MELVILLE AND PURITANISM

KEIICHI HARADA

I. PURITAN HERITAGE

History does not repeat itself. But, ideas, thoughts, or patterns of thinking do remain in human history in various forms of heritage. This fact may be made clear when one thinks of the Platonism, which has taken various expressions through the Middle Ages, sixteenth, seventeenth, eighteenth century thoughts, and into the Transcendentalism of the nineteenth century. It is in this sense of heritage that I would like to discuss the relationship between Melville and Puritanism. It is true that Melville did not have a direct relationship to Puritanism as Hawthorne or Emerson did, but there is no doubt that he acquired the Puritan way of thinking through his absorption of the Puritan heritage imprinted on American society, through his reading of the seventeenth-century literature, and through the Calvinistic atmosphere in which he had grown up.

Needless to say, it is impossible and absurd to suppose that the Puritanism of the seventeenth century could have preserved itself intact into the mid-nineteenth century. Its contribution to the American heritage was not in concrete ideas, but rather, as Kenneth Murdock remarks, in "a few general religious and moral attitudes." Then, what are the characteristics of the heritage which the Puritans had left in American society?

One of the basic attitudes of the seventeenth-century Puritans may be defined as existential seriousness where one was always conscious of his aloneness before God and found himself in an eschatological tension with God. Such an attitude may be easily understood when

---

one considers the development of Protestantism. The Medieval concept of man as a microcosm, and the Catholic notion of man in the category of analogia entis was denounced when Protestant theology came into being. Calvin insisted on God's absolute sovereignty and the total depravity of mankind, and that there was an unfathomable abyss between God and man. Man's salvation from this desperate situation was no more possible by good works as the Catholic Church taught. It was possible only through God's free grace. Luther's idea of sola fide also became the core of the Protestant theology, and this concept led to a new emphasis on individual responsibility as a logical consequence, for, faith was to involve a man in his personal response to God. Even the doctrine of predestination did not discourage this personal responsibility. How, then, can a man who is predestined be responsible? Urian Oakes answers this question in his discourse:

As He predetermins Second Causes, so He concurses with them in their Operations. And this Predetermination, and Concurse is so necessary; that there can be no real Effect produced by the Creature without it. And it is a Truth also, that when God Improves Second Causes for the production of any Effect, He so concurs with them, that He doth withall most immediately, intimously, and without Dependence upon these Causes by which He acts, produce the Entity, or Esse of the Effect. If this be considered, it will appear that created Agents, are as it were, God's Instruments, that act as they are acted by Him, and cannot move of themselves.¹

Luther's concept of Beruf, which gave Protestant merchants so much vigor later, was based on the same logic. Calvin's attempt to establish the Civitas Dei was also based on the same principle. And no doubt, the attempt of the New England Puritans to establish a 'civill and ecclesiastical' commonwealth also derived from such a way of thinking.

A more acute reason for their existential seriousness was their drastic break with Medieval-Catholic beliefs which had been prevailing in their common life. Theodore Spencer comments on this aspect as follows: "Protestantism, in spite of the doctrine of predestination, put a new and greater emphasis on individual choice: it was a harder and tougher kind of moral life, than the Roman ones; the soul was no longer guarded from God's wrath by a series of shock-absorbers

or saintly intermediaries; it stood face to face with the Almighty."\(^1\) The Puritan thus had to stand before God "face to face" without protection. The doctrine of predestination preached God's free election, but it did not specify the salvation of any particular one. He had to make every effort to search for even the slightest possibility of salvation and divine grace. As George Whicher explains, "Under compulsion of the Calvinistic doctrine of election the Puritan was trained to search his heart for daily evidence of God's Grace."\(^2\) And this Puritan mind took a form of introspection. Anne Bradstreet wrote in her *Meditations*, "There is no object that we see, no action that we doe; no good that we injoy; no evill that we feele or fear, but we may make some spirituall advantage of all."\(^3\) Also Michael Wigglesworth wrote in his *Poor Mens Watch*: "... But whose reads our Lines, if God but give him eyes, / Shall see that these things are no Tales, but Spiritual Mysteries."\(^4\) The symbolic mind is not, of course, exclusively a Puritan characteristic. People all through history have been concerned with a symbolic way of thinking. People in the Middle-Ages and the Elizabethans are noted for their concern for the symbolic meaning of the universe in nature's hierarchy. Therefore the search for divine symbols in the mind of the Puritans was not a unique phenomenon. The uniqueness lies rather in its Biblical symbolism. As we have already seen, the foundation and the authority for the Puritans was the Bible. God's revelation was to come to men only through the Bible. Any attempt to explain God's nature from man's side, or to see God in nature, as the Catholics believed and as Deists believed later, was approved only when it was used as subordinate to the Bible. As Miller and Johnson say, "For Puritans, reason does not make clear the sense of Scriputure, but the clear sense of Scripture creates the reason."\(^5\) The Puritans deliberately avoided multiple symbolism, for the ultimate truth was to be found only in the Bible. Murdock appropriately comments on this point:

