer domineers; but still doth speak" (p. 630). The false assertion made on Padulla that reason is the best understanding that man could have of God is discarded, and Babbalanja embraces a real faith in God. Such faith employs reason, but not in the rash or extreme manner that resulted in the irrational mutterings of Azzageddi.
With faith in God, Babbalanja can use his reason to understand what God wants. In a dream vision that he experiences after his conversion, Babbalanja sees an angelic figure that speaks to him: "No mind but Oro's can know all; no mind that knows not all can be content" (p. 634). Babbalanja understands that as a man he will never know all that there is to know about Oro; and this lack of knowledge will make Babbalanja discontented and always searching. The last thing that Babbalanja is told in his vision is that "Mardian happiness is but exemption from great woes-no more" (p. 636). Thus faith does not bring happiness to man; faith gives man a belief in a loving God. On Mardi, though, the believer must still deal with the difficulties and frustrations of life in the real world. Reason helps to cope with human failings and helps to reveal how faith is realized in this world.

After his conversion, Babbalanja gives up his quest for Yillah in favor of Alma. At least one critic has registered doubt about this conversion. William Dillingham finds Babbalanja's conversion merely an illusory and temporary one: "The Serenias of man's world are not wrong but only sadly inadequate and thus temporary. When Babbalanja awakes and finds his illusion shattered, he will no longer be the same." But Babbalanja rededicates himself to the pursuit of Alma through his reason: "Here [on Serenia], I tarry to grow wiser still:-then I am Alma's and the world's" (p. 637). Faith is not an excuse to stop questioning; faith provides a framework, a limitation perhaps, for the answers that man can expect from God. Babbalanja has no intention of letting faith be a final answer to the problem of understanding God. Babbalanja's conversion instead provides him with a balanced view of how man can view divine nature. Man must view such nature through
reason and faith. And it is only within the framework of faith and reason that prophetic knowledge is viable. Babbalanja's conversion is a turning to a balanced view of God, not an escape to the illusory absolutism of fideism.

Thus Babbalanja's journey for absolute spiritual truth comes to an end with his visit to Serenia. He gives up his pursuit of Yillah because he has found a greater truth in Alma. The other Mardians also cease their journey; they too have found their answer in Alma. But Taji will not stop.

Taji is not satisfied with the Serenian answer which allows that man can know God best through faith. In one critic's view, Taji is dissatisfied with Serenia "because its people ignore the dark and violent aspects of human life." The benevolent doctrines of love and universal faith practiced on Serenia certainly do represent Melville's "ideal Christianity" and do de-emphasize the evil and injustice on Maramma. But the ideals of Serenia do not chase Taji away; he lacks faith. And he is not gifted with belief on this island essentially because he will not relinquish his own willful insistence. He leaves Serenia believing that he still is a demigod and that Yillah is a divine spirit worthy of his pursuit.

Choosing Yillah over Alma splits Taji from the Mardians. Taji chooses Yillah willfully and absolutely; through his willful choice of Yillah, he closes himself to the possibility of real faith in God. Babbalanja's choice is based on his reason, and when that fails, his faith and prophetic knowledge. A central difference, therefore, between the character of Taji and Babbalanja lies in the ability of Babbalanja to understand prophetic knowledge, and the inability of Taji to recognize the need for such knowledge.
The last chapters of *Mardi* are thus given over to the type of monomaniac quest that prefigures Ahab's last days on the *Pequod*. Duly warned by the newly converted Babbalanja, "Taji! for Yillah thou wilt hunt in vain; she is a phantom that but mocks thee" (p. 637), Taji lands on Flozella a Nina intent on finding Yillah in the company of Hautia, an evil Mardian queen who is somehow part of Yillah: "In some mysterious way seemed Hautia and Yillah connected" (p. 643). The growing awareness that his Yillah is not the pure spiritual being that he first loved is too much for Taji. When he sees what he thinks is Yillah's drowned figure in Hautia's pool (p. 653), Taji strikes out in mad pursuit of this vision. He commits his will to pursuit of a phantom; his absolute course leads him to almost certain death.

Yillah's mysterious relation to Hautia is too shocking for Taji because he has committed himself to the belief that Yillah is a pure spiritual being. Such commitment is of course based on sheer willfulness and not on faith in God and caution in interpreting what appears to be divine directive and manifestation. Taji's quest is a failure because he assumes an identity as a demigod in pursuit of ideal, divine, absolute truth. The stance of Babbalanja is much more human; he recognizes the need to act with caution in asserting God's will, and he recognizes the limitation of human understanding through reason.

The import of Taji's fate is unmistakable. His reckless pursuit of an absolute ideal results in his death. Time and again this theme is sounded in Melville's writing. There is always someone, in this case Babbalanja, to speak in a cautionary voice of warning to the heedless pursuer. Taji's quest is for a being whom he mistakenly takes to be absolute spiritual reality. Babbalanja's quest shows the impossibility
of such certainty. Babbalanja's voice is thus prophetic in that he warns man of the danger in his search for God. Prophetic knowledge is at best uncertain; prophets must speak with qualifications when they talk of God. Nowhere does Melville better demonstrate this position than in Ishmael's narrative in *Moby-Dick*. 
NOTES:


5 Sedgwick, pp. 50-51.

6 Franklin, "Taji is a phony demigod chasing a phantom," p. 50.

7 Davis, p. 173.

8 Sedgwick, "Babbalanja is mainly the vehicle for Melville's impassioned speculative thinking," p. 41.


14 Wright refers to Taji's last act as a "suicide," p. 361.
CHAPTER II

THE AUTHENTIC MELVILLEAN PROPHET: MOBY-DICK

_**Moby-Dick** is a book that dramatizes moral conflict. The obvious physical conflict between Ahab and the whale extends into the moral realm when Ahab's pursuit of Moby Dick becomes for him the pursuit of evil. Some critics have argued that Ahab's quest for Moby Dick is highly moral; their sympathy lies with this man who seeks Moby Dick as the principle, not the agent, of evil.¹ Other critics see the evil in **Moby-Dick** dramatized in god-like Ahab because he destroys himself and his crew in his self-made war against essentially indifferent nature.² The final judgment about the moral conflict between Ahab and the whale is constantly reassessed by critics.

There is a primary commentator on the themes of moral good and evil in **Moby-Dick** whom the critics often forget. As Howard Vincent says, "Concentrating on Ahab, as most readers do, we forget the narrator of the story, quiet Ishmael."³ It is Ishmael's first-hand observation of the conflict between Ahab and Moby Dick that reveals the moral dimension of this conflict. However, Ishmael's narration of the events surrounding the Pequod's last voyage does not easily characterize the moral conflict. There is a great deal of ambiguity in Ishmael's story because his account is not just an account but a story of an experience that he has lived through. All the ambiguities in Ishmael's narration are a result of his trying to come to terms with the meaning of the moral conflict for himself, a participant and a witness to this conflict. The story of the
whale and Ahab is thus Ishmael's story too. And the manner in which Ishmael tells the story of the Pequod's last voyage is immensely important to the ultimate meaning of *Moby-Dick*.

The responsibility of relating what happened on the *Pequod* is quite seriously assumed by Ishmael. The long digressions on whaling and the nature of whales are evidence of Ishmael's commitment to providing the fullest possible revelation about whales. The legend-like story of Ahab, related in episodic fashion, also indicates Ishmael's sincerity in conveying the full history of his captain. Ishmael must finally be accepted as a reliable narrator, moreover, because he alone is left to tell the story; his account is all that remains. In short, what Melville has created in Ishmael is a person who has first-hand access to all the important personages and events in the story, and a person who has a certain honesty and responsibility to reveal what has happened to him.

In part, Ishmael fashions his narrative from the things that he hears other characters say and do. These other characters in *Moby-Dick* upon whom Ishmael relies for his own narrative are prophetic figures: Tistig the Indian squaw, Elijah, Gabriel, Fedallah, and Father Mapple. Each of these characters utters a prophecy that relates to Ahab's pursuit of the whale. Ishmael includes these prophetic responses within his own unique prophetic response, which is independent from the prophecies of the minor characters. Most important to this study of Ishmael as a prophet is an awareness of the role that the minor characters play in affecting Ishmael's narrative. Thus some attention must be paid to the nature and authenticity of the minor characters as prophets.

Nathalia Wright has most fully discussed prophetic characters in *Moby-Dick*. She states that all the prophetic figures: Tistig, Father,
Mapple, Elijah, and Gabriel are connected with some Old Testament prophet or prophecy. Fedallah is the exception here because he seems not to be connected with Hebraic prophetic tradition. However, one must look at more than a person's name or his overt allusion to other prophets' names before one can make a judgment about prophetic nature. Fedallah is indeed, as it will be demonstrated later in this study, very much in the Old Testament tradition because of the way that he is chosen and used to reveal God's will. In fact, aside from the verbal association that Tistig, Mapple, Elijah, and Gabriel have with Old Testament prophets and prophecy, all of these characters speak and act like Old Testament prophets. Wright classifies these prophets and their prophecies into four types of prophets that appear in the Old Testament. Initially, there is the soothsayer or simple foreteller of events, like Tistig or Elijah. Secondly, there is the more sensitively attuned hearer and interpreter of God's word, such as Father Mapple. Thirdly, there is the apocalyptic seer and foreteller of doom, such as Gabriel. And finally, there is the false prophet, such as Fedallah.

Wright's observation that the prophets in *Moby-Dick* bear a resemblance to biblical prophets heightens what she sees as the "mood of fate" in *Moby-Dick*. This insight into the prophetic nature of certain characters in *Moby-Dick* reveals a structural principle to Wright; the words of the prophets predict what is going to happen in the book. As she avers, Father Mapple's sermon is "a prophecy, of which the ensuing narrative [that is, practically the whole voyage] is a fulfillment." It is incorrect for Wright to say that Ahab's pursuit of Moby Dick and the ultimate destruction of the *Pequod* is a fulfillment of Mapple's prophetic sermon because Mapple does not preach to Ahab but to Ishmael.
And prophetic words primarily hold those who hear them accountable for heeding the message. Thus Ishmael's actions, more so than Ahab's, should be judged as a fulfillment of Mapple's sermon. Secondly, and more importantly, the narrative that follows Mapple's sermon is not an account of his fulfilled prophecy but Ishmael's story of the voyage of the Pequod. If the prophetic characters are at all capable of informing the narrative, of giving the narrative shape and direction through their prophecies, then one must look to Ishmael as the final prophet in Moby-Dick because it is through his words that the other characters reveal their prophetic nature and express their prophetic utterance.

Before one can judge Ishmael as prophet, one must judge the authenticity of the minor characters as prophets. Such judgment can only be made when one understands the tradition of the Hebrew prophets, the tradition in which the minor figures act.

In the Hebraic tradition anyone could become a prophet provided that God chose him. This special choice by God of the one that will be the prophet is of primary importance. Also, what is as important as God's choice is the prophet's awareness of his chosen place in God's design. One authority states: "The certainty of being inspired by God, of speaking in His name, of having been sent by Him to the people, is the basic and central fact of the prophet's consciousness." Once the prophet is aware of his divine inspiration, his actions and words take on a special character. He speaks for God.

The prophet is not merely a passive receiver and relater of God's word and will. Often, there is a questioning, a struggling, a denying of the message from God. It is fair to say that the prophet sees himself as "an associate of God," and able to determine how best he can
interpret God's message. In Heschel's words: "By response, pleading, and counterspeech, the prophet reacts to the word he perceives. The prophet's share in the dialogue can often give the decisive turn to the encounter, evoking a new attitude in the divine Person and bringing about a new decision."\(^{10}\)

It is this freedom and responsibility that the prophet has to search for God's true intention in the divinely inspired consciousness that produced so many different kinds of prophets in the Old Testament. No two are exactly alike, even if they are inspired by God at the same time. In fact, God once simultaneously inspired four hundred prophets falsely and one prophet truly, making of course the substance of the responses opposite (1 Kings. 22). Since Melville knew this instance of biblical prophecy in which the four hundred lying prophets gave bad advice to King Ahab, one is not surprised to find multiple and different responses among Melville's prophets also. Who, for instance, is telling the truth about the consequences of pursuing the white whale? Fedallah, Gabriel, or Elijah? Still, there is another and more basic problem in discussing Melville's prophets in _Moby-Dick_. Before one can decide which prophetic message to believe, one must establish that the messages revealed are true prophetic utterance made by real prophets.

The basic awareness of a prophet, it has already been stated, is his perception of divine inspiration operating in his consciousness. He has to be "in direct communication with God."\(^{11}\) However, not all of the prophetic characters can claim this special knowledge. Tis'tig, Elijah, Gabriel, and Fedallah all lay claim to some special knowledge which could or could not be from God. It is this claim to having special knowledge from God, either directly or indirectly stated, that Ishmael examines in
his dealings with these minor prophetic figures. Ishmael reacts to each prophet's authenticity, trying to determine how much each of them speaks for God. Ishmael's narration is thus partly an examination of the authenticity of the Hebraic prophetic tradition as manifested in the prophetic characters. More than an examination, however, Ishmael extends the investigation of authenticity into profound questioning of the viability of the prophetic tradition as being capable of expressing God's will and word. Ishmael's narrative informs all the prophets' messages. His account of the Pequod's voyage is thus a reaction and response to what he sees as the prophets', particularly Mapple's, attempts to convey the will of God. To the extent that Ishmael determines that the prophetic messages he hears are not authentic, he judges the prophetic tradition to be a dead one, one through which God can no longer reveal his will.

Ishmael might easily dismiss as inauthentic those prophetic characters in Moby-Dick who make no special claim to having been inspired by God. Still, a prophet could be known by signs as well as awareness of his prophetic nature. And the great test that the Hebrew prophet could successfully pass was his examination of the future. Guillaume says of the Hebrew prophets: "There is no prophet in the Old Testament who was not a foreteller of the future."12 The labeling of events as portentous and the denouncing of certain continued practices as ultimately destructive were two ways that Hebrew prophets frequently predicted what would happen in the future. And these same devices, that is, portentous events and dire warnings, are repeatedly used in Moby-Dick. In fact, it is the presence of these prophetic portents that originally leads Nathalia Wright to recognize the centrality of the prophetic figure in the book.
As previously stated, Nathalia Wright asserts that in *Moby-Dick* Tistig, Father Mapple, Elijah, Gabriel, and Fedallah are "articulate prophets." Clearly, for Wright, the major distinction of a prophet is his ability to predict or foretell events. Within this distinct group of prophets there are, moreover, four types or classes of prophetic revelation. On the simplest level there is the foreteller or soothsayer. The predictions of such a prophet are simply true or false as subsequent history proves. Thus according to this definition of a prophet, Elijah and Tistig are prophets. Tistig, the Indian squaw who "said that the name [Ahab's] would somehow prove prophetic" makes a prediction that is so general and vague that almost any event would confirm it. But there is not the slightest piece of evidence to support the contention that Tistig is a divinely inspired prophet. In fact, Captain Peleg, who reports Tistig's prophecy to Ishmael, says that it is a lie, and he states that she is a fool. Clearly, at least one person does not believe the authenticity of the Indian squaw's prophetic stature or message.

Elijah, however, is another matter. He appears and directly confronts Ishmael with his knowledge. But what the impact of Elijah's knowledge is Ishmael cannot say. Elijah, Ishmael states, speaks "an ambiguous half-hinting, half-revealing, shrouded sort of talk" (p. 93). Elijah implies that those who sign up for the voyage on the *Pequod* are signing away their souls. But then he says: "Well, well, what's signed is signed; and what's to be, will be; and then again perhaps it won't, after all" (p. 93). Ishmael attributes Elijah's reluctance to state explicitly what he knows or believes to be the truth about Ahab and the voyage to the fact that Elijah is a "little damaged in the head" (p. 92). The mysterious manner in which Elijah relates his prediction, coupled
with his shabby dress and physical deformity, create doubts in Ishmael's mind about the reliability of this prophet. Certainly Elijah's name suggests that this prophet can speak the truth about the Pequod's captain, just as Elijah in the Old Testament foretold the truth about King Ahab. Ishmael knows the story of King Ahab well, and the significance of Elijah's name is not lost on him. Furthermore, the ambiguous manner in which Elijah relates his predictions is similar to the method used by some of the Hebrew prophets. Elijah does not say that the Pequod's destruction absolutely will come to pass. As Robinson says; "Prophetic prediction is necessarily conditional." Thus Elijah has some characteristics of the prophets of old; he is not merely a foreteller or prediction maker.

But how much more of a real prophet Elijah is, Ishmael cannot discover. No indication is given by Elijah that he possesses divine knowledge, only sure knowledge. The source of his knowledge remains undisclosed. It is only Elijah who knows that the shadowy figures who race past Ishmael and Queequeg on Christmas morning are Fedallah and his crew. But he won't say how he knows, or even warn Ishmael that this event is a direful portent. Instead Elijah replies; "Oh! I was going to warn ye against—but never mind, never mind—it's all one, all in the family too" (p. 98). Elijah's family might be the family of prophets, and to this extent what he knows but refuses to tell would be a family secret, which God warned him not to reveal. However, the truth of this possibility is purely speculative, and Ishmael wonders apprehensively about Elijah's predictions and near predictions. In his final reflections about Elijah's predictions, which Ishmael ultimately calls "diabolical incoherences (p. 119), the narrator quells his fear about the predictions
and dismisses Elijah's words as "solemn whimsicalities" (p. 119). While the prophetic authenticity of Elijah is not explicitly stated to be of divine origin, the manner of his prophecy is similar to those prophets who really spoke for God.

In addition to the soothsayers Tistig and Elijah, there is also an apocalyptic seer in Moby-Dick. Wright states that an apocalyptic foreteller, such as Gabriel the Neskypeuna Shaker prophet, is a person whose predictions cannot be vindicated by history. It is quite true that Gabriel's prediction of the general destruction of the Jeroboam's crew cannot be verified as divinely inspired. And even if the crew were divinely designated for annihilation, who would be left to reveal the agent of the action? Apocalyptic destruction means total annihilation; not even Gabriel could have survived that. The apocalyptic foreteller, the doomsday prophet, speaks of things inevitable and irrevocable, past any amelioration of divine will. The prophet, however, speaks of things that will come about if man does not heed the word of God. Nathalia Wright is correct in calling Gabriel an apocalyptic seer because his predictions are cast as inevitable and cataclysmic. When Captain Mayhew of the Jeroboam threatens to put Gabriel off of the ship, Gabriel counters with the direful warning that he will open his "seals and vials" (p. 313), which will unleash complete destruction on the crew.

Because of his apocalyptically prophetic manner of predicting destruction for the crew and the ship, Gabriel creates what Ishmael calls an "atmosphere of sacredness" (p. 313) around himself on the Jeroboam. But this atmosphere is one created out of the crew's fear of Gabriel, not respect for him as a spokesman of God. In fact, Ishmael believes that Gabriel is a fraud who comes from a "crazy society"
(p. 312) of Shakers, who, far from hearing the word of God, deceive themselves about the divine presence with drugs. And Gabriel's apocalyptic forebodings are not divinely ordained but the "measureless self-deception of the fanatic himself" (p. 313).

It is not quite so easy, however, to explain the appearance of Gabriel on the aptly named Jeroboam. The Pequod comes in contact with Captain Mayhew's vessel immediately after Ahab's address to the whale's head in the chapter entitled "The Sphynx," in which he asks the whale: "Speak, thou vast venerable head,...and tell us the secret thing that is in thee" (p. 309). The head of course does not answer, but Ahab's questioning of the whale's head reveals his belief in the absolute truth and knowledge which resides in that head, and by extension in the whale.

Ahab's address to the whale's head is interrupted by the approach of the Jeroboam sailing down on the Pequod and bringing a fresh breeze with her. Significantly, Ahab regards this breeze in a religious context: "Would now St. Paul would come along that way, and to my breezelessness bring his breeze" (p. 310). There is multiple meaning for Ahab here. He is asking for a fresh breeze to blow his ship onward in the hunt for Moby Dick. And Ahab is asking for some kind of external power to come and move him out of his reverie on the whale's head. The external power is the wind, but in this second, religious context, it is also a divine wind or breeze that is associated with God's power. The reference to St. Paul is a reference to the occasion when the apostle prophesied safety for his ship caught in wind and storm (Acts 27). Paul's vision of God in a dream provided him with the words to calm the crew. Ahab associates the breath of God that gave Paul the
power to form his own words with the divine breeze blowing the Jeroboam toward the Pequod. It is this divine wind that Ahab hopes will come and give him power to escape from the bottomless, airless secrets that the whale possesses. Most importantly, however, this wind that Ahab seeks is bearing down on the Pequod with the Jeroboam.

The Jeroboam has, then, some significant association with the deity at least for Ahab. The name of this vessel would have added significance for Ahab because King Jeroboam, in the Old Testament, was a predecessor of King Ahab. Furthermore, it was upon Jeroboam's wicked successor, especially King Ahab, that God inflicted punishment (1 Kings.16.26-34). The appearance of the Jeroboam brings to an Ahab, already predisposed to the presence of divine power in the wind, a deeper realization of divine wrath.

Ahab is not the only person sensitive to a divine presence. Aboard the Jeroboam, Ishmael says, the crew was in awe of Gabriel's sacredness; Gabriel pronounces that Moby Dick is "no less a being than the Shaker God incarnated" (p. 314). And when Macey, the chief mate of the Jeroboam, lowers his whale boat to hunt Moby Dick, Gabriel hurls forth "prophecies of speedy doom to the sacrilegious assailants of his divinity" (p. 315). Somehow the knowledge that the whale is God incarnate is communicated to Gabriel. And he prophesies accordingly: death will come to those who hunt his God. And death surely awaits Macey in his whale-boat as Moby Dick breaches and tosses Macey into the sea. Gabriel, once he reveals that the divinity is present in the form of the whale, can make a specific and accurate prediction. What Wright says about Gabriel's role in predicting Macey's death, namely that Gabriel only narrates an event that can be verified, is not quite accurate. The divine presence already
associated with the Jeroboam, Gabriel's own assuredness in his ability to know not only God's word but his form, and, finally, the accuracy of Gabriel's prophetic message about Macey's fate, strongly support Gabriel's prophetic message about Macey's fate, strongly support Gabriel's real prophetic stature.

Yet the undeniable tone of the chapter entitled "The Jeroboam's Story" is one that casts doubt on Gabriel's sanity and sincerity. Ishmael clearly thinks that Gabriel is daft. There is evidence given that Gabriel has parlayed his specially regarded place among the crew members into an excuse for not doing any work on board. Worse than this abuse of his prophetic privilege, Gabriel "cared little or nothing for the captain and mates" (p. 313). Not caring for those to whom God has sent him is a most grievous offense for a prophet. Finally, Ishmael states that Gabriel made his prediction about Macey's death, not as a decree from God, but from "greedily sucking in this intelligence" (p. 314) about the known maliciousness of Moby Dick. In other words, Gabriel simply made a calculation that the whale would kill Macey because Moby Dick had been known to attack whaleboats before. Ishmael thinks that Gabriel's prediction has little importance, that "anyone might have done [it]" (p. 315).

The final attitude toward Gabriel is thus an ambiguous one. Ishmael recounts certain facts about Gabriel's prophetic authenticity that would lead one, especially Ahab, to believe that Gabriel is a real prophet. Conversely, Ishmael himself does not seem to believe that Gabriel speaks for God. He thinks that Gabriel is daft yet cunningly self-serving in his manipulation of the crew. These are not admirable qualities for a prophet. While both Ishmael and Ahab hear Gabriel, it is only Ahab who appears to be affected by the prophet. And the extent to which Ahab is
affected by Gabriel's words is not at all clear cut or permanent. His only reaction to Gabriel's calling him a blasphemer is to turn aside "stolidly" (p. 316). And of course Ahab does not give up his pursuit of Moby Dick as a result of his contact with Gabriel. It is thus difficult to determine Gabriel's authenticity because he himself does not clearly state where his source of inspiration is. Furthermore, the signs that Gabriel uses to prove that he is a prophet are not well heeded by Ahab, nor are the signs, and their prophetic source, much believed by Ishmael.

Gabriel's audience includes the crews of the Jeroboam and Pequod. Quite obviously those aboard the Jeroboam believe him and those aboard the Pequod, if Ahab's and Ishmael's reaction to Gabriel are representative, do not so readily believe Gabriel. Certainly the Pequod's crew has reservations about Gabriel and his dire warnings. It is, however, in the Pequod's contact with the Jeroboam that the relationship between the prophet's authenticity and his audience is best discussed. The narrow audience for whom the prophet has meaning affects the certainty, of the prophet and of his audience, that the prophet speaks for God. Ishmael is not a part of the Jeroboam's crew, although he does record the fact that they believe in Gabriel as a prophet. Ishmael does not allow the Jeroboam crew's belief to affect his own response to Gabriel.

It is clear that Ishmael has very judiciously chosen reasons for not believing Gabriel; he thinks that Gabriel is half crazy and self-interested. But beyond these immediate reasons there is the possibility that Ishmael cannot believe what the prophets say precisely because he is not a member of the prophet's audience. Although he hears what Elijah says and what both Gabriel and Mapple say, Ishmael does not really ever believe the messages that he hears. His examination of Tistig, Elijah,
and Gabriel leaves him questioning the ultimate reliability of traditional prophetic voice. These prophets make him doubt that he can ever know God's will, while the prophets should make known God's revealed will beyond doubt. Still, the two chief prophetic characters that have yet to be discussed, Fedallah and Mapple, do much to resolve Ishmael's doubts about prophetic authenticity. In short, Fedallah and Mapple demonstrate for Ishmael the inscrutability of God and the ultimate futility in trying to believe in someone who claims to know God's will. Fedallah and Mapple convince Ishmael that prophets and prophetic figures can no longer know God and speak for him.

In his contact with Fedallah, Ishmael recognizes what he thinks is a false prophet. The irony of Ishmael's recognition lies in the possibility that Fedallah might not be a false prophet, but really a true agent of God. This interpretation of Fedallah's role as a truth speaking prophet of God is clearly not the view of most Melville scholars. Most critics see Fedallah as the devil's agent. Howard Vincent labels Fedallah as a "mysterious surrogate of the Powers of Darkness."18

William Ellery Sedgwick, in Herman Melville: The Tragedy of Mind (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1954), asserts that Fedallah is "Ahab's evil spirit" (p. 94). And Ronald Mason, in The Spirit Above the Dust (London: Lehman, 1951), declares explicitly that Fedallah is the "incarnation of the demonic forces" (p. 143). Ishmael himself advances the argument that Ahab is under Fedallah's influence. Ishmael states, perhaps half humorously, that only "Heaven knows" (p. 229) what Fedallah's influence is on Ahab. His words here are more than colloquial, especially when one is alert to Fedallah's prophetic nature and divine inspiration. Nathalia Wright suggests that the role that Fedallah plays in Moby-Dick
is analogous to the role played by the four hundred prophets in the biblical account of Ahab. Those prophets counseled King Ahab to make war when he should not (1 Kings. 22). And Fedallah of course counsels Ahab to pursue Moby Dick. Specifically, Fedallah makes equivocal predictions regarding Ahab and the whale which lead Ahab to believe that Moby Dick is fated to die by Ahab's hand. In the chapter entitled "The Whale Watch," Fedallah predicts that Ahab will not die on the voyage unless he sees two coffins, one not made by human hands, and one made of American wood. Secondly, he tells Ahab that if he [Ahab] is to die, Fedallah will precede Ahab in death. Thirdly, Fedallah states that Ahab need not fear Moby Dick because only hemp can kill Ahab. All of these predictions come true, but their fulfillment insures rather than prevents Ahab's death.

Ahab chooses to believe that what Fedallah says is true and beneficial to Ahab. But why does Fedallah command Ahab's faith and trust? Stated quite simply, Fedallah tells Ahab what he wants to hear. He reinforces that part of Ahab's obsession with the whale. Indeed, Mansfield believes that Fedallah would not exist without Ahab. 19 But there seems to be some evidence for Fedallah's existence apart from his role as a psychological projection of Ahab's self.

To the crew of the Pequod, Fedallah is a devil. Ishmael describes his appearance with his Parsee boat crew as the emergence of "five dusky phantoms" (p. 214). In Ishmael's mind, Fedallah is associated with "secret confidential agents on the water of the devil" (p. 215). And the rest of the Pequod's crew feels the same way. Stubb tells Flask explicitly that he thinks that Fedallah is a devil (p. 323). Fedallah's demonic power, then, is seen as a power superior to Ahab's self and
somehow affecting Ahab. Ishmael believes that Fedallah's power over
Ahab constitutes an "authority over him" (p. 229). As the final chase
approaches, Fedallah's power increases over Ahab. Symbolically, the
increase of Fedallah's power over Ahab is conveyed by the shadow imagery.
Fedallah's shadow "seemed only to blend with, and lengthen Ahab's"
(p. 327). However, nearer the climactic chase of Moby Dick, Fedallah's
shadow is no longer the extension of Ahab's: "In the Parsee Ahab saw "
his forethrown shadow, in Ahab the Parsee his abandoned substance"
(p. 528). Here Fedallah truly is the "devil Ahab." But Fedallah's
self is one that is not dependent upon Ahab for life and existence;
Fedallah and his shadow seem "cast upon the deck by some unseen being's
body" (p. 527). The question arises as to who is the being that
empowers Fedallah. If he is not solely a creation of Ahab, then is he
the creation of the devil as Stubb and Ishmael believe?

There has been much comment on the origin and nature of Fedallah.
It bears repeating that most critics contend that Fedallah is demonic
in origin. In fact, Luther Mansfield insists that even the derivation
of Fedallah's name from the Arabic name, Fadallah, meaning "Bounty of
God," must be understood ironically. Mansfield says that even if
Melville intended to use Fedallah's name to mean "Bounty of God" this
intended meaning of his name constrasts sharply with his real mission as
agent of the devil. But this contention that Fedallah is demonic in
origin and purpose is refuted rather convincingly by Dorothy Grdseloff.
She reveals that Fedallah is an Arabic name derived from the root word,
\textit{fedai}, meaning one who offers his life up to God. The Fedai were a
"secret order of Islamic mystics pledged to commit murder in the service
of God." Thus Fedallah's origin, about which Ishmael and the crew,
and probably even Ahab, know nothing, is communicated through his name to be of divine origin. Demonic in appearance, and diabolical in action, Fedallah is still the agent of God sent to purposely deceive Ahab. Fedallah is therefore similar to the lying, but real, prophets who were told by God to give falsehoods to King Ahab. Ishmael has no inkling of this "real" mission of Fedallah; Ahab of course does not either. He thinks that Fedallah is the true agent of the satanic and pagan fire worshippers to whom Ahab has committed his own self. Thus Ahab believes Fedallah's predictions about Moby Dick to be truly in his favor, not against. Ahab believes Fedallah to be right, and Fedallah is right but for the wrong reasons, that is, not for Ahab's reasons. Fedallah is God's agent while seeming to act for the devil. And his prophecy is true because he has divine inspiration even though this inspiration is conveyed as a demonic one.

However, no one aboard the Pequod can possibly know this. Fedallah's origin and mission are mysterious and unreadable. If he is a true prophet of God, as Grdseloff asserts, no one can recognize him as such. The obscurity that surrounds Fedallah's authenticity as a true prophet of God indicates the difficulty one has in determining the truthfulness of those who speak for God. If one sees Fedallah as an avenging messenger of God, instead of an equivocal seer, then Ahab seems more pathetic than tragic when he puts his faith in Fedallah's prophecies. Ahab is the dupe because he trusts Fedallah to be demonic when even this trust cannot be absolute. Ahab is misled to his death by the prophetic voice that he hears in Fedallah. Confident that he can know the certainty of at least evil, Ahab believes what he hears the evil Fedallah say. Unfortunately Fedallah's prophecy is untrue for Ahab largely because
Fedallah's authenticity as the devil's agent is questionable. The prophet cannot reveal the truth because he cannot reveal with certainty his divine, or even demonic, authenticity.

The prophet can say almost anything, it seems, in the name of the Lord. He can be ambiguous, like Elijah, and Tistig, both in his message and in his consciousness of himself as a prophet. Or the prophet can be purposely deceitful and opposed to God, both in his message and in his consciousness of himself as God's prophet, just as Fedallah appears in his equivocal prophecies and in his demonic appearance. Quite obviously, such ambiguity and deception make it impossible for those who hear the prophet's message to truly believe in it or in the prophet. Also, if there is so much ambiguity in a true prophet's authenticity and message, as in Fedallah, how then can Ishmael make plain his message and authenticity when he speaks in his own voice? The response that Ishmael fashions through his own narrative comes only when he separates himself from the prophetic characters that he has been hearing all through the book. In order for Ishmael to achieve his separation from the prophetic characters in the book, he must deal with the authenticity of Mapple and the credibility of this prophecy.

Ishmael's reaction to Mapple's prophecy reveals his deepest doubts about the traditional figure of the prophet. For Ishmael must ultimately reject the truths that Mapple directs him to believe and obey in his sermon. However, rejecting prophets and prophecies is no new thing for Ishmael. The hesitation that Ishmael exhibits in accepting the prophecies of Elijah, Gabriel, Tistig, and even Fedallah, is well founded. The authenticity of each figure is questionable. Furthermore, the prophetic message that each one brings is in some way unverifiable, or completely
ineffective. Fedallah, for instance, predicts all those things that will happen to Ahab before he will die. Even when Ahab sees the predicted events actually happen, he is still powerless to change his fate. Ishmael can see that the prophets are inauthentic; their messages are to some extent false and ironical. Thus the shape or pattern that the prophecies give to the narrative in Moby-Dick forms a pattern of ironic narration. The prophets predict what should be true or what should be the true course of action, and the prediction turns out to be false or the course of events does not develop as anticipated. Specifically, Elijah tells Ishmael not to go on the Pequod, but he still goes. Ishmael learns that he cannot believe in any one's prophecy because belief in the prophecy almost assuredly means that the prophet's message will turn out to be a false one. When Ishmael hears Mapple's sermon, and hears the directives that are placed before him, he has little choice but to reject Mapple and his message. Ishmael's rejection of Mapple is not without struggle, because he does try to live by Mapple's words.

Father Mapple, unlike Elijah, Gabriel, and Fedallah is not ambiguous or deluded in either his awareness of himself as God's prophet or in his prophetic message. Mapple's sermon is about the Old Testament prophet, Jonah, a man who Mapple says is "an anointed pilot-prophet, or speaker of true things, and bidden by the Lord to sound those unwelcome truths" (p. 47). And Mapple identifies himself with Jonah, calling himself a "pilot of the living God" (pp. 46-47) inspired to interpret the divine teaching of the scriptures. Mapple's distinction between Jonah as a "pilot-prophet" of God and himself as the "pilot of the living God" is not a clear-cut one. Indeed Nathalia Wright calls Mapple a
"prophet of sorts," and she believes that Mapple's sermon "constitutes in itself a prophecy, of which the ensuing narrative is a fulfillment."

Father Mapple's sermon as he himself says, is "two-stranded" (p. 41). He preaches about Jonah to show to his congregation that sin is evil. If, however, as Mapple says, one does sin, "take heed to repent of it like Jonah" (p. 46). Secondly, after repentance, Mapple relates that Jonah had to carry out God's will. And God's will was: "To preach the Truth to the face of Falsehood!" (p. 47), that is, to preach God's real intended destruction to the unbelieving Ninevites. Jonah's example then is the example Mapple exhorts his congregation, Ishmael included, to follow. It is to this two stranded lesson that Wright contrasts the remaining narrative of Moby-Dick. If one does his "gospel duty" (p. 47) and preaches truth to the face of falsehood, then one can achieve that "top-gallant delight" (p. 48) which is prophesied by Mapple as the final salvation. Ahab, of course, is the great sinner against Mapple's directives because he neither repents of his sins, nor does he do God's will in pursuing Moby Dick.

Thus once again it seems that the directive of a prophet brings about the exact opposite behaviour in the prophetic witness. This statement assumes that Mapple is speaking to Ahab. In truth, of course, it is Ishmael who hears Father Mapple's sermon. Critics have taken the preacher's sermon as an expression of orthodox Christianity confronting Ahab's anti-Christian, rebellious self-will. With Ahab's self-destruction, Mapple's sermon seems to be vindicated. Repentance and submission to God's will appear to be the proper ways to achieve salvation. This is Mapple's prophecy and this is what happens, Wright says, "when one fully acquiesces in this will of the universe."
Moreover, Wright is quite correct in remarking that the Jonah in Mapple's sermon resembles more Jeremiah than Jonah in the Old Testament. The qualities of Jeremiah that Mapple posits in his Jonah are basically the same steadfastly submissive qualities that Jeremiah demonstrated in constantly preaching what he believed to be God's will in the face of great adversity. In short, Jeremiah did not give up or give himself over to personal concerns. His preaching clearly marks how perilous any prophet's words can make life. As Wright comments on Jeremiah's teaching: "The way of truth is uneasy, lonely, and fraught with mortal danger." In contrast to Jeremiah's peril, Ahab's perilously fatal cruise seems futile. He appears to be a man who throws away his life because he does not exercise his great physical and moral strength to uphold his "gospel duty." In short, he chooses to oppose God, not uphold him.

This argument seems convincing if one views Ahab and Mapple as the two principals. But as seen before with regard to Gabriel's audience, the prophet's message in Moby-Dick has chief significance for those who hear it. Just as the crew of the Jeroboam was more disposed to recognize Gabriel's prophetic stature than Ishmael was, so Ishmael is more disposed, because he hears Mapple, to see the preacher as God's prophet, his pilot-preacher. While it is true, as Wright claims, that Mapple's Jonah resembles Jeremiah more than the Old Testament Jonah, the event chosen for his sermon is Jonah's experience in the belly of a whale. It is from Jonah's attempt to escape from his mission that Mapple draws the moral lesson of repentance. However, Wright notes a significant difference between Jonah's motivation for his escape and Mapple's account of Jonah's motivation. Mapple says: "Jonah, appalled at the hostility he should raise, fled from his mission, and sought to
escape his duty and his God" (p. 47). Wright gives the added information: "But in assigning a motive for Jonah's flight he [Mapple] diverges from it. In the last chapter of the Book of Jonah the prophet makes a clear defence of himself when he professes to have known that Jehovah's heart was soft and to have suspected that the divine decree for their destruction would be revoked if the wicked Ninevites were moved by his preaching to repentance." And of course Jonah is vindicated. When he does threaten the Ninevites with destruction, they repent and God reneges on his promise to destroy them. Jonah's hope that God would change his mind about destroying the Ninevites is very much in the tradition of the Hebrew prophets. The revelation of divine word should allow both the prophet and the prophetic witness the right to make a choice as to whether or not he must do exactly what God has told him to do. In the words of Martin Buber: "The genuine prophet was not to predict but to confront man with the alternatives of decision." This is just what Jonah did. And thus Mapple uses the story of Jonah as the example of how a true prophet acts. Ironically, however, Mapple does not emphasize Jonah's painfully human, but importantly prophetic actions, namely his hesitation, reservation and personal response to doing what God told him to do. Biblical commentators such as Buber and Heschel admire Jonah's attempt to modify God's spoken directive. Mapple of course finds Jonah's hesitation sinful, and cites Jonah's ultimate repentance for fleeing from God as the first strand of his double stranded lesson.

Mapple's variation from the biblical account of Jonah finally makes his Jonah more steadfast and submissive to God's will. Mapple's Jonah is the proper Christian counterpart to the pagan Ahab. But
Jonah and Ahab are simply not opponents in *Moby-Dick*. It is Ishmael who hears Mapple, and it is Ishmael who bears a very close resemblance to Jonah as a prophet. For Ishmael, like Jonah, tests the divine directive that Mapple lays before him. In the course of the voyage Ishmael does not speak out against Ahab's reckless vengeance. This restraint does not arise from Ishmael's inability to tell right from wrong: "Not ignoring what is good, I am quick to perceive a horror" (p. 6). Rather, Ishmael's hesitancy comes from the lack of certain knowledge that it is God's will for him to pronounce Ahab false before God's true will. Wright states that the narrative relation of the *Pequod*'s voyage which follows Mapple's sermon is a fulfillment of Mapple's prophecy, that is, the fulfillment of what will happen if one disobeys God's will. Yet, Ishmael does not obey Mapple's directive and he survives. In fact it is only by disobeying the directive to call out falsehoods that Ishmael frees himself to discover just how he should act toward Moby Dick and Ahab. Mapple's sermon and prophetic directive thus do not determine the narrative which follows.

The effect that Mapple's words have on Ishmael cannot be dismissed too quickly for Ishmael does attempt to pronounce that the *Pequod*, with Ahab as captain, is on a diabolical voyage: "As the wind howled on, and the sea leaped, and the ship groaned and dived, and yet steadfastly shot her red hull further and further into the blackness of the sea and the night, and scornfully champed the white bone in her mouth, and viciously spat round her on all sides; then the rushing *Pequod*, burning a corpse, and plunging into that blackness of darkness, seemed the material counterpart of her monomaniac commander's soul" (p. 421). These thoughts come to Ishmael while he is acting as
the real pilot of the Pequod, steering her through the night while the try pots burn. Unfortunately, while he stops to judge the meaning of the Pequod's voyage and assess the crew, he loses control of the ship's tiller and almost capsizes the Pequod. Clearly, Ishmael is not a good pilot here; nor is he a good pilot-preacher as Mapple urges him to be. Ishmael's reverie in the chapter entitled, "The Try Works," is a personal meditation only. Never once does he communicate to Ahab his support, doubt, or rejection of Ahab and his destructive will. Yet Ishmael has all of these reactions to Ahab.

Instead of making Ahab the hearer or witness of his reveries and judgments, Ishmael makes the reader aware of the multitude of feelings that he bears toward the captain, the whale, and the voyage itself. This, if anything, seems to be Ishmael's gospel duty. Mapple, toward the end of his sermon, says that the pilot-preacher must "stand forth his own inexorable self" (p. 48) against the "proud gods and commodores" (p. 48) of the world. Ishmael, in his own way, fulfills this directive because he remains apart from Ahab's party and from Mapple's party in order to do his gospel duty, to tell the news about the events of the Pequod's last voyage. One critic has expressed Ishmael's duty well: "Ishmael's task at hand is to observe and to narrate the terrible story of Captain Ahab, the true telling of which imposes certain responsibilities....Passion, melancholy, cynicism, even an unthinking easy acceptance—any of these human attitudes, perhaps malice above all, might turn Ishmael aside from his duty to tell the truth."31

Truth telling for Ishmael, as for Melville, is something much more complex than simply calling out what he sees as false in the face of what he sees as true. All of the prophets that Ishmael knows make some claim
on the truth. And Ishmael knows from his dealings with these prophets that God's will cannot easily be known. All that Ishmael can speculate about God's will is that it somehow accounts for his being on the Pequod:

"And, Doubtless, my going on this whaling voyage, formed part of the grand programme of Providence that was drawn up a long time ago" (p. 5). Much commentary has been offered about the role of fate in Moby-Dick. Beginning with the biblical meaning of Ishmael's name, one who must inevitably be set apart and against all other men, critics have argued that all the events involving Ahab and Moby Dick are part of God's will, or some fated plan. The extent to which fate has ordered events on the voyage is examined by Ishmael in his dealings with the prophetic figures. Ishmael tries to discern through them just how much God does speak to man through a prophet. It is clear from Ishmael's experience at the tiller that God does not answer him through Mapple. The pilot-preacher does not provide Ishmael with a way of discovering God's will. This experience at the tiller and the experience of the whole voyage can reveal nothing more specific and direct than that fate somehow determines these events. Thus Ishmael's narration of the Pequod's last voyage gives, in its final account, a witness to the "inexorable nature of God's decrees," however one wishes to view those decrees.

For Ishmael his gospel duty cannot be the duty of a simple foreteller of events, or a predictor of doom, or even of a pilot-preacher, that is, a moral judge of the Christian God and of his sinful servants, especially Ahab. Ishmael comes to view himself as a prophet with quite different tasks from any of those previously mentioned prophets. Ishmael's task as a prophet cannot be the traditional task of Mapple and Elijah because Ishmael knows that he cannot have, nor claim to have, any
special knowledge of God's will. However, there are forces and powers in nature and in the people on the Pequod that can have only supernatural significance for Ishmael. Of course this allegorical significance of nature and natural events is central to the meaning of Moby-Dick. Furthermore, it is Ishmael's narration of the supernatural and symbolic meaning in nature and natural events that constitutes his prophetic response to nature, to what which in nature appears to be supernatural or divinely ordered. The concept of the prophet of nature is best expressed by Carlyle in his remarks on Shakespeare as a prophet:

"[Shakespeare] too was a Prophet....Nature seemed to this man also divine; unspeakable, deep as Tophet, high as Heaven....[Shakespeare] was conscious of no Heavenly message....He did not feel... that he specially was the 'Prophet of God': and was he not greater than Mahomet in that?". Ishmael the prophet has the same qualities as Shakespeare the prophet. Most importantly, Ishmael is not conscious of a heavenly message especially directed to him. Unlike Shakespeare, however, Ishmael has no choice about his role as a prophet of nature. Interpreting what nature means to him is all that is left to Ishmael. The traditional prophetic figures in the book demonstrate that there can no longer be any special, that is, directly perceived and understood, relationship between God and the prophet who wants to hear God. Instead the prophet must range over all of nature and all of the many responses to nature and natural forces in order to gain some idea of divine presence in nature.