... Inevitably, then, when he preached or wrote on divine themes he tended to limit his diction, his images, and his literary devices to those which he would find in Holy Writ. In subject matter,

---

3 Quoted in Whicher, *loc. cit.*  
4 Miller and Johnson, p. 626.  
too, obviously what was closest to the Bible was best. Biblical style was perfect because it was 'penned by the Holy Ghost.' It was a style of 'great simplicitie and wonderful plainnesse,' 'unpolished,' avoiding 'the flowers of Rhetorike,' 'the goodly ornaments of humane eloquence,' and 'wittie sharpe conceits.'

It is for this reason that Richard Mather said in his Preface to the Bay Psalm Book,” let them consider that Gods Alter needs not our pollishings: . . .” Also in this sense Samuel Mather’s following words are important in understanding the characteristic Puritan mind, particularly in its relationship to Thomist multiple symbolism and to its relationship to later American romantics such as Emerson and Melville. He said, “Men must not indulge their own Fansies, as the Popish writers use to say, with their Allegorical Senses, as they call it. It is not safe to make anything a Type meerly upon our fansies and imaginations: it is Gods Prerogative to make type.” Because of this principle, their literary practices had to be limited in scope and variety, particularly in their use of symbols. But they developed a uniqueness of their own in their homely images and similes. As Murdock points out: “. . . metaphors and similes not drawn from the classics or the world of books but from the common behaviour of men and the common experiences of life; . . .” These uniquenesses did not remain in the mid-nineteenth century in their fullest extent, but the eyes of Emerson, Hawthorne, Melville and Thoreau that saw nature in terms of man’s spiritual pilgrimage and their search for the soul in daily experiences may be taken as a Puritan heritage. Despite his bookish tendency, Melville’s description of the life on the ship and the images in Father Mapple’s sermon in Moby Dick, his homely images in the description of the New England background in Pierre certainly show the influence of the Puritan way of thinking that was still prevalent by the mid-nineteenth century.

It has been already observed that the Puritan always stood before God in a state of introspective tension. However, it was not that he was standing before the wrath of God with fear and trembling all the time. There was a peculiar way of reconciliation through their mysticism.

---

1 Murdock, p. 42.  
2 Miller and Johnson, p. 555.  
3 Quoted in Charles N. Feidelson, Symbolism and American Literature (Chicago, 1952), p. 89.  
4 Murdock, p. 57.
Wiggesworth began "A Prayer unto Christ the Judge of the World" as follows: "O dearest Dread, most glorious King, / I'll of thy justest Judgment sing: . . ."¹ This paradoxical passage can be understood only through the Puritan mystic psychology and logic. Despite Calvinistic pessimism, there was always the possibility of salvation in God's grace. Because God's design is unknowable to man, the possibility is infinite. Despite man's evil, weakness and inability, they felt, God's grace was always present. It is in this belief in "despite" that the "dread" could become "dearest" in the faithful mind of the poet. Jonathan Edwards later expressed this relationship again and again in his writings with the word "sweetness." For Edwards, God's absolute sovereignty and wrath are reconciled with man in a "sweet" mystical union. Wiggesworth sang in another place:

Whole Christ with all my heart I earnestly Embrace;
And for my whole Salvation I relie upon his grace:
Renouncing all my own both Righteousness, and Sin;
Endeav'ring Holiness, as well as Happiness to win.²

Here the idea of wholeness and heart has an important significance. Jonathan Edwards later in his essay on A Divine Light, talking about the enlightened man, said, "He does not merely rationally believe that God is glorious, but he has a sense of the gloriousness in his heart."³ This Puritan emphasis on "heart" is also an emphasis on "Affection" and "Will" in Edwards' words. The dilemma of determinism immanent in the doctrine of Calvinism was thus solved by the Puritans in their emphasis on "heart", "Affection", or "Will".