Still the notion of Ishmael as a prophet like Mapple, Gabriel, Elijah, and Tistig is never very far from Ishmael's mind: "I declare upon my soul, I had no more idea of being facetious than Moses" (p. 204).
And in telling his story Ishmael does, after all, use the voices of those different prophets. But there are places in *Moby-Dick*, particularly in the cetology chapters, and in those meditative chapters like "The Whiteness of the Whale," where Ishmael speaks in his own prophetic voice. In discussing Ishmael's real prophetic character, that is, his awareness of supernatural forces in nature, it is most beneficial to examine Ishmael's comprehensive response to the nature of the events that he experiences. Because Ishmael, like Jonah, finds God in nature by testing and questioning, one who wants to discover Ishmael's prophetic character must examine those places where Ishmael does his testing and questioning. And he is most expansively speculative in the cetology chapters, and in certain of the more meditative places in his narrative.

To certain critics, Ishmael seems anything but a person who sincerely seeks contact with a Christian God or God's will in nature. At times, Ishmael himself plays humorously, even irreverently, with orthodox Christian teaching. While he is waiting in the whaleman's chapel he half consents to the unchristian notion that there is no resurrection after death: "What deadly voids and unbidden infidelities in the lines [on the cenotaphs] that seem to gnaw upon all Faith, and refuse resurrections to the beings who have placelessly perished without a grave" (p. 35). But then he turns his attention to Father Mapple's pulpit, and he becomes full of Christian righteousness and enthusiasm for the divine power: "From thence [the pulpit] it is the storm of God's quick wrath is first descried, and the bow must bear the earliest brunt. From thence it is the God of breezes fair or foul is first invoked for favorable winds" (p. 39). It seems that Ishmael has a keen awareness of each possibility, that is, the possibility that there is no life after death, and the
possibility that God is real and present in the pulpit preachers, such as Mapple. This quality of double vision is essential to the understanding of Ishmael's awareness of himself as a prophet. There is an orthodox, spiritual side to Ishmael that wants to believe in the traditional beliefs and the traditional figures of religious institutions. However, Ishmael's experience proves to him that such belief is untenable for him personally. Whenever there is a statement by Ishmael of belief in a traditional figure of religion, like Mapple, or an assent to a traditional truth of faith, like the resurrection, this statement cannot remain unqualified.

The thoroughness with which Ishmael examines all the possibilities for prophetic authenticity both in the prophetic figures and in himself ultimately convinces himself and the reader that he is sincerely trying to speak for God, even when he is not sure of God. To this end Ishmael employs ambiguity as a rhetorical method that intensifies the searching nature of his prophetic character. Ambiguity becomes a method of finally persuading the reader that Ishmael is sincere in his search for God, and most importantly, that he is sincere in relating the events in the narration.

That comprehensive ambiguity is Ishmael's view of things is apparent from his initial effort to decide what the best form of worship is. Immediately after Mapple's sermon, when Ishmael seems most impressed and influenced by Mapple's two-stranded lesson, Ishmael embraces Queequeg's pagan religion by worshipping the wooden idol, Yojo. As he kneels with Queequeg before the idol, Ishmael says: "But what is worship? to do the will of God—that is worship. And what is the will of God?—to do to my fellow man what I would have my fellow man do to me—that is the will
of God" (p. 52). Ishmael's understanding of worshipping God on this occasion, so soon after hearing Mapple's definition of worship, is hard to reconcile with Mapple's righteous view of Christian worship. Similarly, Ishmael uses ambiguity to reveal the full meaning of whiteness in the chapter entitled "The Whiteness of the Whale." Here, a succession of white symbols and events connoting "beauty" (p. 185) and "virtue" (p. 185) is followed by a succession of white symbols and events that connotes "transcendent horrors" (p. 186). The final attitude toward whiteness is predictably ambiguous: "It [whiteness] is at once the most meaning symbol of spiritual things, nay, the very veil of the Christian's Diety; and yet should be as it is the intensifying agent in things most appaling to mankind" (p. 193).

The reason for such a comprehensive presentation of both possible meanings of whiteness is revealed by Ishmael: "What the white whale was to Ahab, has been hinted; what, at times, he was to me, as yet remains unsaid" (p. 185). Thus the initial reason for a discussion on the meaning of whiteness in whales is to present another view differing from Ahab's conviction that the white whale is either principal or agent of evil. For Ahab says: "That inscrutable thing is chiefly what I hate; and be the white whale agent, or be the white whale principal, I will wreak that hate upon him" (p. 162). Of course what Ishmael provides in his account of whiteness is not another interpretation of whiteness to oppose Ahab's view, but the comprehensive view of whiteness which accounts not only for Ahab's view but for any other possible interpretation. Such a comprehensive view of whiteness results in futility if one looks into this ambiguity to find Ishmael's "true," private, personal feelings toward whiteness. But in giving such an account, in narrating
the whole truth about the meaning of whiteness in whales, Ishmael per-
suades the reader that the color does mean all the things that he says
it does. Furthermore, it is precisely in the fullness of his discussion
that Ishmael reveals the complex meanings of whiteness. Truth, here the
fullness of truth about whiteness, can only be revealed in ambiguity.
This is what Ishmael relates through his discussion; he does his gospel
duty to preach the truth. Of course what he says would not be accept-
able to Mapple. Ishmael's words are his expression of his prophetic
duty and witness. As he says: "But how can I hope to explain myself
here; and yet, in some dim, random way, explain myself I must, else all
these chapters might be naught" (p. 185). No judgment about Ishmael's
feelings toward whiteness, religion, Ahab or anything else can be made
until the whole story has been told. And in Ishmael's narration he is
very careful to present not just his reactions, but the full account
and meaning of all the actions that take place. It is also in the fullness
of account that a prophet, a prophet of nature like Ishmael, must
express himself.

Ishmael's adherence to thoroughness in his account of the meaning
of whiteness, and in his discussion of whales in the cetology chapters,
is a chief characteristic of his narrative and prophetic manner. By
adopting this manner of thoroughness and fullness of narration he trans-
cends making the narrow moral judgments that Mapple exhorts him to make.
Yet Ishmael, unlike Ahab, who disobeys the predictive warnings of
Gabriel, and who misconstrues the equivocations of Fedallah, survives
the voyage. There are basically two schools of critical thought to
account for Ishmael's survival. One feels that he survives largely
because he rejects Christian morality and aligns himself with Ahab. 35
The other school feels that it is precisely the fact that Ishmael retains his Christian beliefs which saves him. Neither school attributes any great degree of self-determination to Ishmael's survival. But, indeed, he is quite aware, as his narrative indicates, of those forces that affect his survival and thus command his attention and respect.

It becomes evident to Ishmael that Father Mapple's directives do not apply to him, rather that there are other, more immediate forces that must be obeyed. In a very special way, Moby Dick himself becomes a powerful, supernatural force in Ishmael's consciousness and imagination. In his exploration of the whale's history and mythology, Ishmael cannot be limited to Christianity, Mapple's religion, or idolatry, Queequeg's religion, or paganism, Ahab's and Fedallah's religion. Moby Dick himself becomes a powerful, supernatural force in Ishmael's life while on the Pequod, and especially in his consciousness and imagination after the voyage is concluded. Arvin has stated: "The White Whale is a grandiose mythic presentation of what is godlike in the cosmos." And it is true that Ishmael creates the whale as a "godlike presentation" in the cetology chapters. These chapters, while seeming to be on the periphery of the narrative, are really central to the narration of the godlike stature of the whale. In developing the full history and significance of whales, Ishmael reveals their divine magnificence just as he revealed the full ambiguity of whiteness in the chapter entitled "The Whiteness of the Whale." Comprehensive ambiguity, Ishmael's methodology, finally reveals his true prophetic character, as it reveals God to him.

Beginning with his meditations on the inscrutable appearances and meanings of the whale, Ishmael proceeds to explore the allegorical
possibilities of the whale as a source of truth until finally he fashions out of the whale a symbolic representation of God. In the chapter entitled "Of the Monstrous Pictures of Whales," Ishmael states: "There is no earthly way of finding out precisely what the whale really looks like. And the only mode in which you can derive a tolerable idea of his living contour, is by going a whaling yourself" (pp. 265-266). However, even when one goes whale hunting and captures a whale it is impossible for him to divine the meaning of his brow: "How may unlettered Ishmael hope to read the awful Chaldee of the Sperm Whale's brow? I put that brow before you. Read it if you can" (p. 345). At best when one considers the whole "bulk and power" (p. 347), Ishmael says, "You can best form to yourself the truest, though not the most exhilarating conception of what the most exalted potency is" (p. 347). At best the whale can only reveal part of his enormous power. However, the whale in his inscrutability also reminds Ishmael of the ultimate inscrutability of truth: "For unless you own [acknowledge] the whale, you are but a provincial and sentimental­ist in Truth" (p. 336). Here it is clear that the whale in its inscrut­ability, in its ability to convey to limited man only half its enormous power and force, is very much like the ultimate truth of anything, even whiteness, which is equally elusive and uncommunicative for Ishmael.

However, the exploration of the whale's power and godliness is merely well begun with Ishmael's meditations about the whale's mysterious unknow­ableness. The wealth of information about the history of whales and whaling that he has compiled in the cetology chapters provides him with the necessary historical and literary material to invest the whale with the verbal symbolic stature that belongs to him. In short the cetology chapters reveal the whale as a symbol, perhaps even an incarnation, of God.
Amid the casual, sometimes jocular tone of the cetology chapter entitled "The Praire," and devoted to the meaning of the whale's brow, Ishmael states: "But in the great Sperm Whale, this high and mighty god-like dignity inherent in the brow is so immensely amplified, that gazing on it, in that full front view, you feel the Deity and the dread powers" (p. 344). The key word here is feel. The whale has the ability to bring about the powerful emotions of awe and terror that one, especially a Calvinist like Melville, might expect to experience before God. But just a few paragraphs later, in the same chapter, Ishmael, in a whimsical tone, refers to a time in the future when "the merry May-day gods of old" (p. 345) may be returned. When, if ever, such a time should come about "then be sure, exalted to Jove's high seat, the great Sperm Whale shall lord it" (p. 345). Significantly, the whale has been transformed from an animalistic force analogous in awe and dignity to God, to a co-equal with the gods of old.

While the tone of the whale's transformation into a divine force might be suspect as a totally serious one in the chapter entitled "The Praire," there can be no mistake about the seriousness with which the whale is identified as a godly idol of worship in another chapter entitled "A Bower in the Arsacides." Ishmael ostensibly includes this chapter in his narration about the wonders of whales to prove that he has first hand knowledge of the whale's skeletal anatomy. On an island in the South Pacific, Tranque, Ishmael has seen the skeleton of a beached whale which the natives have transformed into a sacred temple in the middle of the forest. The dead whale's skeleton is covered with the growth of the forest and Ishmael describes it as "a white, worshipped skeleton" (p. 447). The whale's skeleton lies in a forest and makes it
difficult for Ishmael to determine whether the whale's skeleton is dominated by the living, relentless forces of nature, the natural "weaver god" (p. 447) of life, or the forces of death: "Life folded Death, Death trellised Life; the grim god [the whale's skeleton] wived with youthful Life, and begat him curly-headed glories" (p. 447).

Thus the whale becomes for Ishmael an increasingly important symbol of God's power and majesty. Of course it would be unfair to say that Ishmael everywhere, and at all times, identifies the whale with God. He is aware that he cannot be completely converted to absolute faith in the whale as a true symbol of God. He asserts significantly: "Doubts of all things earthly, and intuitions of some things heavenly; this combination makes neither believer nor infidel, but makes a man who regards them both with equal eye" (p. 372). It is necessary to retain some suspicion about the absolute certainty with which he commits himself to people, symbols, and beliefs. This reservation allows him to observe all things with "equal eye" and present the full account of all that he sees. Also, Ishmael is aware that the way he views the whale is largely determined by his moods. Exploring the particular psychological state that precedes the sighting of one school of peculiarly angelic looking whales, Ishmael ponders: "It is all in what mood you are in; if in the Dantean, the devils will occur to you; if in that of Isaiah, the archangels. Standing at the masthead of my ship during sunrise... I once saw a large herd of whales....As it seemed to me at the time, such a grand embodiment of adoration of the gods was never beheld" (pp. 375-376). Thus whatever reservation about the fleeting, ultimately suspicious attitude that he must have towards his own moods, Ishmael's most powerful awareness of whales is an awareness of their godliness.
And it is finally to this perception of the whale as a divine, supernatural reality, that Ishmael commits his prophetic, that is, his revelatory powers of narration. It is in the chapter entitled "The Honor and Glory of Whaling" that Ishmael quite appropriately reveals his perception. In marshalling his storehouse of knowledge and experience about whales and whaling, Ishmael finds that there are a great many "demi-gods and heroes, prophets of all sorts" (p. 359) associated with the history of whaling. He is proud of course to be associated with such a fraternity, in other words, to be a fellow prophet. The remaining part of the chapter relates famous characters, mythical and historical, who were whalemen. In each instance, the various whalemen, Perseus, St. George, Hercules, Jonah, and Vishnoo [sic], went whaling for more noble reasons than simply to "fill men's lamp-feeders" (p. 360). It is the last member of the noble society, however, who is particularly striking to Ishmael. The Hindu God Vishnoo "became incarnate as a whale" (p. 362) in order to search the bottom of the seas to find the Vedas or mystical books, "whose perusal would seem to have been indispensible to Vishnoo before beginning creation" (p. 362). Like Vishnoo, Ishmael plumbs the depths of the sea, experientially and historically, before he begins his narration about the Pequod's last voyage. The books, chiefly Beal's Natural History of the Sperm Whale (1839), Bennet's Narrative of a Whaling Voyage Round the Globe (1840), Browne's Etchings of a Whaling Cruise (1846), and Storesby's An Account of the Arctic Regions, with a History and Description of the Northern Whale Fishery (1820), were indispensible to Ishmael's, and Melville's, creation of the voyage and the story of the whaling industry. But most important, it is Vishnoo, Godly and whale-like, who seeks out these sacred books as if only he could carry their
mysteries to man. Ishmael, too, is the only one who can convey the mystery of the whale to man. He quite correctly associates himself with the society of noble whalenmen; he is one of the prophets in that society. Thus in this very special sense Ishmael becomes the whale's prophet, the witness to the will of force in nature which Ishmael largely identifies with the force of God.

Ishmael's survival is thus not merely the saving act of a Christian God, or the triumph of a romantic rebel, although Christianity and romanticism provide part of the explanation. His survival is the beginning of a new life for him. The headnote to the epilogue in the American edition declares: "And I only am escaped to tell thee" (p. 567). Like the messengers who come to tell Job of his family's destruction and the loss of his possessions, Ishmael comes to relate the story of the godlike power of the whale and Ahab's conflict with it. This headnote from Job, omitted in the English edition of Moby-Dick, but included in the American edition, reemphasizes Ishmael's narrative purpose. Ironically, Melville was criticized by his English reviewers because he seemed to them to have no consistency in narrative point of view. The seeming disappearance of Ishmael as the first person narrator at various points in the book upset their sense of novelistic form.

However, it is precisely the aim of this headnote to the epilogue, and the epilogue itself, to confirm explicitly Ishmael's very real existence after the holocaust and his prophetic task as a narrator.

Among those critics who account for Ishmael's survival, Rosenfeld offers the view: "The coffin-life buoy combines the theme of faith and Christian action for Ishmael." Specifically, Rosenfeld believes that Ishmael's intellectual skepticism and intrepidity, similar to
Bulkingon's, and Ishmael's faith and love for Queequeg, make him the kind of person effectively equipped to reject Ahab and be worthy of survival. Rosenfeld's argument is convincing. Moreover, Rosenfeld's article is significant to this study of Ishmael's prophetic character because of the remarks that it makes about the writings on Queequeg's coffin. Queequeg transcribed the religious mysteries written on his body to the coffin. Not once, Rosenfeld says, was Queequeg so presumptuous as "to attempt to understand the message which he embodies." So it is with Ishmael, who clings to this message that he cannot fully understand but that he must relate to the fullness of his understanding. Not only is there lack of complete understanding as to the whale's absolute divinity and power, but there is a lack of pronouncement about Ahab's demonic or deistic tragedy. Still, it is Ishmael's duty as a prophet to "confront man with alternatives," to remain dead to the certain understanding of one thing, and alive to all the possible, though ambiguous, meanings of all things. In the chapter entitled "Try Works," after his attempt to be a prophet like Mapple, Ishmael likens his situation to Solomon's: "'The man that wandereth out of the way of understanding shall remain'" (even while living) "'in the congregation of the dead'" (p. 422). It is thus Ishmael's fate to remain the only living member of that congregation on the Pequod. And his reluctance to be confined to any single understanding or conclusion about the events on board is related to his isolation, survival, and his narrative task.

For it is incumbent upon Ishmael to separate himself from the traditional Hebraic notion of the prophet as he sees this figure reflected in Mapple, Elijah, and Gabriel, in order to discover and
express his full response to the persons and events of the voyage. This steadfast commitment to what he feels must be his own view of things is similar to the determination of the prophet Jeremiah, one of Melville's favorite biblical figures, to remain true to his calling. Indeed what compels Ishmael to remain free from obeying the traditional prophetic voices that he hears is the overwhelming supernatural force that he feels in the events and people on the whaling voyage. Like his spiritual brother, and literary predecessor, Diogenes Teufelsdrockh, Ishmael says an everlasting "No" to those traditional, confining voices that urge him to place his faith and trust in a dead, or at least inarticulate, prophetic tradition. And like Teufelsdrockh, Ishmael records his response to nature as a prophetic response. Teufelsdrockh states that nature is a "Volume written in celestial hieroglyphs, in the true Sacred-writing; of which even Prophets are happy that they can read here a line and there a line." And Ishmael can glimpse, if only on occasion, that the inscrutable meaning of the whale rests somewhere above the sheer force of nature. The whale is certainly some kind of manifestation, if not the only manifestation, of divine power. Likewise, the hieroglyph of meaning surrounding the moral conflict in Ahab's pursuit of Moby Dick is indicative of something much more supernaturally significant than just whale hunting. What the meaning of the voyage is only Ishmael can say. Furthermore he alone, isolated, and free to narrate all that he experiences, can attempt to prophesy what the natural events and forces of the voyage and the people on that voyage mean to him.

Thus, Melville's adaptation of the Carlylean Prophet of Nature to characterize Ishmael's view of nature and natural events is thoroughly
unique. Thompson's assertion that the God hating and God defying characters express Melville's real view is not the author's final view about God or God's ways in the world of man. Even Ishmael, apparently reconciled to the holocaust of nature's spent energy and Ahab's consuming passion, does not reveal a final truth about the will of God. He has no words as he floats calmly over the spot where the Pequod sank. Significantly his voice is silent just like the voice of nature, symbolized by the sharks who circle his buoyant coffin with padlocks on their mouths. Ishmael does not speak until he puts his words in his prophetic context as narrator of the events of the voyage. Furthermore, Ishmael will not speak without the qualification and comprehensiveness that he exhibits in discussing the meaning of whiteness and majesty of whales.

The scope of Ishmael's narration is comprehensive; it borders in fact on the omniscient. Critics have offered explanations why Ishmael knows what Ahab says in his supposedly solitary speeches. Their attempts seem weak efforts to explain structurally how Ishmael has access to knowledge that he seems to have had no opportunity to have. As a prophet of nature, however, Ishmael's response to Ahab, or to whales, cannot be limited to his physical, literal contact with either or both. As he says in the chapter entitled "The Tail," his mood determines to a great extent how he will view the whale on any one occasion. There is obviously a great deal of imaginative force brought to bear on the meaning and significance of whales and Ahab. Furthermore, Ishmael has the right, perhaps the duty to reveal all of his moods and imaginings because this sort of reverie is all that he can do as a prophet. The voice and power of God cannot be directly communicated to him. Still this failure does not deter him from his prophetic task.
to perceive the meaning of nature, and to relate these perceptions.

In summary, Ishmael cannot speak with the authenticity of the prophets of old, but he still seeks to reveal the will of God in nature to the best of his ability. Thus his apparent digressions in Moby-Dick on the history of whales and whaling are central to the narrative because in these chapters Ishmael reveals the majestic and divine power that inheres in the whale, and by extension in nature. It is imperative to remember that Ishmael's revelations about the whale's divinity are never without qualification. Although the undeniable fact of Ishmael's perception is that the whale is a deified being, the equally undeniable fact of Ishmael's experience is that this being cannot always and unreservedly be worshipped as God. Prolonged reverie of any kind in Moby-Dick, whether it be about the limitlessness of the sea, the horror of the try-works, or the glory of whales, is always a dangerous thing. Similarly for the prophet of nature such as Ishmael, and here Melville distinguishes Ishmael from Teufelsdrockh, the prophetic characterization of nature which describes God's will and power in natural forces, people, and events can only be an incomplete characterization, a part-time role. The Melvillean prophet has to see himself with an "equal eye" (p. 372), the equal eye that Ishmael uses to look at himself whenever his imagination exceeds the validity of his prophetic voice.
NOTES:


Melvin Bowen, The Long Encounter (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960). Bowen writes: "However important the theme of acceptance may be felt to be in Moby-Dick, it yet remains entirely secondary, in its imaginative impact, to the celebration of heroic defiance," p. 252.

2 Newton Arvin, Herman Melville (New York: Sloan, 1950). Arvin asserts: "Ahab, on the other hand, has shown no such capacity [for the laws of acceptance]; on the contrary, he has persisted in identifying Moby Dick with 'all evil,' and piling upon the whale's white hump 'all the general rage and hate felt by his whole race from Adam down.' But this is both madness and wickedness," p. 191.


3 Vincent, p. 55.

4 Critics do not entirely agree on this point, however. Bowen states: "the story itself is Ahab's and not Ishmael's," p. 241. And Vincent counters: "Moby-Dick is Ishmael's book as much as it is Ahab's," p. 389.


6 Wright, p. 81.

7 Wright, p. 92.


9 Heschel, p. 25.

10 Heschel, p. 366.


Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*, ed. Luther Mansfield and Howard Vincent, (New York: Hendricks House, 1952), p. 80. All subsequent references are to this text unless otherwise noted.

Mansfield and Vincent say that Fedallah is the "objective symbol" of the conflict in Ahab. Thus Fedallah is "hardly a character in his own right," p. 731.


Mansfield and Vincent, pp. 731-733.


Grdseloff, p. 399.

Wright, p. 89.

Wright, p. 92.

Vincent sees the thematic relevance of Mapple's sermon to Ahab's fate: "As the story of Moby-Dick unfolds we realize the relevance, thematically as well as wittily, of the sermon on Jonah, for Jonah's fugue is repeated in the flight of Ahab. In Fr. Mapple's sermon we behold a man saved by a whale, but in Ahab's act we see a man destroyed by one," p. 72.

Wright, p. 91

Wright, p. 89

Wright, p. 83.


Vincent writes: "Ishmael has also learned the law of acceptance, to accept what Fate has in store for him, not to fight it in the manner of Ahab," p. 390.

Canady, p. 52.


The anti-Christian school, of course, is led by Thompson. He asserts that the two important attitudes in the book are Ishmael's and Ahab's, and that these attitudes are anti-Christian, p. 239. Thus when Ishmael survives he survives to "coffin-meditate on the paradox of God's simultaneous malice and indifference," p. 239.


Sedgwick, p. 125: "Against the strong attraction he feels for Ahab, Ishmael manages to keep his spiritual balance." Sedgwick's comments indicate the prevalent critical attitude about Ishmael's control over the forces that fight to command him. Ishmael only manages to keep his spiritual balance, in the opinion of Sedgwick, he does not fashion a strong spiritual identity.

Arvin, p. 189.

Arvin, p. 189.

Howard Vincent, in The Trying-Out of Moby-Dick, has done more than anyone else to explain the tone and function of the cetology chapters. It is Vincent's opinion that Ishmael's "transformation of the fish-god into a whale-god [is] to be expected from the humorous mind which has already defined a whale as a 'fish with a horizontal tail,'" p. 280. Clearly Vincent understands Ishmael's mythmaking as primarily humorous. But Vincent does not even discuss the quote that appears from the chapter entitled, "The Tail." There is no mistaking the seriousness of tone here and in other places cited as evidence of Ishmael's sincerely deistic view of the world.


Mansfield and Vincent, p. 831.

Rosenfeld, p. 325.

Rosenfeld, pp. 319-320.

Buber, p. 197.

47. Henry Golemba, "The Shape of Moby-Dick," *Studies in the Novel*, 5 (Summer, 1973): "The ship is relatively small, and little occurs that evades the crew's knowledge, for example their awareness of Fedallah's presence. Finally, Ahab is never completely alone. In his 'monologue' in 37, Melville is careful to station him near the window; in 44, he rushes from his room," p. 210.
CHAPTER III

THE ASPIRING PROPHET: PIERRE

Ishmael as narrator exercises great care in relating the events and in presenting the characters in Moby-Dick. Of course Ishmael's caution and thoroughness as a narrator are directly related to his skeptical character; he is a person who is not easily won over to any one certain way of thinking, or acting. Thus he examines all alternatives. As we have already seen, Ishmael's characteristic detachment, and his discursive questioning and speculation contribute to his survival and characterize his narration as prophetic in Moby-Dick. After Moby-Dick, the prophet-like figures never achieve the comprehensive view of experience that Ishmael relates as his prophecy in Moby-Dick. In Pierre, written almost immediately after Moby-Dick, Melville creates Pierre, a prophet-like figure who lacks totally any of the skepticism and intellectual expansiveness that are the saving qualities of Ishmael, and of Ishmael's prophecy.

Pierre, in F. O. Matthiessen's words, is a tragedy "the opposite of Ahab's."\(^1\) Pierre is a "young idealist, who, with some distrust of his intellect but none of his heart, followed unswervingly his generous impulses."\(^2\) The opposition between Ahab and Pierre is thus an opposition between the mind and the emotion, between the head and the heart. Ahab's tragedy lies in his intellectual obsession with Moby-Dick as principle or agent of evil. Pierre's tragedy lies in his emotional obsession with Isabel as the principle source of truth, albeit "glad
Truth, or sad Truth." In his zealous pursuit of Isabel, truth, and
the right course of action, Pierre claims divine sanction for his action;
he claims to be a prophet acting on divine command. Pierre's claims for prophet-like stature, and the actions that he
performs in the name of a prophet, are the two key areas of study in
this chapter. However, to understand Pierre as a prophet-like figure
one must view his actions in the context of the ambiguity that pervades
the novel, and, in particular, Pierre's obsession with Isabel as a
source of revelation. For it is the ambiguity in experience that pre-
cipitates Pierre's reckless and disastrous actions in New York City.
Pierre is basically unequipped to deal with the ambiguity in Isabel and
ultimately in himself. The foundation for Pierre's unambiguous view of
the world and himself lies at Saddle Meadows. It is here that Pierre
perceives his world to be a paradise blessed by God. Here also Pierre
lays claim to his prophet's role, a role he fervently believes that he
can uphold in his monistic world.

The first few chapters of Pierre, which deal with Pierre's home
and life at Saddle Meadows, have long been recognized as Melville's
satirical comment on idyllic rural life. However, Pierre's view of
Saddle Meadows is not satirical; for him the Meadows are a paradise.
Pierre thinks that he can communicate directly and honestly with nature
at the Meadows: "She [nature] blew her wind-clarion from the blue hills,
and Pierre neighed out lyrical thoughts....She whispered through deep
groves at eve, and gentle whispers of humanness, and sweet whispers of
love, ran through Pierre's thought-veins" (p. 14). At Saddle Meadows,
there is an easy and direct communication between Pierre and nature;
nature is an unambiguous and sympathetic friend to Pierre. It is not
difficult to imagine how such easy and open access to the vast mysteries of the natural world would lead anyone, especially Pierre, to act with absolute assurance.

Furthermore, the uncomplicated benevolent Saddle Meadows provide the backdrop for Pierre's impossibly idealistic love for Lucy Tartan. This relationship opens the secrets of love for Pierre and Lucy, or so the narrator claims: "Looking into each other's eyes, lovers see the ultimate secret of the worlds; and with thrills eternally untranslatable, feel that Love is god of all....Love is both Creator's and Savior's gospel to mankind" (p. 38). This passage reveals the epistemological value of love for Pierre; lovers who look into each other's eyes will "see the ultimate secret of the worlds" (p. 38). Love, like the natural world at Saddle Meadows, is an open secret that reveals whatever is unknown to the inquirer. Love thus reveals truth to Pierre, although at Saddle Meadows Pierre knows not what kind of truth he will discover in love. He is sure that love's truth, whatever it may be, will be divine in origin. As he tells Lucy, "The audacious immortality of divinest love are in me;....A god decrees to thee unchangeable felicity; and to me, the unchallenged possession of thee and them, for my inalienable fief" (pp. 41-42). For Pierre love is both divine in origin and absolute in the truth that it brings to the lovers about themselves.

It is clear that Pierre's intellectual development at Saddle Meadows is limited to his understanding that the natural world is a kind and benevolent place, receptive and responsive to his every inquiry. His emotional development is equally limited to his understanding of love as a pure, divine emotion revelatory of the deepest, most wonderful
secrets that man can know.

This naive conception of love is not viable in the real world of experience. Moreover, Pierre clings to the simplicity of his thought, and the purity of his emotion in his initial encounters with Isabel. Her face represents to Pierre the first ambiguous appearance in his adult life: "Encircled by bandelets of light, it [Isabel's face] had still beamed upon him; vaguely historic and prophetic; backward, hinting of some irrevocable sin; forward, pointing to some inevitable ill. One of those faces, which now and then appear to man, and without one word of speech, still reveal glimpses of some fearful gospel. In natural guise, but lit by supernatural light" (p. 49). This last sentence in the description of Isabel's face is crucial to the understanding of Pierre's response to her. Although he fears that Isabel's face is "prophetic" or portentous of doom for any admirer, he also believes that she is in part motivated by the supernatural, the godly. This insistence on a divine source behind Isabel's mysteriousness is the inevitable result of Pierre's unambiguous view of the world formulated from his privileged position at Saddle Meadows.

By proclaiming that the dark mystery of Isabel is made clear in supernatural light, Pierre hopes to remove all doubt about her earthly mystery, and to posit a supernatural motivation for what might very easily be a natural, ungodly, seduction. Claiming to see the hand of God even in the most mysterious Isabel, Pierre assumes a prophet's relation toward her; he acts out what he believes to be God's will. The spiritual testing that he undergoes when he receives Isabel's secret letter proclaiming that she is in fact Pierre's illegitimate sister validates the divine sanction that he feels directing his encounters with her. Pierre
holds this letter in his hand and senses "two antagonistic agencies" (p. 73) struggling within himself. One force, what Pierre in his spiritually heightened state calls his "bad angel," (p. 73) "bade him finish the selfish destruction of the note; for in some dark way the reading of it would irretrievably entangle his fate" (p. 73). Conversely, the "good angel" (p. 73) bade him to "Read, and feel that best blessedness which, with the sense of all duties discharged, holds happiness indifferent" (p. 73). Pierre, attuned to doing what he understands is the divinely ordained thing, reads the letter, the letter that occasions his ultimate tragedy with the ambiguous Isabel. At this juncture in the novel, Pierre believes that Isabel is sent to him by angelic and divine directive. He opens the letter and "every vein in him pulsed to some heavenly swell" (p. 73).

The picture of Pierre, wrestling between two angels, and finally choosing to obey the commands of the good, true messenger of God, provides a basic insight into Pierre's prophetic role. After the presentation of Isabel's face, and the acceptance of her letter as a divinely inspired missive, Pierre openly refers to himself as a prophet aware that God has singled him out among all men to champion Isabel. In the fact of alienation from his mother and indifference from Falsgrave, Pierre declares his prophetic nature: "I once cherished some slight hope that thou Falsgrave wouldst have been able, in thy Christian character, to sincerely and honestly counsel me. But a hint from heaven assures me now, that thou hast no earnest and world disdaining counsel for me. I must seek it direct from God Himself who, I now know, never delegates His holiest admonishings" (p. 193).

There are several other instances, in Pierre's initial encounters
with Isabel, that must be cited in order to fully document Pierre's characterization as a prophet acting on God's behalf toward Isabel.

The narrator calls attention to Pierre's prophet-like motivations:

"Pierre was one of those spirits, which not in a determinate and sordid scrutiny of small pros and cons—but in an impulsive subservience to the god-like dictation of events themselves, find at length the surest solution of perplexities, and the brightest prerogative of command" (p. 103). Again, a little later in the novel, the narrator comments on Pierre's commitment to Isabel and Delly: "Divinely dedicated as he felt himself to be; with divine commands upon him to befriend and champion Isabel" (p. 125). And finally when Pierre confronts Isabel, his profession of brotherhood and his dedication to her are openly stated as prophecy: "In one breath, Memory and Prophecy, and Intuition tell him—'Pierre, have no reserves; no minutest possible doubt;—this being is thy sister; thou gazest on thy father's flesh" (p. 131).

There are of course many other reasons why Pierre wants to accept Isabel and her story. Henry Murray details the psychological and sexual motivations behind Pierre's rash acceptance of the dark lady of Saddle Meadows. Murray's explanations provide a very human understanding of Pierre's actions toward Isabel. But Pierre is anxious to impute divine justification to all his motives in order to cover up any natural suspicions that he might have about his own actions toward her.

When Pierre reads Isabel's note claiming to be his sister, "his whole form [is] in a tremble" (p. 75). Furthermore, Pierre is shocked because of the truth that such a letter reveals about his father:

"The letter!—Isabel—sister—brother, me, me—my sacred father!—This is some accursed dream!" (p. 76). And yet Pierre does not allow himself to
remain on this initial psychological level of shock and denial. The hand of God is discerned even in this most unbelievably shocking revelation about his father. Pierre vows to accept this new truth concerning his father and he vows to accept this truth as a heavenly one: "This letter is not a forgery. Oh! Isabel, thou art my sister;...Ah! forgive me, ye heavens, for my ignorant ravings, and accept this my vow.-Here I swear myself Isabel's....Oh! thou poor ignorant girl.... which heaven hath placed in my hands....I see thee long weeping, and God demands me for thy comforter" (pp. 76-77).

Thus Isabel not only destroys the "perfect marble form of his [Pierre's] departed father" (p. 79), but she also replaces this monument with what seems to be, for Pierre at least, a divinely commanded existence. Once again Pierre rushes to cover very natural feelings here, shock and outrage with a divinely ordered view of events, such a view as he might have perceived in his narrow world of Saddle Meadows.

Even Pierre's sexual feelings for Isabel take on the character of divine command. Pierre acknowledges that he is persuaded by Isabel that she is his sister because she is truly a "womanly beauty" (p. 127). Still this beauty only confirms Pierre's exalted notion of the divine truth of her suit. The loveliness of her human form bespeaks her closeness to God: "We lie in nature very close to God" (p. 127).

Furthermore, Pierre's physical contact with Isabel conveys much more to him than human affection. Because she cannot receive his embraces with natural affection of an acknowledged sister, Pierre imparts a spiritually significant meaning to her" "Isabel wholly soared out of the realms of mortalness, and for him became transfigured in the highest heaven of uncorrupted Love" (p. 167).
Thus Pierre's particular psychological and sexual responses to Isabel seem to transcend the realm of human experience and become divine directives. The pattern of Pierre's psychological and sexual responses to Isabel complements Pierre's view of himself as a prophet acting as God's agent on Isabel's behalf.

For all Pierre's attempts to invest the mysterious Isabel with supernatural importance, in effect, for all Pierre's claims to be a prophet acting on God's command in Isabel's behalf, Pierre cannot absolutely maintain his belief in Isabel as a supernatural agent. The very natural suspicions that he initially had about her claims of sisterhood recur after he has made his prophetic profession of faith. He realizes that there will always be an element in Isabel that he cannot classify as clearly supernatural: "In her life there was an unraveled plot; and he felt that unraveled it would eternally remain to him. No slightest hope or dream had he, that what was dark and mournful in her would ever be cleared up" (p. 165).

Still Pierre succeeds, at least momentarily, in overwhelming his doubts about ever totally and completely knowing Isabel and her true history with his faith that her mystery is part of the "unravelable inscrutableness of God" (p. 166). Pierre determines that Isabel's mystery is ultimately a "sacred problem" (p. 166); he further characterizes the effect that her mystery has on him as part of a "Pantheistic masterspell, which eternally locks in mystery and muteness the universal subject world" (p. 178). Pierre views Isabel as a heaven-sent agent in his life, who can make even the natural world seem godly through the wonderfully divine effect that she creates on her surroundings. It is not difficult to see the relationship between Pierre's initial pantheism
at Saddle Meadows and this "Pantheistic masterspell" (p. 178) that he feels Isabel casts on him and on nature.

Pierre's relationship with Isabel begins at Saddle Meadows. As long as Pierre stays with Isabel at the Meadows, he is inclined to view her and her natural mysteriousness as primarily a divinely dictated mystery. Once, however, Pierre leaves the Meadows and enters the real world of experience in New York City, Isabel's mystery and Pierre's belief in that mystery as a prophetic revelation both lose their supernatural character.

When Pierre abandons the Meadows, moral order abandons him. He and his two charges are cast into the hellish, immoral world of the corrupt city. The scene that greets the travelers at the police station is indicative of this immoral world: "Both men and women, gave downright battle to the officers;...The thieves'-quarters, and all the brothels, Lock-and-Sin hospitals for incurables, and infirmaries and infernoes of hell seemed to have made one combined sortie, and poured out upon earth through the vile vomitory of some unmentionable cellar" (pp. 282-83). The city is not in tune with natural order but rather with chaos. Furthermore, the personal morality or code of behavior that does prevail in this world is a kind of moral relativism outlined in the Plinlimmon pamphlet: "The highest abstract heavenly righteousness is not only impossible, but would be entirely out of place, and positively wrong in a world like this" (p. 250). The pamphlet tolerates selfish action because such action is human (pp. 250-51). Thus the moral forces and the personal code that operate in the city are the opposite of Pierre's view of a world of moral order.

Most significantly, the immoral forces in the city, so opposite to
the moral benevolence of the countryside, act as a barrier to Pierre's clear understanding of God's will and word. The sharpest contrast between Pierre's ability to hear and know God's clear dictate regarding Isabel at Saddle Meadows and his inability to hear God's voice once he leaves the Meadows is indicated in the following excerpts. At the Meadows, "The deep voice of the being of Isabel called to him from out the immense distances of sky and air, and there seemed no veto of the earth that could forbid her heavenly claim" (p. 203). After Pierre and Isabel leave the Meadows, however, "Silence is the only voice of our God (p. 239)....But Pierre—where could he find the Church, the monument, the Bible, which unequivocally said to him—'Go on: thou are in the Right; I endorse thee all over; go on'" (p. 240).

Quite simply Pierre has lost his way in the immoral world of the city. This moral dislocation leads to a serious questioning of his prophetic vocation. The place to which Pierre retreats and examines the authenticity of his prophetic commitment to Isabel as God's agent is called, most significantly, the Church of the Apostles. It is here that Pierre tries to reaffirm the direct and assured contact with the divinity that he sincerely believed was his at Saddle Meadows. It is here, unfortunately, that Pierre discovers the impossibility of ever possessing such assured, prophetic truth again.

The Church of the Apostles is most literally the saving retreat for Pierre, Isabel, and Delly. Unequipped to deal with the moral chaos in the city, the trio find refuge in this misshapen tower. Symbolically the Church of the Apostles, with its "worm eaten pulpit" (p. 312) is a fallen temple of God. Furthermore, the church is inhabited by a group of philosophers and starving aesthetes rumored to "have some mysterious
ulterior object, vaguely connected with the absolute overturning of Church and State, and the hasty and premature advance of some unknown great political and religious Millennium" (p. 315). Pierre's retreat to this church in order to reaffirm his prophetic calling is thus doomed from the start. God no longer inhabits this temple. Its inhabitants are all, to some extent, religious anarchists, unbelievers in the kind of simple faith that Pierre held at Saddle Meadows.

Pierre's plan of course is to reside at the Church of the Apostles while he revises and sells some of his adolescent poetry, poetry written at Saddle Meadows and filled with simple romantic and religious sentiments. Significantly, his juvenalia appears to be without value when seen in the real, ungodly atmosphere of the fallen temple that is the Church of the Apostles. As Pierre says to Isabel, "Isabel, in that chest are things [his juvenile writings] which in the hour of composition, I thought the very heavens looked in from the windows in astonishment at their beauty and power. Then, afterward, when days cooled me down, and again I took them up and scanned them, some underlying suspicions intruded;... All this time, there was the latent suspicion of folly; but I would not admit it" (p. 320).

This loss of faith in his early work, work that was extolled by one of Pierre's critics as "blameless in morals, and harmless throughout" (p. 289) is indicative of Pierre's loss of contact with what he believed to be the divine elements in his experience at Saddle Meadows. He can no longer believe in the sentimental poetry that he wrote because his world is no longer a sentimental place. He has, as he says, a suspicion that he was a fool at Saddle Meadows to believe and write such things as he did. Moreover, and most importantly, with this old faith gone, Pierre
vows to replace it with an even more ardent, more mature view of experience: "Isabel, I will write such things—I will gospelize the world anew, and show them deeper secrets than the Apocalypse!—I will write it, I will write it!" (p. 321).

Pierre's vow to gospelize the world anew is made rashly in the hope that such ardent rededication to his writing will overwhelm his feelings of foolishness and betrayal. Pierre had earlier made a similar rash dedication to Isabel as God's agent when he first felt the failing of his divinely sanctioned faith (p. 76-77). Thus while Pierre's dedication to gospelize the world anew is just as intense as his earlier prophetic claims to act as God's prophet, his perception of God's will and divine action is now markedly cloudy. He can no longer feel or believe that his self-righteous defense of Isabel is virtuous. She questions him: "Pierre? Tell me first what is Virtue; begin!" (p. 321). And Pierre replies, "If on that point the gods are dumb, shall a pigmy speak?" (p. 321).

Pierre has lost his direct contact with God, his faith in Isabel as God's agent, and finally his faith in himself as God's prophet. The question that pursues him is how did this happen? His residence in an apparently godless temple in an openly immoral city is an action that does not seem to be completely Pierre's fault. He acted on what he thought were divine commands. Thus some evidence points to the possibility that God himself has deceived Pierre into thinking that his concern for Isabel was a sacred duty. As the narrator asserts, "There is still another hour which follows, when he [Pierre] learns that in his infinite comparative minuteness and abjectness, the gods do likewise despise him. And own him not of their clan... Even the paternal gods themselves did
now desert Pierre" (p. 348-49).

Pierre reflects the despair that he feels in the face of God's possible deception. Vivia, a character in Pierre's new "gospel" states, "Oh God, that man should spoil and rust on the stalk, and be wilted and threshed ere the harvest hath come! And of God, that men that call themselves men should still insist on a laugh! I hate the world, and could trample all lungs of mankind as grapes, and heel them out of their breath, to think of the woe and the cant—to think of the Truth and the Lie!" (p. 357). Vivia's curse on the world, which is to say Pierre's curse on the world, is yet another rashly conceived statement which seizes upon the possibility of God's deception and amplifies such a notion into an absolute truth.\textsuperscript{10}

The most rational explanation for Pierre's loss of faith and contact with God in the city is not that God is deceptive in nature, but that Pierre is consistently rash and irrational in his response to the possibility of truth. In Braswell's words, Pierre engages in "reckless self-indulgence"\textsuperscript{11} when he seizes as truth the rational possibility that Isabel is God's agent, and that God is a deceptive trickster. Pierre never truly, \textit{i.e.} coolly and analytically, faces the possibility that Isabel may not be his real sister sent to him by God. When such a doubt occurs, Pierre leaps to cover such skepticism with prophetic testament to her divine mission. Similarly, when the real possibility that God has deceived him strikes faltering Pierre in New York city, there is no cool analysis of this doubt about divine benevolence. Instead rash Pierre lets blasphemous words fly from his new gospel.

To be a true prophet, as Fletcher attests, one must preserve his eternal verities, "his moral, political and religious principles,\textsuperscript{12}
while he lives in the world of men, and the tangle of human experience. Fletcher adds, the "method of prophecy is to hold the eternal and the ephemeral in simultaneous copresence, balancing principle against unstable reality." Pierre's prophetic method is just the opposite; he balances unstable reality against principle. Because he feels that Isabel might really be his sister, Pierre believes that she is sent to him by God. Because Pierre experiences failure in his efforts to champion Isabel, he blames God for malevolently treating man.

Pierre's prophetic character, then, is ultimately the result of his own rush to believe that his actions are divinely sanctioned. He can be said to no more truly have heard the word of God at Saddle Meadows, than to have truly seen "with prophetic discomfiture" (p. 407) the face of Enceladus superimposed on his own head. Both events happen in a dream; Isabel appears to him in the dreamlike, idyllic world of Saddle Meadows, and Enceladus appears in a nightmarish vision. In each dream, Pierre does not see reality. When the real world does confront him, he is unable to deal with it.

Finally, Melville seems to be saying that Pierre's fate will be the fate of every man who clings too closely to apparent truth as an absolute, divine command: "For there is no faith, and no stoicism, and no philosophy, that a mortal man can possibly evoke, which will stand the final test of a real impassioned onset of Life" (p. 340). Unlike Ishmael, who has no faith, no stoicism, and no philosophy that he calls his own absolutely, Pierre has very idealized notions about God and the way that God wants him to act in the world. One measure of the difference between Pierre and Ishmael as characters and prophets can be seen most dramatically in the outcome of each novel. Where Ishmael
survives to tell of his experience in his own expansive and thorough way, Pierre kills himself and murders his only living relative as a consequence of his prophetic experience.