This Puritan emphasis on the mystical "heart" was inherited by Melville. In his copy of Moses from an Old Manse, he underlined heavily a passage referring to "such light as never illuminates the earth, save when a great heart burns as the household fire of the grand intellect."⁴ Also in his letter to Hawthorne in regard to Ethan Brand, he wrote, "It is a frightful poetic creed that the cultivation of the brain eats up the heart . . . I stand for the heart. To the dogs with the

---

¹ Miller and Johnson, p. 586.
² Ibid., p. 626.
head! I had rather be a fool with a heart than Jupiter Olympus with his head." The same idea is found, again, in his “secret” review of The House of the Seven Gables, which says, “There is the grand truth about Nathaniel Hawthorne. He says No! in thunder; but the Devil himself cannot make him say yes. For all men who say yes, lie; and all men who say no,—why, they are in the happy condition of judicious, unencumbered travellers in Europe; they cross the frontiers into Eternity with nothing but a carpet-bag,—that is to say, the Ego. Whereas those yes-gentry, they travel with heaps of baggage, and, damn them! they will never get through the Custom house.” Thus for Melville intellect without heart was meaningless, and it was quite a natural attitude for him who, like the Puritans, spent his whole life seeking for the secret of the soul which, to him, lies in a far deeper place than intellect and reason can reach. Julian Hawthorne wrote his impression of Melville when they met in New York in 1884: “He conceived the highest admiration for my father’s genius, and a deep affection for his personality; but he told me, during our talk, that he was convinced that there was some secret in my father’s life which had never been revealed, and which accounted for the gloomy passages in his books. It was characteristic of him to imagine so, . . .” Julian was right to say that Melville’s extreme interest in “secret” was “characteristic” of him. Melville’s whole life was characterized, indeed, by his desperate search for the “dark, vast forest,” as D. H. Lawrence called it. Melville once stated that it was “the great power of blackness” that most interested him. For, he believed that this “power of blackness” derived “its force from its appeal to that Calvinistic sense of Inmate Depravity and Original Sin, from whose visitation, in some shape or other, no deeper thinking mind is always and wholly free.” Thus his interest in “heart” and “secret” were based, as in the case of the Puritans, on the Christian existential attitude. He was not able to rest upon the solution which the Puritans found, but,

2 Ibid., p. 105.
3 Julian Hawthorne, Hawthorne and His Circle (New York, 1903), p. 33.
nevertheless, his search and struggle were essentially the legacy of the Puritan fathers of American soil.

II. THE SEA OF LIFE

Seeing at the sea as a dramatization of life is not uncommon in human history since the time of the Odyssey. But mystical people especially have found the sea to have some spiritual meaning for them. The Puritans saw God’s glorious hand in it, especially when they compared their voyage with that of other “children of God” who were helped over the Red Sea. It is the place where “man’s struggle from darkness to light” was to take place.1 After a long and adventurous voyage from England to the new continent, Francis Higginson wrote: “Those that love their own chimney corner, and dare not go far beyond their own town’s end, shall never have the hour to see these wonderful works of Almighty god.”2 Melville could not find God’s merciful hand nor light in his search for the truth, but the sea had a special charm for him. For him, the sea was life itself. On the right side of to his brother-in-law, John C. Hoadley, in 1834, is found the following words written by Herman himself: “All life,” says Oken ‘is from the sea; none from the continent. Man also is a child of the warm and shallow part of the sea in the neighborhood of the land.’”3 Also he expressed his feeling through the mouth of Ishmael in Moby Dick, “That unsounded ocean you gasp in, is Life.”4 However the life to be found in the sea is not a calm and complacent life which is found in the “chimney corner,” as Higginson called it. It was the life of mystery, darkness and fury for Melville. It is the life only those who dare to face “the power of blackness” can stand gazing at. Ishmael says again, “The sun hides not the ocean, which is the dark side of this earth, and which is two thirds of this earth. So, therefore, that mortal man who hath more of joy than sorrow in him, that mortal man cannot be true—not true, or undeveloped.” (Ch. XCVI, p. 422).