At the outset of this chapter, it was stated that Pierre lacked the skepticism and intellectual expansiveness that were both so vital and necessary to Ishmael's success as a prophet. Clearly the analysis of Pierre's character, demonstrating his emotional obsession with Isabel as a divinely appointed source of truth, indicates the basic reason why Pierre lacks the intellectual stature that Ishmael has. Pierre's intuition of the heavenly hand of God in human affairs is absolute and unchecked. And even though Pierre buttresses his Saddle Meadows intuitions with prophetic assurances, he cannot sustain belief in his assertions as divine edicts. Pierre, although he tries with all his heart, cannot grasp God in the natural world with the same kind of conviction that Ishmael has when he sees supernatural significance in the godly whale. Pierre's failure as a prophet bespeaks the failure of one who proclaims an absolute perception of the divine in nature. For any person such notions are precarious; for a Melvillean character, however, such absolute perception is fatal.
NOTES:


2 Matthiessen, p. 467.


4 Nathalia Wright, *Melville's Use of the Bible* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1949): "But his [Pierre's] fate, and Billy Budd's is by no means unique. It is like that of the prophets...men infused with the spirit but persecuted by the world," p. 108. Among the critics, Wright alone comes closest to viewing Pierre's actions as those of a prophet.


7 Murray, pp. 49-57.

8 Angus Fletcher, *The Prophetic Moment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971). Archetypally the consecrated temple or church is a sacred place "within which all is ordered and theoretically indestructible," p. 15. Obviously the Church of the Apostles is quite different from the sacred temple.


10 Interestingly, Murray notes that some of Vivia's (Pierre's) words here, "and could trample all lungs of mankind as grapes," are an echo of, "I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with me: for I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury" (Isaiah, 63,3), p. 495. Melville's adaptation of Isaiah's prophecy is a further indication of how Pierre has fallen as a prophet; Isaiah's words are used in rant, not in revelation.

12 Fletcher, p. 5.

13 Fletcher, p. 5
CHAPTER IV

THE DECEIVING PROPHET: THE CONFIDENCE-MAN

In <i>Pierre</i>, Melville explores the implications of a man who aspires to an absolute standard of action and who claims divine sanction for such actions. Pierre fails in his actions as a prophet to bring into fruition what he mistakenly believes is divine will. Melville's view of prophets who claim to know God's word absolutely, and who claim to know how to effect God's will absolutely in this world is unquestionably revealed through Pierre's actions. Men who aspire to prophetic stature will only topple themselves in self-doubt and self-destruction. The prophetic figure thus evolves from a sometimes reliable one, in <i>Mardi</i> and <i>Moby-Dick</i>, to a totally unreliable one in <i>Pierre</i>. The <i>Confidence-Man</i> furthers this development, or deterioration, of the prophetic figure in Melville's writing. For in <i>The Confidence-Man</i>, the prophetic figure is not only unreliable, but also consciously dishonest and ungodly in his dealings with men. Prophets in this grimly picaresque novel devote their efforts not to revealing God's word but to undermining man's faith in God. The prophetic figures in <i>The Confidence-Man</i> are brazenly false and ironic; their deception seriously reduces the credibility of the prophet's role. Melville discloses that man cannot trust in the prophetic role as a viable way of knowing divine will.

<i>The Confidence-Man</i> is a book about an imposter, a Confidence Man who plies his trade in various disguises aboard a Mississippi steamboat. Early in the novel, clothed in the garb of a Negro beggar, the
Confidence Man foretells the many costumes that he will subsequently don to effect his chicanery: "Dar is aboard here a werry nice, good ge'mann wid a weed, and a ge'mman in a gray coat and white tie, what knows all about me; and a ge'mann wid a big book, too, and a yarb-doctor; and a ge'mann in a yaller west; and a ge'mman wid a brass plate; and a ge'mman in a wiolet robe' and a ge'mman as a sodjer."\(^1\) These many disguises provide the Confidence Man with the cover needed to gain the confidence and money of the passengers. The imposture of the Confidence Man also disguises his true identity and mission which seem to be diabolical in nature. In Elizabeth Foster's words, "The Confidence Man himself is Melville's most ironic and bitter presentment of his half mystical apprehension of evil at the heart of things. The evil is thrust close here; the devil goes to and fro in the earth and walks up and down in it."\(^2\)

Disguised as a devil, the Confidence Man speaks and acts in ways that assume an allegorical and metaphysical significance far beyond simple deception.\(^3\) The Confidence Man becomes a supernatural deceiver, an enemy of the Lord who uses God's word, specifically scripture, in a false and ironical way to deceive man and to lead him away from God. Clothed in his various disguises, the Confidence Man is a false, ever changing deceiver who dupes men out of earthly gain. Mouthing the words of scripture in his deceptions, the Confidence Man is a formidable threat to man's spiritual relationship with God. The Confidence Man's abuse of scripture breaks the divine link between God and man that exists in the truthful interpretation of scripture and in prophetic speech. As Fletcher writes, "The prophet who speaks for the Deity also tries to make his vision available to the ordinary believer by translating the
word of the Lord into the vernacular....The lively oracles of God exercise that skill which is the basis of Reformation faith, the independent power of reading and interpreting a text.⁴⁴

Necessarily this chapter will focus on the Confidence Man's particular use and abuse of scripture. For it is on those occasions when the Confidence Man invokes scripture to gain man's confidence that the Confidence Man speaks as a false and deceiving prophet, a perverter of God's word. John Ringman and Frank Goodman are two particular characterizations or manifestations of the many faced, multitalented Confidence Man, who particularly abuse the Bible to accomplish their selfish aims.

Before these two characters appear in the novel, two other characters, who also have a significant relationship to scripture, board the Fidèle. The deaf mute and Black Guinea open the novel with a startling contrast of personalities and truths. The deaf mute, who literally brings St. Paul's epistle on charity to the passengers, is hooted and jeered from the deck. The mute may be a characterization of the Confidence Man.⁵ What is more important than the mute's identity is the fact that he fails to win the passengers over to the truth espoused in St. Paul's epistle on charity. Such a failure symbolizes the failure of the divine love in this world. Thus early in the novel Melville indicates that man ignores God's word. As the discharged Custom House official proclaims, "To where it belongs with your charity! to heaven with it!... here on earth, true charity dotes, and false charity plots" (p. 14).

Black Guinea is the first characterization of the Confidence Man to appear after the deaf mute's banishment. The Negro, "cut down to
the stature of a Newfoundland dog" (p. 9), is a disguised devil loose among the Christian travelers. Furthermore, this crippled figure is an adaptation of still another part of St. Paul's epistle. Thomas Quirk argues convincingly that Black Guinea and the figures that he claims will vouch for him are adapted from St. Paul's epistle:7 "And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues" (1 Cor. 12:28). The figures in St. Paul's epistle are God's appointed delegates to the Church. Black Guinea and his friends are of course ironic inversions of these helpful delegates. To see Black Guinea as a prophet, as Quirk claims,8 one must realize that the Negro is a false prophet, a devil loose in the world and a devil who manipulates scripture for his own perverse reasons. The figures that Black Guinea claims will appear to vouch for his sincerity do indeed appear. But they are not God's delegates; they are deceivers prophesied by a false prophet. These figures, notably Ringman and Goodman, also pervert and falsify the word of God revealed in scripture.

The goal of Black Guinea, and of all the characterizations of the Confidence Man that follow Guinea's appearance, is to make men believe in the Confidence Man and not in God. As Guinea states, "No confidence in dis poor old darkie, den?" (p. 16). John Ringman and Frank Goodman of all the subsequent characters in the book most pervasively and persuasively misuse the Bible and the prophet's exegetical talent for interpreting scripture to achieve their confidence schemes. Aboard the Fidele, a microcosm of a world in danger of losing contact with divine truth, the Confidence Man roams the decks a devil who can quote
the Bible to his own deceitful purpose.

John Ringman is the first person that Black Guinea claims will vouch for the Negro's honesty. Ringman is mentioned first in the Negro's list as the man "wid the weed," (p. 13), and when Ringman subsequently appears he wears a "long weed on his hat" (p. 19). Predicted to appear by a false prophet, Ringman is himself subtly deceiving in his own misuse of the prophet Jeremiah's words.9

The allusion to Jeremiah's prophecy comes in the context of Ringman's appeal to Mr. Roberts, a merchant that Ringman approaches for money. When Roberts admits that he doesn't remember meeting Ringman before his encounter with him on the Fidele, Ringman declares, "You see, sir, the mind is ductile, very much so: but images, ductilely received into it, need a certain time to harden and bake in their impressions, otherwise such a casualty as I speak of will in an instant obliterate them, as though they had never been. We are clay, sir, potter's clay, as the good book says, feeble, and too-yielding clay" (p. 21). The potter's clay mentioned in the "good book" is discussed at length by Jeremiah, "Then I went down to the potter's house, and, behold, he wrought a work on the wheels. And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter; so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it. Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the Lord. Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel" Jer. 18. 3-6.

Jeremiah uses the analogy of clay in the potter's hand to symbolize the power that God has over his creation. God can mold and shape people
to do his will as easily as the potter can shape clay. Ringman's adaptation of Jeremiah's words contains an irony that is lacking in the prophet's analogy. Ringman accepts the mind's ductility while he affirms nothing about God's power to shape the mind. Instead the whole thrust of Ringman's discussion with Roberts is to persuade Roberts that man must rely on man to discover truth. Clearly, Ringman is trying to make Roberts rely on the man with the weed for the truth about Ringman's trustworthiness. When one remembers that Ringman is the first incarnation of Black Guinea's many so called friends, one realizes the ominous, as well as ironical, tone in Ringman's words. If Ringman has the power to correct the impressions in Roberts' mind, then he has the power that God has. But Ringman is clearly not God, nor is he a true prophet of God. Instead he is a man who can manipulate the meaning of scripture and the words of a prophet for his own deceitful ends. Ringman misrepresents Jeremiah's words for the purpose of gaining Roberts' trust.

Ringman's adaptation of the Bible is not limited to his encounter with Roberts. In his next contact with man, the sophomore who reads Tacitus, Ringman exhorts the young man, "Drop Tacitus. His subtlety is falsity. To him, in his double-refined anatomy of human nature is well applied the Scripture saying-'There is a subtle man, and the same is deceived.'" (p. 28). As Foster notes, Ringman's reference to scripture is a pastiche of various verses strung together to fit his confidence-gaining purpose. Strengthened it seems by his triumph over Roberts, winning both Roberts' money and confidence, Ringman is bold enough to rearrange sacred scripture to reveal what he wants men to accept. The man with the weed has effectively removed God from the Bible and substituted himself as author.
The success that Ringman has using scripture to support and validate his pleas for money is a preview of the success that the Confidence Man has in the first half of the novel. Not on every occasion does the Confidence Man use scripture to win peoples' confidence and money. The devil is too clever to use the same ruse every time. Yet on certain occasions the Confidence Man adopts Ringman's tactic of manipulating scripture to his own self-serving end. Manifesting himself first as the man "in the gray coat and white tie" (p. 31), soliciting for the "Widow and Orphan Asylum recently founded among the Seminoles" (p. 31), and then as the herb doctor in a snuff-colored surtout, the Confidence Man in the first half of the novel appeals to the passengers' charity by making scripture appear supportive of his appeal. When one remembers that all of the characterizations of the Confidence Man are the fulfillment of Black Guinea's list of men, one realizes that these two particular manifestations of the Confidence Man are also diabolical figures who interpret the Bible for false purposes.

The man in gray, the agent from the Widow and Orphan Asylum, receives twenty dollars from a woman for his charity. Encouraging her to donate money, he quotes St. Paul, "I rejoice that I have confidence in you in all things" (p. 50). While he tells her that her generosity will be set down in "another register" (p. 50), namely God's register, it is unlikely that the man in gray will use her money to do God's work.

The man in the snuff-colored surtout also invokes scripture to persuade the old miser to buy some of his bogus Omni-Balsamic Reinvigorator. When the man in the surtout declares, "Yes, when through weakness everything bids despair, then is the time to get strength by
confidence" (p. 89), he is echoing the words of Isaiah, "In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength" Isaiah. 30:15. Significantly the man in the surtout's words here are a paraphrase rather than a direct quote from the Bible. As the Confidence Man proceeds from passenger to passenger, he assimilates the citations from scripture into his own speech. This process of assimilation, making the sacred word into his own word, is a sure indication that the Confidence Man is using the Bible to serve his own purpose, and not God's purpose.

In the second half of the novel, the Confidence Man as the cosmopolitan, Frank Goodman, dominates the action in the book and continues the manipulation and misapplication of scripture that Ringman initiates in the first half of the novel. To remind the reader that this final manifestation of the Confidence Man is very much the devil that Black Guinea is, Melville gives Frank Goodman the appetite of the devil: "Served up a la Pole, or a la Moor, a la Ladrone, or a la Yankee, that good dish, man, still delights me" (p. 151). As John Shroeder notes, "We need not go to the Fathers of the Church for this reference. Modern writers from Poe to C. S. Lewis have noted the Devil's fondness for the human soul as a dish." 12

Goodman is the best disguised devil in Black Guinea's list. He seems to be at some points in his characterization a true supernatural agent of God. Goodman enters the barber's shop saying, "Bless you, barber" (p. 254), in a voice that sounds like a "sort of spiritual manifestation" (p. 254). Indeed his manner has convinced some critics that Frank Goodman is a sincere speaker of divine truth. 13 Goodman's supernatural appearance, however, is only a guise; his demonic nature appears in his physical resemblance to the Satanic serpent (p. 213), and in his
The scriptural text that is the focal point in the cosmopolitan's encounters with William Cream, the barber, and the Simeon-like figure of the old man is the apocryphal Book of Wisdom in the Old Testament. Cream cites a passage in the Book of Wisdom, "An enemy speaketh sweetly with his lips;... I believed not his many words" (p. 267), as his guiding truth. Cream hopes that the truthfulness of this passage will help him withstand Goodman's fast talking attempt to avoid paying for his shave. The cosmopolitan undercuts the accuracy and even the authority for Cream's biblical passage: "I never happen to have met with those passage you cite" (p. 268). At this point in their conversation neither Goodman nor Cream indicates that he knows that the Book of Wisdom is apocryphal. They both assume that this apocryphal Book of Wisdom, one of the fourteen noncanonical books of the Old Testament, is authentic, sacred scripture. Goodman, in his denial of this book's existence, reveals an apparent unfamiliarity with the Bible. There may be some reason to believe, however, that Goodman may indeed know the apocrypha and deliberately not want Cream or any other man to know its contents, especially the Book of Wisdom.

The Book of Wisdom, as one commentator writes, discusses, "The true nature of wisdom....Wisdom is conceived of in a very wide sense and includes such diverse activities and skills as aptitude in craftsmanship, business capacity, cleverness, cunning, caution in word and act." Clearly Goodman would not want the barber to predicate his trust in man on the lessons of practical experience. The practical truth of the apocryphal Book of Wisdom is surely apparent to this incarnation of the devil, Frank Goodman; his bold denial of the Wisdom
book's existence is indicative of the pervasive talent that the Confidence Man has in manipulating the practical as well as the supernatural merit of biblical text.

Goodman is not finished with the Book of Wisdom when he concludes his conversation with Cream. He vows to discover whether the Book of Wisdom is part of the "True Book" (p. 268). Since he probably already knows that the Wisdom book is part of the Bible, his vow can be seen as a prelude to his final abuse of sacred text.

Having undercut the practical application of the Wisdom book, Goodman directs himself to refuting the very authority that the Book of Wisdom has as part of sacred scripture. It is extremely noteworthy that of all the controversy that surrounds the sacred authenticity of the apocrypha, much commentary focuses on the authenticity of Ecclesiasticus, or the Book of Wisdom. One commentator claims that, "It seems unlikely that either he [Ben Sira, the author of the Wisdom book] or his readers can have thought of ranking his proverbs as holy scripture." Another commentator counters, "It may even be that Ben Sira considered his book to be the equal of inspired Scripture." Deliverately ignoring this controversy, Goodman deceitfully argues away the book's merits as a source of wisdom. Goodman's argument is the last such attack on scripture; his remarks constitute a serious threat to man's prophetic relationship to God.

When Goodman enters the passenger cabin aboard the Fidele, he meets an old gentleman reading the Bible. To this gentleman Goodman reveals his doubt that such words as he finds in the Book of Wisdom, "With much communication he will tempt thee, he will smile upon thee, and speak thee fair" (p. 274), can possibly be divinely inspired.
The old man unknowingly plays right into Goodman's hand when he tells the cosmopolitan that the section of the Bible that holds the Book of Wisdom is apocrypha, or not truly God's word. Goodman seizes upon the formal appearance of the Book of Wisdom in the noncanonical section of the Bible as evidence that this scriptural work cannot possibly be the word of God. Goodman's argument is intended to undercut the authenticity of the Book of Wisdom; by discounting the book's authenticity and merit, Goodman establishes himself, in the eyes of the old man, as a reliable authority in scriptural matters. The cosmopolitan's satisfaction at dismissing the Wisdom book's merits is not small: "I cannot tell you now thankful I am for your reminding me about the apocrypha here. For the moment, its being such escaped me. Fact is, when all is bound up together, it's sometimes confusing. The uncanonical part should be bound distinct. And, now that I think of it, how well did those learned doctors who rejected for us this whole book of Sirach. I never read anything so calculated to destroy man's confidence" (p. 275-76). Thus the old man's confidence in scripture is reduced, and his confidence in the false prophet Goodman is bolstered.

The cosmopolitan's note of thanks for the dismissal of the Wisdom book's sacred authenticity brings into focus once again the whole point of his scriptural citations. As a disguised devil, the Confidence Man wants man to trust him, the devil, and not God and God's word, scripture, as the standard for human knowledge and behavior. In his earlier characterizations, as Ringman, the man with the weed, the man in gray, and the man in the surtouit, the Confidence Man was content to use scriptural texts either quoting them directly or misquoting them in part to mislead men to do the devil's bidding. With Frank Goodman and his extended discussion of the Book of Wisdom, Melville creates a devil who can not
only quote scripture, but also refute the very applicability and authenticity of sacred text. When the devil can overturn man's trust in the Bible altogether, there is little hope for man to find God in this world.

In the chapter entitled "In the Polite Spirit of the Tusculan Disputations," the Confidence Man declares to Pitch, "And with submission, sir, what is the greatest judge, bishop or prophet, but a talking man? He talks, talks....The best wisdom in this world, and the last spoken by its teacher, did it not literally and truly come in the form of table-talk?" (p. 142). The "table talk" wisdom alluded to here is of course the truth of Christ's love imparted to the apostles at the last supper.17 And the talk about this truth is, in a broad sense, what the judges and prophets in the Old Testament foretold and interpreted for man. The Confidence Man, however, can never talk to man in sincerity and honesty about the truth of Christ, or about Christian confidence, or charity, because he is an arch deceiver who spins a web of words to catch man. Like the prophets, bishops, and judges, the Confidence Man talks and talks, but unlike them he reveals nothing of God's will and word.

The figure of the prophet in The Confidence-Man is the figure of a dishonest man. Lawrance Thompson calls the Confidence Man the "swindler as God's agent."18 The profundity of the swindle is most fully seen when one acknowledges the Confidence Man as a false prophet, a conscious perverter of God's will and word as revealed in scripture. Melville's view of the prophet as an ironical figure is unmistakable; the prophet is a figure not to be trusted at all. The traditional role of the prophet as a revealer and commentator on divine will is no longer
possible. The implication seems to be that man lives in a world where he cannot see God through any of the traditional avenues. With caution and often with disappointment, man must rely on his own limited self to understand God in this world.

Living with such an awareness of man's self-reliance, Melville waited years before he published again. Clarel certainly reflects the loss of the prophet as a traditional agent in revealing God. But Clarel also finds some tentative hope for the man who relies on himself.
NOTES:

1Herman Melville, The Confidence-Man, ed. Elizabeth Foster, (New York: Hendricks House, 1954), p. 13. All subsequent references, until otherwise noted, are to this text.

2Foster, p. 15.


5Watson G. Branch, "The Mute as 'Metaphysical Scamp,'" in The Confidence-Man, ed. Hershel Parker (New York: Norton, 1971): "Certainly the character who has his advent in so grand a manner on the first page of a book entitled The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade should be the Confidence Man himself," p. 318. Foster states, "Melville clearly differentiates between him [the deaf mute] and the Confidence Man: he [the deaf mute] is innocent of fraud; he is unequivocal; he is not on the Negro's list of Confidence Men," p. 52.

Foster again comments," In 'Benito Cereno,' Melville had described another Negro in much the same terms as this one: Don Benito's servant turns up his face 'like a shepherd's dog' to his master; our crippled Negro is 'cut down to the stature of a Newfoundland dog!...It seems that Melville carried over from 'Benito Cereno' the dog-like black man as a symbol for the black, deceitful, universal malice masquerading as fidelity and love," p. 52.

8Quirk, p. 473.

9Foster claims that the reference to the Bible here is from Isaiah, "But now, O Lord, thou art our father; we are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand" 64:8, p. 302. The reference to Jeremiah seems to fit the full implications of Ringman's remarks. Also Black Guinea is earlier referred to as "Jeremy Diddler," p. 16.

10Foster, p. 303.

11Foster notes this allusion to Isaiah, p. 319.


13Merlin Bowen, "Tactics of Indirection in Melville's The Confidence-Man," Studies in the Novel, 1 (Winter, 1969), noting the barber's comments on Frank Goodman as "quite an original," p. 269, Bowen's observation is apt: "Not Hamlet, nor Don Quixote nor Milton's Satan is original in this sense, but the confidence man as God is," p. 410.


16Metzger, p. 86.

17Foster, p. 326.

CHAPTER V

THE LIMITATIONS OF PROPHECY: CLAREL

Some scholars who have seriously studied Melville's long poem Clarel, believe that it is a culmination of Melville's most mature thoughts and feelings about man's spiritual quest to know God in this world. Aside from the internal evidence in the poem, which confirms this critical observation, the circumstances attending the source and composition of Clarel support the contention that it is a mature, important achievement in the Melville canon. Melville's journey to the Holy Land in 1856 provided him with the factual material for his poem. The most interesting fact about the trip to the Holy Land is that twenty years elapsed between it and the publication of the poem. These intervening twenty years, 1856-1876, were spent by Melville in relative obscurity, working at his daily job as a customs inspector. Thus more thought, perhaps more real contemplation, went into the composition of Clarel than any other book in Melville's long career. That the poem contains many of Melville's ideas about the most problematical issues in his life (such as God, faith, religious truth) is understandable because of the long gestation period that the poem had during Melville's most mature years.

Because the poem occupied such a large portion of Melville's intellectual life, Clarel is quite complex, and the numerous characters in the poem express a multitude of ideas during the course of an extended pilgrimage. Therefore, some summary of the poem must first be given
before one discusses the importance of the prophetic figure which is pervasive throughout the poem.

Clarel is a theology student newly arrived in Jerusalem on the "Vigil of Epiphany." He travels about the city visiting the places so important in Christian history. In Jerusalem he meets and falls in love with a Jewish girl named Ruth, who now lives in the Holy Land with her emigrated American family. While the love that Clarel bears for Ruth seems sincere, it is by no means all-consuming because he leaves her to undertake a pilgrimage to the Dead Sea and back, passing through several landmarks, such as Mar Saba and Bethlehem. By the time that Clarel returns from his pilgrimage it is Easter. But unfortunately there is no resurrection of faith in him to parallel the faith in Christ celebrated on this holy day. Even his love for Ruth is unfulfilled because she has died in his absence.

Jerusalem, from which Clarel begins his pilgrimage, is a city that once was the center in man's religious experience; but now Jerusalem is a "distracted city, in which the traffic of modern commercialism and the attacks of skepticism are swamping the authority of the faith which had sustained it." Clarel leaves this modern city to journey through the deserts of Palestine in hopes of rediscovering his lost faith. Clarel is not similar to the many Christians who come to the Holy Land like children on holiday,

These children of the climes devout,
On festival in fane installed,
Happily ignorant, make glee
Like orphans in the play-ground walled.

(I, iii, 136-39)
For Clarel is cursed with the modern spirit of skepticism; his western culture asks, "And can the Father be?" (I, iii, 135). In his wanderings to the Dead Sea and back to Jerusalem by way of Mar Saba (an ancient Christian monastery) and Bethlehem, Clarel hopes to dispel the skepticism that pervades his modern age. Clarel's fellow pilgrims, especially Celio, Mortmain, Margoth, and Ungar, all lead Clarel to consider that faith can no longer be possible in the modern age. His journey with these modern skeptics through the barren places of the once holy Holy Land is a disaster as a religious pilgrimage, because Clarel does not discover a sign or a symbol in the Holy Land that gives him strength to believe that Christianity is still alive.

The pilgrimage is the most important structural element in the poem, for it provides Clarel with the opportunity to search among the once spiritually vital Holy Land for his lost faith. Furthermore, the various travelers that Clarel meets and befriends provide him with alternatives to his spiritual malaise. Among these pilgrims, Melville places his prophetic figures, ready to offer Clarel a full range of responses to God.

In Clarel, as one might expect in a work that is the most mature expression of an author's most comprehensive views, prophetic figures reiterate the dangers of claiming absolute perception of God's will and knowledge, such danger as is revealed by Pierre, Ringman, and Goodman. And the prophetic figures in Clarel also reiterate the values of a cautious, balanced, and comprehensive understanding of complex, divine mystery and will in the universe, such understanding as is revealed by Ishmael in his narration of the events aboard the Pequod. All of the manifestations of prophets found in Melville's earlier work
appear in his poem, *Clarel*.

Melville creates a full range of responses in his prophetic figures in *Clarel*. These responses encompass hope, caution, and doubt. In the final analysis, however, Clarel remains independent of the prophetic figures' influence. Unlike Pierre, Clarel does not deceive himself into becoming a false prophet, nor does Clarel find a way of forming a qualified acceptance of prophetic knowledge as Ishmael does. Instead, Clarel and Melville take a final stand against the ultimate reliability of the prophetic way of knowing God in this world. In short, *Clarel* espouses the end of prophetic knowledge. The figures in the poem are finally incapable of providing man with any absolute understanding of God.

The poem opens with Clarel, a disillusioned theology student, in despair; he has come to Jerusalem looking for a key or clue to his lost faith.

Other cheer
Than that anticipated here.
By me the learner, now I find.
Theology, art thou so blind?
What means this naturalistic knell
In lieu of Siloh's oracle
Which here should murmur?

(I, i, 19-25)

Clarel's reference to Siloh, a place once hallowed because Jesus miraculously healed a blind man there, indicates his spiritual barrenness. The Holy Land has no supernatural edification for him, only a "naturalistic knell." It is Clarel's futile search, through his
pilgrimage to the Dead Sea and back to Jerusalem, to find some living faith in the Holy Land that provides the theme and structure of the poem. Clarel longs to find some sign or some person on his pilgrimage to help restore his lost faith. Unfortunately his pilgrimage is in vain.

Clarel's journey puts him in contact with places that were once holy and spiritually fertile, but now are barren. Moreover, Clarel comes in contact with many different types of people on his journey. The people that Clarel meets are very important to him, for in these people Clarel seeks one who, "Would question me, expound and prove,/ And make my heart to burn with love-" (I, vii, 51-52). Unfortunately no one person can expound and prove to Clarel's satisfaction what is necessary for the restoration of faith in a God that has disappeared from his life. The figures that Clarel does meet, however, do offer him alternatives to his despairing state. It will be helpful at this point to briefly note who the key figures are on Clarel's journey, for it is among these figures that Melville places the prophetic charcters who offer their own particular message from a God that Clarel cannot hear.

There are some thirty-two important characters in the poem. Of these thirty-two, ten may be considered major characters who directly influence Clarel and his search for a restoring faith in God. The two most significant people that Clarel encounters during his journey befriend him in Jerusalem. These two men are Rolfe and Vine. Vine is a powerful, yet mysterious, man of genius. Clarel is attracted by Vine's courageous isolation and mystic aura, even though he never is able to pierce Vine's inner self, his "heart a fountain sealed" (II, xvii, 22). Rolfe comes closest to being Clarel's spiritual mentor in the poem. Rolfe's defense of human and religious values ultimately persuades Clarel
to admit the truth of Rolfe's view, "Let fools count on faith's closing
knell-/ Time, God, are inexhaustible-" (I, xxxi, 270-71). But the aware­
ness that faith will always be available to man is not an assurance that
man will always have faith. Thus, even though Rolfe does offer Clarel
the most attractive alternative to a life without faith, Clarel does not
find a final salvation through faith. He remains to the end a man
frustrated in the search for certain belief.

In addition to the alternatives offered by Rolfe and Vine, Clarel
is exposed to several other characters typifying various beliefs. There
are four characters in the poem—Celio; Mortmain; Agath; and Ungar—who
constitute a "monomaniac sequence;" these four are openly bent on abso­
lutely pursuing one truth in life. Celio and Mortmain seek positive
proof that God exists, and they die frustrated in this pursuit. Agath
and Ungar are absolutists in their belief that faith is impossible in
the modern world. None of these four is a prophet. Still the extremity
of their unbelief and suffering deeply affects Clarel in his search for
faith. While Clarel is exposed to their absolutist views, he success­
fully avoids their influence.

Clarel also encounters two overtly religious figures in Nehemiah,
an evangelical millenarian who preaches the imminence of Christ's Second
Coming, and Nehemiah's designedly opposite religious counterpart,
Derwent, who advocates an unexciting rationalistic, and melioristic
approach to all matters of religious belief. In addition to these two
religious opposites, Clarel encounters Margoth, a nineteenth-century man
of science, who questions the necessity of any faith in a world increas­
ingly explainable in scientific and technological terms.

Clarel and these nine characters serve to reveal the central issue
in the poem, which is Clarel's search for faith in this world. It is in these characters that one sees the various postures of faith-seeking man; the postures range from the apocalyptical Nehemiah to the despairing Mortmain. Clarel is seen in relation to these characters and to the stances that they assume. Thus he judges their views and the prophetic quality of their claims to have a certain knowledge of God. In this poem, therefore, the prophetic figures are a series of minor figures; they serve the hero, Clarel, only as a vehicle through which Clarel can have faith. Once again, one should state that Clarel's final position with regard to having a certain faith in God, at least in this world, is not a strong one. The various alternatives offered by the prophetic characters in the poem are not viable for Clarel. In short, he cannot find a faith, or a claimant for such faith, a prophet, to believe. It is essentially this thesis that bears examination in this poem, in order to determine Melville's attitude towards prophetic knowledge.

Almost, it would seem, in answer to the question that Clarel poses in Jerusalem, namely that he meet someone who "Would question me, expound and prove,/ And make my heart to burn with love-" (I, vii, 51-52), Nehemiah appears carrying his Bible. It is significant that Nehemiah is the first important figure in Clarel's quest, because Nehemiah is so overtly prophetic. The old man uses the Bible to predict Christ's Second Coming.

Passages, presages he [Nehemiah] knew:
Zion restore, convert the Jew,
Reseat him here, the waste bedew;
Then Christ returneth: so it ran.

(I, viii, 26-29)
For Nehemiah, the Bible provides a direct access to the divine will; scripture is a message to be decoded and translated by people like himself. Faith for Nehemiah is a matter of believing that he can correctly interpret the verbal signs. The dangerous consequence of the individual's own response to scripture, already dramatized in The Confidence-Man, is not repeated in Nehemiah's "primal faith" (I, ix, 43). Clarel both doubts and marvels at Nehemiah, because he has such simple faith in the Bible's power to reveal God. Thus although Nehemiah can offer Clarel no prophet's tersimony to the revealed will of God, Clarel is "Won by his [Nehemiah's] mystic saintly way" (I, ix, 42), enough so that Clarel allows the old man to be his guide and friend. At the outset of the poem, therefore, while Clarel does not subscribe to this prophetic knowledge, he is attracted by the honesty of its chief claimant.

Nehemiah becomes Clarel's guide through Jerusalem. But it is clear that Nehemiah can reveal nothing spiritually meaningful to Clarel. Nehemiah's prophecy that Christ will come again is seen by Clarel as "A dream, and like a dream it blurred/ The sense- faded, and was forgot" (I, x, 97-98). Clarel simply cannot believe in the truths that Nehemiah extracts from the Bible. The intense skepticism of Celio, a humpedback Italian youth whom Nehemiah and Clarel encounter, strikes a much more responsive chord in Clarel's psyche. Celio avers,

This world clean fails me: still I yearn.
Me then it surely does concern
Some other world to find. But where?
In creed? I do not find it there.

(I, xii, 97-100)
He and Clarel recognize in each other, without speaking, a similar spiritual desolation. However, the frustration of not being able to find in Jerusalem any place vital enough to inspire his belief in a living God produces drastic effects. Like Pierre, Celio is a man bent on perceiving God in human experience. Unlike Pierre, however, Celio cannot even temporarily convince himself that God has directly touched his life. In an impassioned lament, Celio reveals his frustration, "Nature and the [God] in vain we search" (I, xiii, 72).

Celio longs for the kind of direct contact with God that Nehemiah appears so facilely to have in scripture. Celio's longing for some perception of God is an aspiration to absolute knowledge that is denied. Such frustrated aspirations result in Celio's demise and death. For Celio in frustration withdraws into the inner recesses of Jerusalem and dies in despair of faith.

In a journal that Celio leaves behind, Clarel discovers "A second self" (I, xix, 27), and a self brave enough to ask the important questions about life's existence without God. Clarel also recognizes the danger in asking such questions for the man who cannot accept uncertainty about God's existence. Thus Celio provides Clarel with some evidence as to the fate of the seeker for absolute certainty in this world. Celio is the example of what happens to the absolutist who cannot accept a hidden God. Celio's fate haunts Clarel; but Clarel does not try to follow him in his intensely absolutist pursuit of God.

Placed between a millenarian in whom he cannot find belief and a skeptic in whom he sees the effects of unbelief, Clarel seems trapped without alternative. Soon after Celio's death, though, Clarel encounters the two major figures in his journey who will provide him with the most
viable possibilities for the faith seeking man. Vine is first seen in
the sepulcher of kings; a mysterious figure, Vine makes an initial
impression as one who "would keep separate" (I, xxviii, 51) his inmost
feelings from Clarel. Yet Clarel feels attracted to Vine precisely
because of the mysterious aura that surrounds the man and seems to
suggest something deep and essential about Vine's humanity. Clarel
feels that there must be some powerful, inner strength which Vine has
because of some certain faith. In the sepulcher, Vine and Clarel,
In Vine Clarel finds someone who conveys some spiritual quality. Unlike
Celio whose inability to find a sign of God in this world led to his
destruction, Vine, "A spirit seemed he not unblest" (I, xxx, 97), appears
to derive some faith that transfigures the facts of spiritual barrenness
in the Holy Land.

The nature of this faith is unknown to Clarel; however the narrator
reveals that Vine's mysterious aura comes more from his manner than from
an inner faith in God.

Under cheer
Of opulent softness, reigned austere
Control of self. Flesh, but scarce pride,
Was curbed: desire was mortified;
But less indeed by moral sway
Than doubt if happiness through clay
Be reachable.

(I, xxix, 32-38)

Vine is a recluse, not because he seeks a private relationship with God,
but because he shuns the corrupting influence of men.
His virgin soul communed with men
But through the wicket.

(I, xxix, 45-46)

Still Clarel does not perceive all this in his first contact with the mysterious Vine. For Clarel, Vine presents a hope that a life of faith is possible even though it demands a great deal of self-sacrifice and isolation. Such a self-contained life is very attractive to Clarel especially after the truncated alternatives offered by Nehemiah and Celio.

Vine and the life of the mystic and recluse present one possible alternative for the seeker Clarel. Rolfe, who comes closest to being Clarel's spiritual mentor is introduced to Clarel very soon after Vine encounters Clarel. Rolfe is a completely different type of man from Vine. Scholarly, yet "a messmate of the elements" (I, xxxi, 21), Rolfe is a commanding person, frank and "indiscreet in honesty" (I, xxxi, 25). Whereas Vine's attractiveness to Clarel comes in his mystic and mysterious aloofness, Rolfe appeals to Clarel for just the opposite reasons; Rolfe is eminently approachable and understandable. Indeed it is Rolfe's belief that man must remain open to understanding himself, his past, and an ever possible divine intervention in future human experience. As Rolfe attests,

Yea, long as children feel affright
In darkness, men shall fear a God;...

Though 'twere made
Demonstrable that God is not-
What then? it would not change this lot:
The ghost would haunt, nor could be laid.

(I, xxxi, 192-200)
Rolfe is an advocate for belief in God, although such belief is sometimes uncertain.

Rolfe proclaims his belief in the need for faith in God, even when one is burdened with doubt. In a scene that clearly draws attention to Rolfe's proclamation as prophetic utterance, Rolfe sits on some stones, "Whereon the Saviour sate/ And prophesied" (I, xxxiii, 7-8). Placing Rolfe where Jesus sat, Melville obviously draws attention to Rolfe's importance. And what Rolfe says when he sits on these stones is significant too. For Rolfe quotes the Bible here; his recitation,

Might frankness claim,
With reverence for site and name;
No further went they, nor could fill
Faith's measure-

(I, xxxiii, 28-31)

Rolfe refuses to interpret scripture; he simply witnesses these words and places their import before Clarel to accept or reject. There is no mystery here in the manner of Rolfe's revelation. And the import of the biblical passage is left to Clarel. Here Rolfe bears witness to the importance of scripture as an organ for the seeker of faith. Throughout the poem, Rolfe calls attention, as a prophet should, to the many signs, i.e. the Catholic Church, priests, and scripture, that God has given man to aid his faith. But Rolfe pronounces none of these signs as absolutely revelatory of God's will to the seeker of faith.

Rolfe's role as a mentor and prophet is clearly similar to Ishmael's narrative function in Moby-Dick. Both Rolfe and Ishmael suggest that God suffuses human experience. Also, both Rolfe and Ishmael refrain from advocating any one way of interpreting God's will in human affairs.
Of course, Ishmael's participation in the events aboard the Pequod gives him the occasion to witness those events in his own narratively prophetic manner. In Clarel, although Rolfe is the witness to a view of experience that proclaims the necessity of believing in God, Clarel is not a willing participant in this view of experience. A sure indication of the loss of the prophet's place of power in Melville's later work lies in the fact that in Clarel the prophetic Rolfe cannot give a willing Clarel a true witness to the nature of God's will in human affairs.

Clarel wants to believe but cannot find anything or anybody to believe in. It is in this uncomfortable and frustrating state of mind that he sets forth from Jerusalem with Rolfe, Vine, and Nehemiah on a pilgrimage. Clarel hopes to find some sign in the wilderness that will help to restore his faith. What Clarel encounters instead, as revealed in Book II, is the barren wilderness near the Dead Sea that does not respond to his plea for faith. Another member of this pilgrimage, Mortmain, seeks an absolute answer in the wilderness about God's nature and will in human affairs. Mortmain's faith will be restored only through such knowledge; his monomaniac search leaves a very deep impression on the faith seeking Clarel. In Mortmain, Clarel receives further confirmation of the frustration and despair that awaits anyone who aspires to know God's will absolutely.

Mortmain, the second figure in the monomaniac sequence of characters, is the bastard son of a noble Swedish lady. Spurned by his parents, he is a man obsessed with understanding the nature of good and evil, and God's relation to the two. His life has been an unyielding search for what is good in the world. As the narrator states,
That uncreated Good
He sought, whose absence is the cause
Of creeds and Atheists, mobs and laws.

(II, iv, 49-51)

The "uncreated Good" is God from whom Mortmain seeks an answer to the questions posed by his own harsh life, and by the evil in the world. Mortmain wants God to answer him personally. Paradoxically, before Mortmain will believe in God, he wants absolute assurance that God exists.

Mortmain does not of course receive an answer to his questions, because like Ahab and Pierre, Mortmain also calls the deity to account for the evil in the world. He cannot force an answer from a silent God. In an effort to test God's benevolence, Mortmain leaves the pilgrim train to wander in the wilds near the Dead Sea. He dares God to come to his aid if he needs it (II, xv, 70-80). Mortmain is later reunited with the pilgrims at the Dead Sea, and his brash challenge before God goes unanswered.7

However, in the solitary wilderness, Mortmain has formed some opinions of his own, without divine guidance, about the nature of evil. Thus when he returns to the caravan, he is filled with an evangelical fervor; Mortmain acts as if God had really spoken to him in the desert. He exclaims, "Repent! repent in every land/ Or hell's hot kingdom is at hand!" (II, xxxiv, 30-31).

Mortmain's speculations on the nature of evil make him feel that evil is a "Doom well imposed, though sharp and dread,/ In some god's reign, some god long fled" (II, xxxvi, 46-47). And man has refined this doom into the many manifestations of social injustice and harsh
living that Mortmain has experienced. Chiefly, Mortmain sees women as the root cause of the propagation of evil in the world.

O soft man-eater, furry-fine:

Oh, be thou Jael, be thou Leah-

Unfathomably shallow!—No!...

Thee, Thee, [women]

In thee the filmy cell is spun—

The mold thou art of what men be:

Events are all in thee begun—

(II, xxxvi, 93-95, 99-102)

It is psychologically plausible that Mortmain would conclude that the chief agent of evil in the universe is a woman, especially because his own mother hated him. It is not credible, however, that Mortmain received this message about the origin of evil from God, although Mortmain acts as if he were speaking with prophetic fervor. In effect Mortmain fools himself into believing and holding onto this absolutist yet uninspired view of evil. From this point on in Book II, until his death at Mar Saba in Book III, Mortmain is essentially useless to Clarel. The monomaniac vituperation that pervades Mortmain's outlook on human experience is too absolutist for Clarel. The fate of a man such as Mortmain, who seeks the source of uncreated good and the origin of evil, does not lead him to God but to alienation and death. Clarel is once again exposed to an absolute seeker of God's word and successfully rejects.

The rejection of Mortmain does not raise Clarel's spirits. Mortmain, like the other absolute seekers of divine knowledge in the poem, is destined to fail. Clarel sees through Mortmain's failure the
improbability of having certain, divine knowledge. Furthermore, in Book II, Clarel encounters another position available to the faith seeking man. In the conversations between Rolfe and Derwent, Clarel gains a perspective on the possibility of believing in something that cannot be claimed certain.

Derwent is a foil for the absolutist Mortmain. An Anglican priest, Derwent's view of faith in God is facilely optimistic. He responds directly to Mortmain's criticism of the now commercialized landmarks in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Me thinks, good friend, too much you chide.
I know these precincts. Still, believe,-
And let's discard each idle trope-
Rightly considered, they can give
A hope to man, a cheerful hope.

(II, iii, 129-33)

Derwent is too ready to believe that God exists and that man can easily believe in God.

Rolfe, however, is most keenly aware of the difficulty that modern man has in believing in God. Rolfe points to the cause for faithlessness in history; God is no longer a force. Rolfe's argument is expressed most fully in the wilderness of the Dead Sea in Book II. Here he asks, "Whither hast fled, thou deity/ So genial?" (II, xx, 65-66). Man has lost his belief in God because he has perverted and abused his fellow man.

Oh, men
Made earth inhuman; yes, a den
Worse for Christ's coming, since his love
[Perverted] did but venom prove.
In part that's passed.

(II, xxi, 85-90)
What are left to modern man are the dubious dregs" (II, xxi, 91) of Christianity because man has cut himself off from God.

While the "dregs" of Christianity are all that remain for man, there is still some source of faith in these dregs. After the pilgrims' encounter with a Dominican priest (II, xxv), Rolfe comments on the residual value of the Catholic Church as a source for modern man's faith. The Church's endurance into the modern age is seen by Rolfe as a vestige of divine power, a lasting manifestation of the deity. The Church's old rituals and traditions have some vital power.

What mean her [the Catholic Church's] re-adopted modes
Even in the enemy abodes?
Their place old emblem reassume.

(II, xxvi, 167-169)
Rolfe is not an advocate for conversion to the Catholic Church as the answer for the faith seeking man. But the Church does represent for Rolfe a sign that God once lived and that man still has a basis for believing in God.8

It is Rolfe who offers Clarel a viable alternative for the faith seeking man. Still Clarel cannot assent to Rolfe's personal belief that if man wants to believe in God he must allow God to use whatever means (supernatural and natural) He sees fit to communicate Himself to man. Thus Clarel's response to Rolfe in Book II is unsympathetic. Clarel still seeks some surer sign than Rolfe can offer.

Moreover, the options for the faith seeking man are becoming severely limited as Clarel wanders through the wilderness to Mar Saba. Mortmain's
obsession with absolute certitude excludes him from Clarel's allegiance. And Book II closes with the death of Nehemiah, the millenarian who was Clarel's guide in Jerusalem. Nehemiah dreams a vision of the "New Jerusalem" (II, xxxviii, 42) to which God calls him. Nehemiah dreams that he hears God say,

Pain is no more, no more is death;
I wipe away all tears: Come, ye,
Enter, it is eternity.

(II, xxxviii, 29-31)

Pursuing this vision and God's call, Nehemiah walks in his sleep into the Dead Sea and drowns. No more demonstrative example could have been offered as a commentary on the consequences of Nehemiah's prophecy. Those who zealously believe in God's personal intervention in a man's life (such as Nehemiah), and those who zealously believe that God will never intervene in a man's life (such as Celio and Mortmain) suffer the consequence of death as the price of their respective reliefs.

Prophecy is impossible in this world. Certainly prophecy cannot help the faith seeker. If Clarel is to escape from the wilderness, literally and spiritually, he must find a new guide.

A guide unfortunately is not immediately forthcoming. In Book III, Clarel takes refuge from the wilderness in the solitary Greek monastery, Mar Saba. Here the pilgrims ostensibly find a Christian haven from their wandering. However, the monastery only serves to polarize Clarel's awareness of growing doubt and diminishing faith. It is in this third section of the poem, as Kenny notes, that Clarel becomes aware of the "awful fact of nothingness."9 Ironically, Clarel reaches this spiritual nadir in the overtly religious and Christian surroundings of Mar Saba.
Just before the travelers arrive at the monastery, they engage in some pessimistic discussions about the existence of God (III, v, 40-60) and about the possibility of faith in God, "But in her Protestant repose/ Snores faith toward her mortal close?" (III, v, 73-74). Clarel remains out of these conversations, an observer who is loath to be involved on anyone's side. Even when the pilgrims arrive at Mar Saba and try to rally their falling spirits with revels, the specter of doubt raised in their earlier remarks still haunts Clarel.

With what sweep
Doubt plunges, and from maw to maw;
Traditions none the nations keep—
Old ties dissolve in one wide thaw;

(III, xiv, 103-06)

In this despondent state, in this hollow Christian refuge, Clarel has two key conversations, one with Derwent, and the other with Rolfe. These two dialogues reveal the limitations of these men to the faith seeking Clarel. His desire for some affirmation of faith is unfulfilled by both men. Derwent in fact evokes open hostility from Clarel. Urging that Clarel adopt his practical view of the Christian faith, ["Have Faith, which, even from the myth/ Draws something to be useful with:"] (III, xxi, 186-87), Derwent reveals to Clarel the superficial, spiritually barren nature of his faith. Derwent proclaims,

Less light
Than warmth needs earthly wight.

Christ built a hearth: the flame is dead
We'll say, extinct; but lingers yet,
Enlodged in stone, the hoarded heat.
Why not nurse that?

(III, xxi, 246-51)

Derwent in effect says that faith is a matter of what one wants to believe, rather than what God wants one to believe. Why not, in Derwent's words, want to believe; it's easier than struggling, "Betwixt rejection and belief" (III, xxi, 286)? Clarel's answer is swift and empassioned. "Doubt bleeds, nor Faith is free from pain!" (III, xxi, 309). Instead of a humane, warm feeling, "enlodged in stone," Clarel wants a faith that can come only from God, even if such faith is painful to hold. After this conversation, Clarel never has much confidence in Derwent's optimism. Somewhat like the Confidence Man, Derwent is not really interested in realities, in this case the true nature of faith, so much as he is interested in pleasing appearance.

Clarel's conversation with Rolfe does not finally decide his attitude toward Rolfe. Still, Clarel acknowledges that Rolfe too has a weakness. Essentially, Rolfe, in his analytical approach to Christianity, is unemotional about the rituals and rites of Christianity. Explaining the history and rite of Greek Easter, a rite that celebrates the "receiving from heaven of the Holy Fire" in an elaborate exercise that incorporates both zeal and hysteria, Rolfe observes that the Greek Christians maintain this Easter fire ritual because

'Tis ancient, 'tis entangled so
With vital things of needful sway;
Scarce dare they deviate that way.

(III, xvi, 136-38)

Rolfe acknowledges the need to maintain religious rituals from the past as a source of religious faith for the present, even though these rituals
may not be as inspiring today as they once were.

The prospect that a believer in God can have only vestigial forms to worship in order to verify one's faith in God upsets Clarel. He almost wishes that Rolfe were "a partisan" (III, xvii, 262) like Nehemiah, advocating wholeheartedly one empassioned though unconvincing faith in God. Clarel sees Rolfe's broad historical and analytical approach to faith and religion as a "hollow, many-sidedness!" (III, xvi, 266). Clarel does not yet recognize in Rolfe's overly tolerant view of historical Christianity a view that encompasses the realities of doubt and faith in human experience.

Clarel does not in short see Rolfe's honesty. The response to Rolfe at this point in the poem is an emotional one,

Clarel knew decline
Of all his spirits, as may one
Who hears some story of his line
Which shows him half his house undone.
Revulsion came.

(III, xvii, 252-56)

Unlike Pierre whose downfall was in part due to his moral revulsion at hearing unpleasantly "some story of his line," Clarel does not hurl himself into opposition with either Rolfe or Derwent. Mortmain provides Clarel with an example of what emotional rebellion means. Clarel knows, from the example of Mortmain, that emotional rebellion means death. Still the passion of the doubter is an attractive force for Clarel, especially when compared to the relatively unempassioned Rolfe. Thus Book III moves towards its conclusion and Clarel has not yet found a spiritual leader. Furthermore, Clarel's spiritual crisis deepens with
Mortmain's death.

During the revels that precede the pilgrims' stay at Mar Saba, Vine renders his impression of Mortmain and Rolfe seated together.

Methinks (mused Vine), 'tis Ahab's court
And yon the Tishbite [Mortmain]; he'll consort
Not long, but Kedron seek.

(III, xi, 230-32)

Vine's description is obviously significant because it characterizes Mortmain as a prophet, specifically, the prophet Elijah who attended King Ahab's court. Obviously too Melville is drawing some attention to the similarity between Mortmain and Elijah in Moby-Dick, an enigmatic prophet whose words are a puzzle to Ishmael. While the echo of Elijah, the enigmatic figure from Moby-Dick, helps to explain Mortmain's mysterious quality, the biblical allusion is more fruitful in explaining Mortmain's prophetic character because Elijah the Tishbite warned Ahab of violent things that would happen and then retired to the desert before God appeared to him again. Clearly, Mortmain's speeches do have prophetic warnings in them. Furthermore, there is a resignation that surrounds Mortmain in death, similar to the resignation that surrounded Elijah before his end.

At the end of Book III, Mortmain experiences a heightened spiritual moment before the Palm of St. Saba. The tree is fraught with religious significance for all the pilgrims. Reputed to have been planted by St. Saba himself, the tree is a traditional source of hope and faith. Indeed Derwent addresses the palm in hope,

   Thou benediction in the land,

   A new millennium may'st thou stand:
So fair, no fate would do thee harm.

(III, xxv, 68-70)

Mortmain is not quite so optimistic. Still he does want to believe that this fertile tree growing in the midst of a desert does symbolize God existing in the world of men. Mortmain addresses the tree,

Envoy, whose looks the pang assuage,
Disclose thy heavenly embassage!...
And sway'st thou over here toward me-
Toward me can such a symbol sway?

(III, xxviii, 57-65)

Mortmain's plea is not answered directly by the tree or by God of course. Instead, Mortmain falls into a dream in which "He felt as floated up in cheer/ Of saint borne heavenward from the bier" (III, xxviii, 71-72). This dream seems remarkably like Nehemiah's dream vision just before his death. Similarly, Mortmain's dream is his last. He awakens from this pleasant vision to remember all "The years outlived, with all their black;" (III, xviii, 83). Then he prays again to the tree to comfort him in his moment of death.

That Mortmain receives this comfort from God is not clear. When Clarel does find Mortmain dead, he is remarkably peaceful in repose, with an eagle's feather on his lips. The feather is certainly symbolic, but of what one can not definitely say. An eagle had earlier taken Mortmain's cap from his head (III, xxv). For Agath, this eagle represents the devil: "The devil's in these eagles-gier" (III, xxv, 143). That Mortmain dies with an eagle's feather on his lips may suggest a final victory by demonic forces. Also, the biblical echo of the eagle is unmistakable. Mortmain in all his suffering resembles Job.
Moreover, Job learns a lesson from the eagle too, when God says to him, "Doth the eagle mount at thy command, and make her nest on high?" (Job. 39:27). Job learns acceptance of divine will; he can no more understand God's way than he can control the eagle's movements. So it is with Mortmain. Perhaps the eagle's feather is a final submission to the inexplicable will of God. As Job is told, "And where the slain are, there is she [eagle]" (Job. 39:30). Perhaps Mortmain does learn this submission which the eagle's feather on his lips seems to suggest.

The final sequence of events in Mortmain's life serves as a grim reminder to Clarel that one cannot rage against divine mystery in this world without some dire consequence. Mortmain's death is cast as a noble one. Yet the curious dream vision and the accompanying waking reminders of horror that precede his death pose an ambiguous problem. Does he successfully receive the spiritual comfort that he prays for in death? Or does he end spiritually as he does physically, alone and outcast? Like Celio, Mortmain is not permitted a Christian burial; the monks cannot allow one who has blasphemed as Mortmain has to be buried within the monastery.

Thus Mortmain's death makes Clarel confront the fact of nothingness, that is, the possibility that there can be no faith, nor any advocate for faith in the world. This monomaniac's plight is ultimately a dismal one; certainly there is nothing to suggest, except for the ambiguity of the eagle feather, that Mortmain made a satisfying pact with God. In the third book, therefore, taking refuge in the only bastion of Christianity in the barren desert, Clarel verifies again the failure of an absolutist to reveal a vital contact between God and man. Furthermore, Derwent and Rolfe reveal their weaknesses as men of faith;
they cannot provide Clarel with a basis for even a simple belief in God.
The movement through the Holy Land has been a spiritual disaster for
Clarel. The journey to Bethlehem, which comprises the movement in
Book IV, begins in deep irony. Clarel sets out for the birthplace of
Christ without any hope that he may once again believe that God exists
or cares for man.

Mortmain's death in Book III leaves the travelers with no spokesman
to oppose the facilely optimistic Derwent. Agath, an old sailor who
joins the pilgrims in Book III, assumes something of the character of
the monomaniac after Rolfe's death. Although not consumed with despair,
as Celio and Mortmain were, Agath no longer has faith and does not
believe that the Holy Land will give him a new source of belief. For
when the pilgrims leave Mar Saba for Bethlehem and the return to Jeru­
usalem, Agath cries,

See ye, see?
'Way over where the gray hills be;
Yonder-no, there- that upland dim:
Wreck, ho' the wreck-Jerusalem!

(IV, i, 188-91)

But Agath has not always been completely without faith. As the
pilgrims discover, Agath has emblazoned on his arm a tattoo of the
crucifixion scene. He describes the tattoo's history and meaning for
him.

Sketched out it was on Christmas day
Off Java-Head. Little I thought
(A heedless lad, scarce through youth's straits-
How hopeful on the wreckful way)
What meant this thing which ye see,
The bleeding man upon the tree;
Since then I've felt it, and the fates.

(IV, ii, 73-80)

From Agath's remarks, it is clear that the tattoo no longer has significance for him in his present state as a pilgrim. As Rolfe remarks,

Nor the sign [the tattoo],
Losing the import and true key,
Descends to boatswains of the brine.

(IV, ii, 123-25)

Vine calls Agath a "man of nature true/ If simple" (IV, ii, 196-97), and says that his tattoo is something "Upblossoming from his ancient creed" (IV, ii, 200). Thus Agath wears a dead symbol on his arm. He is for the pilgrims a man of sorrows and misfortune whose life has not been marked, as his arm has, by any sign of Christ, or even benevolence.

Unlike Celio or Mortmain, however, Agath does not rail against God for his misfortune. The old man instead recounts his early life as a sailor. He compares his former life on a far island, a dismal place ["There clouds hang low, but yield no rain-" (IV, iii, 5)], to his life in "this stricken land" (IV, ii, 210), the Holy Land. The similarity in Agath's mind between the faraway island and these Christian lands emphasizes again the loss of faith in the modern world. Agath's presentation of this loss of faith is much less violent than either Celio's or Mortmain's. There is in Agath's character a strong sense of resignation to the way things have turned out in his life. After Agath finishes his recollections, he sits like a dumb animal, "Which better
may abide life's fate/ Than comprehend" (IV, iii, 107-08).

Agath's character is not lost on Clarel. The mood of resignation that permeates Agath's life of misfortune, a life apparently unexplained or unaided by God, prompts Clarel to ask,

What may man know?...

Since this, then, can baffle so-

Our natural harbor—it were strange

If that [world, heaven] alleged, which is afar,

Should not confound us when we range

In revery where its problems are.

(IV, iii, 109-20)

If Agath accepts without question his personal disasters in quiet resignation, how can Clarel do otherwise in his life? Clarel sees an example of noble endurance in Agath and recognizes the similarity in spirit between Agath's resignation to things the way they are, and Rolfe's honest attempt to accept the many-sidedness and multiplicity of life's actions and meanings. For as Clarel says,

Green and unsure,

And in attendance on a mind [Rolfe's]

Poised at self-center and mature,

Do I but lacquey it behind?

Yea, here in frame of thought and word

But wear the cast clothes of my lord?

(IV, iii, 125-30)

Clarel's wonder that Rolfe may be his "lord" is central to Clarel's understanding of what role prophets and prophecy play in his life. Early in Book I, the narrator refers to Rolfe as an incarnation of the Hindu
god, Vishnu; it will be remembered in this study that Ishmael also claims Moby-Dick to be an incarnation of Vishnu. Thus Rolfe is a naturally divine sort of man in the same way that the whale is a natural god. In Ishmael's case of course he gives a tentative witness to the whale's supernatural character in his prophetic narration. The obvious question is does Clarel also give such witness and affirmation to Rolfe? The answer is unfortunately, no. It is the narrator in the poem who claims Rolfe's divine affinity, not Clarel. Still Clarel is allowed to see the possibility that Rolfe might be a godly sort of man, worthy of faith and belief, but finally not a prophet, not a spokesman for God for the frustrated Clarel.

Nothing illustrates more clearly Rolfe's inability to speak to Clarel than the fact that immediately after Agath's comments Ungar dominates the action with monomaniacal railings similar to Celio's and Mortmain's. This recurring pattern of exposure to tortured men seeking some absolute answer from God or about God is unrelieved in Clarel's life. Ungar is of course slightly different from the others in his monomania; but the obsession with absolute truth and the consequent depression and despair which follow when no answer is forthcoming from God are clearly present.

Ungar, a half-blooded Indian who fought for the Confederacy in the American Civil War, is a very different sort of monomaniac from Celio and Mortmain. Ungar desires a certain faith in the modern age as one that can bring civilized man to his highest achievements. But Ungar's desires are unfulfilled; Christianity is not a saving force in the world. Ungar states,

Christ's pastoral parables divine,
Breathing the sweet breath of sweet kine,
As wholesome too; how many feel?

(IV, xviii, 126-28)

Nor is the institution of democracy a saving belief for man in society,
Ay, Democracy...
The Past she spurns, though tis the past
From which she gets her saving part-
That Good which lets her Evil last.

(IV, xix, 133-40)

In a faithless world, Ungar is the voice of modern man who has seen what society can offer and has found it unsatisfactory. Ungar's anguish is summed up in his curse upon the democratic America which spawned the Civil War, "Arch strumpet of an impious age" (IV, xix, 145).

Rolfe for his part tries to refute Ungar's despairing view of the modern world and its social and religious institutions. In response to the certainty with which Ungar predicts the collapse of modern man's social and religious institutions and beliefs, Rolfe gives a balanced reply,

Not much is certain.
God is-man.
The human nature, the divine-
Have both been proved by many a sign.

(IV, xx, 65-68)

Rolfe, like Ishmael, cautiously assents to the belief that God does act in human affairs. A man without a certain, particular religious affiliation, Rolfe maintains a belief that the supernatural permeates the natural world, even though modern man cannot certainly believe in such divine action.
Coming as it does on the hillside overlooking Bethlehem, the dialogue between Rolfe and Ungar is extremely important. If Rolfe can ever persuade Clarel that there is a basis for believing in God and God's concern for men in this world, he need give Clarel this basis at Christ's birthplace. Clarel listens to this dialogue; he does not willingly disbelieve like Ungar. For as Clarel avers,

If man in truth be what you [Ungar] say...
Sinner, sin out life's petty lease:
We are not worth the saving

(IV, xxii, 64-69)

However, Clarel cannot affirm Rolfe's prophetic witness that God does still operate through natural forms. The confusion of disbelief that Clarel momentarily transcended when he accepted Rolfe as his "lord" (IV, iii) appears again. As Clarel gazes at the star over Bethlehem, he ponders,

But ah,
Yet, yet there gleams one beckoning star-
So near the horizon judge I right
That 'tis of heaven?

(IV, xxii, 70-73)

There is no answer forthcoming for Clarel. He cannot find in this natural sign, a supernatural meaning. Rolfe as a spiritual mentor can show Clarel a way to believe in God in this world; Rolfe cannot teach Clarel how to believe.

Clarel's final return to Jerusalem and the discovery of Ruth's death is thus somewhat anticlimactic. Clarel never really tested his love for Ruth; thus his loss of her is not really as dramatic and
important as his permanent loss of a way to believe in God. However, Clarel's emotion over Ruth's death is sincere. Moreover, the picture of Clarel sitting for days in grief,

In film of sorrow without moan-
Abandoned, in the stony strait
Of mutineer thrust on wild shore,...
Alone, for all had left him so;

(IV, xxxii, 3-8)
is an accurate description of his intellectual as well as emotional state. The search for faith has left him paralyzed by doubt, unable to move into defiant rejection of God, or into blind acceptance of divine intervention in human experience.

Significantly the last time that one sees Clarel in the poem is in a scene, just before the Epilogue, in which Clarel "vanishes in the obscurer town" (IV, xxxiv, 56) of Jerusalem, apparently to remain a wanderer over the unholy Holy Land. Thus the sentiment of the Epilogue which expresses what some critics have felt is Melville's final comment on Clarel's faith seeking efforts cannot really be a final evaluation of Clarel's experience. When the narrator in the Epilogue exhorts,

Clarel, thy heart, the issues there but mind;...
Emerge thou mayst from the last whelming sea,
And prove that death but routs life to victory.

(IV, xxxv, 28-34)
he is expressing a hope that Clarel never indicates is a viable hope for himself.12
The Epilogue's narrator does express a belief and hope close to Rolfe's attitude in the poem. Rolfe, if not a prophet, is at least a man courageous enough to have faith in God. Rolfe's prophetic character does not convert Clarel from his skepticism. Still the narrator notes Rolfe's quality as a man who speaks with some reliability concerning God's will. Although the Epilogue is not totally convincing in its note of hope, the narrator's hope comes from a real faith, like Rolfe's faith, and perhaps from the faith that Clarel may find in the dusty center of Jerusalem.
NOTES:


2Herman Melville, Clarel, ed, Walter Bezanson (New York: Hendricks House, 1960), I, i, 10. All subsequent references are to this text unless otherwise noted.


4Mason, p. 229.

5William Shurr, The Mystery of Iniquity (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1972): "At the level of simple geography, for example, the poem is inconclusive. The journey is circular: from Jerusalem, through various sites; back to Jerusalem...At the narrative or plot level, there is no resolution, no final clarification," p. 49.

6Bezanson, p. 530.

7Bezanson notes about Mortmain, "He has a prophetic tone which relates him to Elijah (II, xxxiv, 20; III, xi, 231; III, xxxii, 15) and to John the Baptist (II, xxxiv, 39)," p. 542.

8Kenny makes some observations on Melville's feeling toward the Catholic Church: "The scorn for all churches that Melville poured into the short story "The Two Temples" changes in Clarel to awe for an

9 Kenny, p. 89.

10 Bezanson, p. 623.

11 Bezanson, p. 625.

12 Brodwin, The "hope expressed at the end of the poem is a weak counter to the entire poem's thrust—that man has lost all authentic relationship with God," p. 379. Fogle notes that at the end of the poem, "one cannot identify completely with his [Melville's] advice to his young hero Clarel," p. 114.
CHAPTER VI

THE LIMITATIONS OF PROPHECY IN A WARSHIP: BILLY BUDD

While Moby-Dick is Melville's greatest artistic achievement, Billy Budd stands as his fullest statement about the human condition. This novella, finished just before he died, is the capstone to Melville's life as a writer. The story of the innocent, handsome sailor who kills the malevolent Claggert and in turn is killed by the authoritarian Captain Vere is a moral drama. Still it presents more than abstract moral concepts of good and evil dramatized by men. Billy Budd portrays the inevitable limitation of men who live out their lives in a morally complex world. At the end of his life, Melville at last accepts the human limitation of partially knowing good and evil; he presents this limitation in a sympathetic, though tragic, picture of man.

The thematic concern in Billy Budd, as in all of Melville's major work, is the subject of good and evil and man's relation to these two forces in the universe. Billy Budd dramatizes most intensely the conflict that results from an extremely innocent man's confrontation with an equally extreme evil man. The conflict that results from such a confrontation is presented in the difficult choice that Captain Vere must make to execute the good man in order to preserve order. Melville presents the conflict between good and evil in Billy Budd through characters that are essentially human despite their allegorical implications.

In addition to the moral conflict, there is a religious dimension to the conflict between Claggart and Billy. Melville imputes to Billy a
god-like nature. Thus Billy's actions effect a response from the narrator, Vere, the Dansker, and the crew that is prophetic. The prophetic response is essentially a very tentative and unsure witness to Billy's divinity. Although Billy is a god-like character, no one can clearly proclaim his divinity, or comment on his divinity with a prophet's certainty. Once again, in Billy Budd as in Clarel, Melville demonstrates the limitation of the prophet in this world. And like Clarel, the Captain, the Dansker, the crew, and the narrator in Billy Budd must ultimately rely on their human understanding to know and judge in this world.

Billy Budd is Melville's final statement about the presence of spiritual reality in man's world. To the extent that divinity can be seen in Billy Budd, it is seen through the eyes of Vere, the Dansker, the crew of the Rights-of-Man and the Bellipotent, and the narrator. These people recognize and comment on Billy's goodness and divine nature. In short, Vere, the Dansker, the crew, and the narrator provide all the prophetic witness that is allowable to Billy in this world.

While the prophetic characters in Billy Budd may see something godly in Billy, none of these characters openly admits Billy's spiritual nature, Melville's final statement about prophetic figures is a statement that they are limited in their pronouncements about God and his workings in the affairs of men.

Returning to sea life as a subject for his last story, Melville grapples for a final time with man's apprehension of God in this world. In some ways, Billy partakes of spiritual reality; he readily resembles Christ. As Shurr notes, "Billy's first captain describes him in terms used to describe Christ in Mark 5:30-'a virtue went out of him.' To
reinforce the idea that he is working with biblical allusions, the

captain [of the Rights-of-Man] concludes by calling Billy 'my peace-

maker.'...Billy has a 'crucifixion' in Chapter 19; 'Billy's agony' the

night before he dies is mentioned in Chapter 24." Still it is hard for

the captain and crew of the Bellipotent to see such divinity in a war-

ship, just as it is hard to see divinity in society. Indeed, the

Bellipotent is a "smooth-functioning microcosm of society as a whole" and

intensifies the difficulties that man has in understanding how God

acts in his life. Thus Billy Budd serves as Melville's comment on the

chronic difficulty that man has in understanding the nature of divinity,

even when such nature is put in the midst of human society.

Difficult as it is for a prophet to see and understand divine will

and nature in the world, it is even more difficult for a prophet to

witness God on a warship. In the real world, in the South Sea world

of Moby-Dick for instance, supernatural nature can manifest itself in

Moby Dick. The world aboard the man-of-war Bellipotent does not allow

such extraordinary demonstrations of divine nature. Aboard the

Bellipotent, the strict human regulation of martial law prevails and

excludes divine law and divine nature. Thus the prophets aboard the

Bellipotent are further limited in their understanding of the god-like

Billy because of the special circumstances that prevail aboard the

Bellipotent. What the prophetic figures in Billy Budd must rely on to

understand God in this world is their own limited, human knowledge. Through their search for divine understanding, through the ordeal of

Billy Budd, the captain and crew of the Bellipotent come to a fuller

understanding of the limitations of their humanity.

It is not surprising that within the sailors' world talk of divine
nature would be muted. Billy's mien, first on the merchantman Rights-of-Man, and later on the Bellipotent, is the world of the impressed seamen. Billy's sea life is slavishly ordered by human laws, and not left to divine intervention or ordering. Gifted as he is with superior qualities of beauty and affability, Billy is welcomed by captains and crew alike. Yet these very qualities cause Billy to stand apart from his fellow man. Billy is different and his difference is not easily accommodated to the sailors' world of men and law.

Billy is different from the rest of the crew because he is a godlike character. Critics have long recognized a divine aura to Billy Budd; Billy is not likened to just one god, either. In one critic's view, Billy "is compared to three gods—Hyperion, Hercules, and Apollo. Of these three, Apollo is by far the most important." The narrator notes in Billy's appearance a superior, god-like quality. "He [Billy Budd] showed in face that humane look of reposeful good nature which the Greek sculptor in some instances gave to his heroic strong man, Hercules." In addition to resembling Greek gods, Billy has some Christian characteristics as well. The captain of the Rights-of-Man reveals Billy's Christian spirituality; Billy appears, "like a Catholic Priest" (p. 47) aboard the Rights-of-Man, and brings peace to the squabbling seamen. Finally, Billy is characterized as a sort of natural god, possessing "certain virtues pristine and unadulterate" (p. 53); he is an "upright barbarian, much such perhaps as Adam" (p. 52). All of Billy's spirituality is quite comfortably couched in his humanity. Thus he does not immediately impress his fellow crew members or his captain as a divine being, but rather as a remarkable fellow. Two people in particular who are impressed by Billy because he stands out from the
rest of the crew of the Bellipotent are the Dansker and John Claggart. While the Dansker and the master-at-arms find Billy remarkable, they each have quite different responses to his nature.

It is the Dansker who christens Billy with the name "Baby Budd." This appellation is bestowed on Billy with a touch of "patriarchial irony" (p. 70) or for some "more recondite reason" (p. 70). Whatever the case, the Dansker has some secretive, deliberate relationship with Billy that is not easily fathomed. Melville, it seems, implies that the exact relationship between Billy and the Dansker cannot be fully understood. The Dansker possesses an "old sapience, primitive in its kind" (p. 70) which somehow allows him to "divine more than he was told" (p. 85). It is the Dansker of course who detects the hatred that Claggart has for Billy before Billy himself is even aware of some difficulty with the master-at-arms. Billy recounts to "the salt seer" (p. 71) some minor difficulties that he is having with one of the ship's corporals. The Dansker replies to Billy that Claggart is "down on you" (p. 71). The Dansker's words do not affect Billy so much as his tone, which is "incomprehensible" (p. 71) and "oracular" (p. 71) to Billy. The Dansker's message is troubling, but his nature is more puzzling. Who the Dansker is makes what he says most compelling for Billy.

While the Dansker may not be readily recognizable to Billy, he is the last manifestation of a definite character type in Melville's writing. Walter Bezanson describes the Dansker as one of several "weird, oracular old sea dogs" ranging from Jarl in Mardi to Agath in Clarel, and finally to the Dansker himself in Billy Budd. All of these characters possess some vague, divine aura that is often more vague
than divine. Still the tone of the Dansker is suggestively oracular, and his message is a mysterious, cautionary prophecy, much like the dire warnings of Gabriel in *Moby-Dick*. Also, the enigmatic nature of the Dansker much resembles Elijah in *Moby-Dick*. In the Dansker, Melville has brought together characteristics from previous prophetic figures. Moreover, the Dansker is clearly not a witness to divine truth. He is an enigma; he does not help Billy in his struggle with Claggart.

There is more that explains the Dansker's enigmatic, unhelpful attitude toward Billy. F. Barron Freeman reveals that Melville's fiction sketch, "Daniel Orme," was originally intended to complement Melville's treatment of the Dansker in *Billy Budd*: "As it ["Daniel Orme"] was first written, it opened at the third paragraph beginning: 'A sailor's name as it appears on a crew list is not always his real name....' In content, this part of the fragment parallels and amplifies the first description of the old Dansker in the novel. Orme is gruff, taciturn, and moody, with a mysterious and exciting past. The Dansker is enigmatic and reticent, with a 'pithy and guarded cynicism.'" While Hayford and Saltz dispute Freeman's discovery, they agree that Orme and the Dansker are similar types of characters. The Dansker's gruffness and reticence are thus deliberately drawn by Melville to form the essential enigma of the Dansker; he is purposely left undeveloped by Melville.

The only real clue to the Dansker's silence in helping Billy is given in his "pithy guarded cynicism" (71), a cynicism that in one reader's view conveys a "complete distrust of human nature and human motives—in essence, an absence of faith in human virtue." The
Dansker's silence is not due to an inability to speak, but from a conscious refusal to help. Billy's innocence and goodness, the external signs of his internal spirituality, elicit no prophetic response from the Dansker. He resembles previous prophetic types, but his resemblance is only a formal one. The Dansker is a vestigial figure who does not even echo the clear voice of earlier prophets.

Thus the Dansker's nature is not clearly prophetic, nor is his message to Billy a witness to divine truth. Still the Dansker does warn Billy of a real danger because Claggart is in fact "down on" Billy Budd. The character of the master-at-arms is a masterpiece of malevolence. His subterfuges are carefully hidden behind smiles. The episode in the mess when Billy spills his soup is illustrative of this point. This action of spilling soup in the mess is no cause for reproach on the part of the master-at-arms. And indeed at first Claggart dismisses the action as unintentional clumsiness. However, when it is noticed that Billy is responsible, Claggart's "countenance changed" (p. 72). Instead of hurling a reprimand at Billy, Claggart "playfully tapped him from behind with his rattan, saying, in a musical voice, peculiar to him at times, 'Handsomely done, my lad! And handsome is as handsome did it, too!'" (p. 72). Claggart is very clever at hiding his contempt for Billy while still acting with contempt for the handsome sailor.

The deception in Claggart's character is malignantly pervasive; he is a thoroughly evil man. The evil in Claggart is a puzzle to the narrator who offers tentative explanations for the master-at-arms' nature. The narrator entertains the thought that Claggart is spiritually depraved, for the narrator implies that to understand a man like
Claggart one would have to have an acute "spiritual insight indispensible to the understanding of the essential in certain exceptional characters, whether evil ones or good" (p. 75). Moreover, Claggart can not be explained by an orthodox religious belief concerning evil; Calvin's doctrine that all men are evil does not explain the specific quality of Claggart (p. 75). The explanation which serves the narrator best but incompletely is Plato's definition of "'Natural Depravity: a depravity according to nature'" (p. 75). Such depravity applies only to the exclusive instance of evil in Claggart and provides a partial understanding of the nature of the master-at-arms.

There is no final explanation for the evil in Claggart or for the evil in the world; Melville demonstrates this through his description of the master-at-arms: "Now something such an one was Claggart, in whom was the mania of an evil nature, not engendered by vicious training or corrupting books or licentious living, but born with him and innate, in short 'a depravity according to nature'" (p. 76). The evil in Claggart is the evil in the world; such evil is always present and unfathomable. This is a deep mystery for Melville. In Billy Budd, moreover, Melville expresses the full power that this evil has to destroy innocence, for Claggart is a "human scorpion" who yearns to "sting Billy with an awareness of the essential malignity of earthly life." Claggart's purpose is to destroy Budd; this aim becomes an obsession with the master-at-arms who holds a "disdain for innocence" (p. 78) which is focused on the innocent Billy. Such disdain is a perverted result of the deepest kind of envy because Claggart really does admire Billy; the master-at-arms is "intellectually capable of adequately appreciating the moral phenomenon presented in Billy Budd" (p. 78). But Claggart
"despaired" (p. 78) of ever being like Billy and his despair led him to disdain innocence and to commit himself todestroying innocence through destroying Billy.

Claggart's commitment to destroying the innocent Billy Budd is a commitment to destroying what he perceives as an absolute innocent. Billy's innocent nature, "a nature that, in its simplicity never willed malice" (p. 78) enrages Claggart, "intensified his passion" (p. 78). Much like Ahab who is enraged by the absolute principle that Moby Dick represents, Claggart attacks Billy because his goodness will not live harmoniously with the evil in Claggart.

While alike in their rage, Ahab and Claggart differ markedly in their perception of absolutes. Ahab sees the whale as an agent of evil, while Claggart is enraged by Billy's innocence and simplicity. Furthermore, the purpose that Ahab and Claggart have in destroying absolutes is most noticeably different. Ahab believes that the whale is evil and that destruction of Moby Dick is a final assault on such evil. Melville does not allow Claggart such a conscious and profound assessment of the innocent Billy; Billy is only a man before Claggart. Thus Claggart is a diminished Ahab, a monomaniac who has power but lacks purpose; Claggart is not engaged in the conscious annihilation of absolutes. He is rather an evil man bent on destroying an absolutely innocent one. In his final work, Melville assures that the characters face each other dramatically and essentially as human beings and not primarily as agents of abstract, absolute principles.

Thus in his pursuit of Billy, Claggart uses human cunning to accomplish his ends. Claggart quite cleverly waits until the Bellipotent is detached from the other ships in the fleet and under threat of attack to
set his own attack against Billy into action. Such careful planning and patient waiting is characteristic of Claggart's malevolent nature. Towards the achievement of his aim, namely the destruction of Billy, Claggart directs a "cool judgment sagacious and sound" (p. 76); his outward demeanor is "always perfectly rational" (p. 76). Thus when Claggart stands before Vere on the quarter deck, he deliberately calculates that the captain will heed Claggart's report of a mutinous sailor on board as a threat to the ship's battle readiness. Claggart is of course well served by his calculations because Vere does listen and respond to the master-at-arms' report.

Claggart's accusation that Billy is spawning a mutiny brings dramatic results. In Vere's cabin Billy and Claggart confront each other. Their meeting is a moral climax in the book, for it presents the clash between a good, innocent man and an evil one. Apparently Billy wins because he meets Claggart's accusations effectively. Claggart delivers his accusations and metamorphoses into a loathsome satanic creature, his eyes "gelidly protruding like the alien eyes of certain creatures of the deep" (p. 98). Billy stands in shock and disbelief, his face forms an expression "a crucifixion to behold" (p. 99); he fells Claggart with one blow. Claggart's pursuit of Billy is a human drama. The master-at-arms is not the agent of evil, but a man who is evil and who hates. The human stature of Claggart makes the reader face the fact that Billy is pursued only by a man, not by an absolute principle of evil.

The outcome of this confrontation between Billy and Claggart would seem to be on the simplest level a victory by a good man over an evil one. The unjustly accused Billy thwarts the evil Claggart. But as Melville notes, "in the light of that martial code" (p. 103) whereby Billy's
action is to be judged, Billy's killing of Claggart is an evil too.

Thus "innocence and guilt personified in Claggart and Budd in effect changed places" (p. 103). This turn of events is the real moral problem in the book because Billy's action must be judged according to its conformity to human law, not divine law. And Vere is the final judge of human law aboard the Bellipotent. Vere cannot afford to let Billy's innocence or his divinity affect the difficult task of administering human and martial laws.

It is not as hard to understand Claggart wanting to kill Billy as it is to understand Vere. An aristocrat by birth and a sailor by profession, Vere is a man who is intelligent ["he had a marked leaning towards everything intellectual" (p. 62)] and very moral. His objection to the democratic revolutions of his time is based on his belief that these new political institutions are at "war with the peace of the world and the true welfare of mankind" (p. 63). Vere's intelligence and moral sense are dedicated to the preservation of martial order. As Captain Vere tells the members of the drum head court, "Our vowed responsibility is in this: That however pitilessly that law (the King's) may operate in any instances, we nevertheless adhere to it and administer it" (p. 111).

Vere will not allow himself to be tempered by the compassion that he feels for Billy. After Claggart dies, Vere laments, "Struck dead by an angel of God! Yet the angel must hang!" (p. 101). Although Billy is the handsome sailor, the peacemaker, the angel of God, he must die in the world of men, a world that is not based on divine law but human law. Those who see in Vere's execution of Billy an abdication of compassion and an arbitrary application of rigorous martial law, blind themselves to the humanity of Vere and the suffering that attends his responsible
action. As one reader observes, "Vere has been abused for his instant observation that 'the angel must hang,' as though he were prejudging Billy and making a mockery of his trial. But it is hard to see how such a sentiment can prevail in any reasoned estimate of the story. Vere likes Billy."  

Billy's death manifests all the divinity that pervades his natural goodness. His divine forgiveness of Vere, "God bless Captain Vere" (p. 123) and the mystical aura of the dawn on the morning of Billy's execution, "the vapory fleece hanging low in the East was shot through with a soft glory as of the fleece of the Lamb of God" (p. 124) reveal the transcendent Billy Budd. The effect of such revelation on Vere is dramatic; he witnesses the execution in a state of "paralysis induced by emotional shock" (p. 123-24). Vere realizes that he has ordered the execution of a spiritual superior. Still the execution is inevitable because Vere can judge Billy only by human knowledge and human laws. Vere has only his human lights to see by; there is no mediator, no prophet that will bring spiritual enlightenment to the captain and guide his actions toward Billy.

For acting on the human plane, Vere pays a terrible price. The martial order that Vere preserves through Billy's death is tested in battle when the Bellipotent engages a French warship the Athéiste. Vere's crew performs well in the battle, but the captain is mortally wounded. Thus while Billy's death helps to preserve order among a potentially mutinous crew, Vere himself is not saved through Billy's death. The forces of evil and godlessness, symbolized by the Athéiste, are constant and unceasing in the world; Vere's execution of Billy is only a momentary stay against the chaos and depravity. The captain's
struggles to uphold martial law exact first the death of the handsome sailor, and finally Vere's own death. As one critic has noted well, "Vere's preservation of martial order leads to the symbolic defeat of chaos, but this chaos kills him." 16

On the captain's death bed, there is no repudiation of the action that he has taken. He dies with the words, "Billy Budd, Billy Budd" (p. 129) on his lips, but these words do not carry the "accents of remorse" (p. 129). Rather, Vere's final words reveal the realization on his part that his course of action is the only one possible to a human being living according to a human code of conduct. Vere might well have been wrong to order Billy's execution, if one measures Vere according to an absolute morality. Billy is innocent and good; such qualities always merit preservation. Still, human life is not lived on an absolute scale. The mitigating forces of compromise, and "forms, measured forms" (p. 128) temper the absolutism of one's action.

The captain is consummately aware of the demand to preserve the forms of order on his ship; the preservation of order is his unquestioned, accepted responsibility. There may certainly not be the need to execute Billy in order to preserve such order, but Vere believes that there is. In part, Vere's order for execution is based on his desire to forestall any mutinous actions. As Vere says, "To the people [the crew] the fore-topman's deed, however it be worded in the announcement, will be plain homicide committed in a flagrant act of mutiny. What penalty for that should follow, they know" (p. 112).

In one critic's view, Vere's order to execute Billy reflects how "man cannot escape responsibility for his acts even when he is not responsible." 17 Perhaps Captain Vere chooses to order an unnecessary
death to preserve a necessary order. The choice "might very well be
wrong" but it is a human error made by a fully responsible human being.
Furthermore, Vere knows that Billy should die too; the captain's deathbed
words express sorrow but not regret. For the preservation of order, Vere
sends Billy to his death.

Melville creates in Captain Vere a figure who can accept life's
limitations without the rebellion of Taji and Ahab, without the frustra-
tion and despair of Pierre and The Confidence Man, and without the un-
happiness of Clarel. Vere's resignation is an honest attempt to present
man as limited but dignified in his humanity. Thus Vere dies without any
spiritual flourish either suggestively prophetic or ironic. He is at
last left alone, as Melville was when he wrote Billy Budd, to face his
humanity and mortality.

Vere's death does not mark the end of Billy Budd. The official
report of Billy's execution completely falsifies the truth of Billy's
goodness and Claggart's malevolence. But the official report is not the
final judgment on Billy. The crew of the Bellipotent mythicizes Billy
Budd. The bluejackets keep track of the yard arm which served as Billy's
gallows: "A chip of it [the yard arm] was as a piece of the Cross"
(p. 131). Billy is remembered as a larger than life figure who was as
"incapable of mutiny as of willful murder" (p. 131).

The myth making that surrounds Billy's death is a testament to his
goodness. He is efficacious for the sailors who remain after him;
Billy's submission to the law serves as an example to the crew that man
must live according to the human codes of conduct. The sailors do not
find Billy's death a futile sacrifice.

One of the sailors even celebrates Billy's history in ballad form,
"Billy in the Darbies" (p. 132). The singer of the ballad is usually thought to be "Billy commenting on his own fate." In this version of the poem, Billy is the speaker who consorts with types like "Bristol Molly" (p. 132) and deals uncharacteristically in puns, "Ay, ay, all is up; and I must up too" (p. 132). To explain this paradox between Billy the poet, and the innocent, straightforward foretopman, one critic argues that the writer of the ballad has "forgotten his man [Billy Budd] partly and confused him with another." It is also likely that the writer of the poem, a sailor like Billy, is the poem's speaker as well. A common seaman would be given to punning and consorting with people like "Bristol Molly" and "Taff the Welshman" (p. 132). A sailor/poet, perhaps like Billy awaiting execution for some crime against the King, would likely address the foretopman in these words,

Good of the chaplain to enter Lone Bay
And down on his marrowbones here and pray
For the likes just o' me, Billy Budd. (p. 132)

hoping that the example of Billy's sacrificial death will serve as a model for the sailor/poet's own imminent execution. Whoever the speaker of the poem may be the sure fact remains that it is a ballad sung by the sailors who live after Billy and realize that his death results from the preservation of order. In the end, the sailors learn from their celebration of Billy in song the same lesson that Vere accepts, namely that man must face his life and death on human terms, without special divine intervention, without monomaniacal railing when such intervention is not forthcoming.

*Billy Budd* is a testament to Melville's humanity. One reader has observed that Melville conveys a serenity in *Billy Budd* that comes from
the "infinite and in the end gentle despair accepted by a man [Melville himself] about to leave the merely human world of time." This judgment may be too harsh on Melville because in *Billy Budd* there seems to be little despair at man's plight as man. The lack of a fully developed prophetic figure to convey to Vere or the crew how the course of events should divinely go is quite clear. And this lack of a full prophetic character is in keeping with the humanistic theme of the work. God is not easily visible in the world of experience and man should not expect to find him easily observed.

Melville presents a vision of man in *Billy Budd* that is similar to Ishmael's view in *Moby-Dick*. Ishmael sees things with an "equal eye" and is careful to qualify his judgments about good and evil. The narrator in *Billy Budd*, a speaker who echoes Melville's own voice, articulates the same reservation about judging the clash between good and evil men. Melville's vision in *Billy Budd* is comprehensive and whole, and finally affirmative in what he says about the value of experience. Nathalia Wright observes that Melville was a philosopher "who was at different times both a pessimist and an optimist, but who tended to see the universe as neither good nor evil, but rather marvelous, as in the physical world of *Moby-Dick*, and mysterious as in the metaphysical world of *Billy Budd*."

The vision of Melville is peopled with prophets who gauge man's responses to God. The prophets in Melville's writing hold a very traditional place between God and man, but Melville's prophetic figures cannot provide the answers that traditional prophets gave to men looking to comply with divine will. It is much harder for the Melvillean prophet to give the "right" answer, and it is often easier for such a figure to
mistakenly provide an absolute answer. Such absolute answers always fail to reveal God and often lead to man’s death. The only viable prophetic response is the one that recognizes that God bears a relationship, sometimes not clear, to a good and evil world; the search for such a prophetic response is in part the achievement of Herman Melville.
NOTES:


A second group of critics view the book as denying such moral order. Merlin Bowen, The Long Encounter (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960): Billy Budd reflects "the sorry wisdom of resignation to a forced complicity to evil," p. 207. Lawrance Thompson, Melville's Quarrel with God (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952): "Melville's misanthropic viewpoint, at the time he wrote Billy Budd, was similar to that of Schopenhauer, who insisted that the world was put together wrong, that God was a scoundrel, that human beings were motivated entirely by selfish and depraved desires," p. 356.

2 This is a third critical view of the book. Richard H. Fogle, "Billy Budd--Acceptance or Irony," Tulane Studies in English, 8 (1958): "Billy Budd is both ironic and ambiguous, but its ironies and ambiguities are Melville's acceptance of the limits of interpretation: they are intended neither to confuse nor to mock," p. 108. Newton Arvin, Herman Melville (New York: William Sloan Associates, 1950): "There is a far more enigmatic intertwining of good and evil in this universe of Melville's final vision than in the universe of theology or of dogmatic ethics: evil and good, Rolfe had said, do indeed play, braided, into one cord," p. 297.


4 Wendall Glick, "Expediency and Absolute Morality in Billy Budd, PMLA, 68 (March, 1953), pp. 104-105.


6 Herman Melville, Billy Budd, ed. Harrison Hayford, and Merton Sealts, Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), p. 51. All subsequent references are to this text.


9. Hayford and Seals: "Freeman's study of the manuscript led him to a mistaken conclusion. He supposed that the sketch titled 'Daniel Orme,' which he transcribed and included in his book as a 'related fragment,' 'was once intended to be part of the novel.'...But his evidence for this supposition was a faulty reading of Melville's notations on the folder which holds the sketch. Freeman transcribed the relevant portion of the notations thus: 'Daniel Orme/omitted of/Billy Budd,' But what Melville actually wrote was 'Daniel Orme/&/Omitted of Billy Budd'..." p. 17.


15. Sedgwick: "It is impossible not to see in Billy's execution a resemblance to the Crucifixion," p. 241.


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