1 Kenneth Murdock, p. 62.
2 Alexander Young, ed., Chronicle of the First Planters of the Colony of Massachusetts (Boston, 1846), p. 237.
—All the following references to Moby-Dick are based on this edition.
Voyage was for Ishmael "[his] Yale College and [his] Harvard." (Ch. XXIV, p. 110). It was an education, but not an education in terms of acquiring a mere knowledge, but an adventure of the soul, which one could never find on earth. Ishmael remarks again, "Consider the subtleness of the sea; . . . Consider also the devilish brilliance and beauty of many of its most remorseless tribes, . . . Consider, once more, the universal cannibalism of the sea; . . . Consider all this; and then turn to this green, gentle, and most docile earth; consider them both, the sea and the land; and do you not find a strange analogy to something in yourself?" (Ch. LVII, p. 274). Symbolic mind of Melville found the sea the "dark side" of the universe, and also "a strange analogy to something in man." Thus Melville started his voyage with his Puritan heritage of a symbolical mind into the sea of the vast mystery of life.

III. TRAGIC VISION

Commenting on the nature of tragedy, Theodore Spencer proposes two factors necessary for it to exist. There must be, he says, "a conventional pattern of belief and behaviour," and "an acute consciousness of how that conventional pattern can be violated."1 Oedipus was tragic in this sense, so was Hamlet, and so were the Puritans, for they were conscious of the situation they were in where they had to break with the traditional and conventional beliefs in many ways. They were to be tragic heroes in a universal drama. Murdock expounds this point thus: "It has been said that all men in all times can be divided into conformists and nonconformists, into those who reverence tradition, submerge the individual in the organization, and set form in religion above life, and those for whom men's own relation to God is the center, and individual inquiry and conviction, not corporate dogma, is the key to the truth."2 The Puritans were undoubtedly what Murdock calls "nonconformists." For that reason they had to leave England. Faith was, for them, not to believe in a conventional dogma, but was a matter of their individual concern, and this was what made them tragic heroes.

Melville was a tragic man in this sense. He was brought up in a Calvinistic environment. In his teens he used to go to the Dutch

---

1 Spencer, p. 50.  
2 Murdock, p. 176.
Reformed Church in Albany, New York. Sermons given in this Calvinistic church must have made strong impressions on his mind. As we have seen before, the sense of "Innate Depravity and original sin" never disappeared from him as long as he lived. At the same time, the Calvinistic training he had in his youth taught him the importance of individual inquiry and individual responsibility before God. A dogmatic acceptance of Calvinistic teaching was impossible. He was too much a child of nineteenth-century scepticism, new ideas, and romantic *Strum und Drang*. Surrounded by those factors, he had to feel a "consciousness of how that conventional pattern can be violated."

Perhaps we can think of two external elements in regard to the growth of his scepticism. One of them is his recognition of human miseries and frustrations through his various experiences. His father's failure in business was one of them. His observation of the missionaries in the South Seas, and of the behavior of so-called Christians in many places must have made him think of the sin of hypocrisy. He saw the misery of man when he first visited Liverpool, where he found, in stead of the beautiful things about which his father used to tell him, a starving mother and a dying child on the street, about whom the police did not take any interest. His experience of the cruel floggings on the war-ship, the *United States*, was enough to convince him that man was not morally good, as his contemporary optimists believed.

Another external element came from his observation of the orthodox Christianity then commonly practiced. Especially when he saw those Christians, who professed their faith in orthodoxy, did not realize the ambiguity of human virtue and lived in a lukewarm daily life, his serious mind must have been quite disturbed. In *Moby Dick*, he used a cannibal, Queequeg, to criticize Christian hypocrisy. Ishmael, who became a bosom friend of this heathen, says, "But alas! the practices of whalemen soon convinced him [Queequeg] that even Christians could be both miserable and wicked; infinitely more so, than all his father's heathens." (Ch. XII, p. 55). After Queequeg saved the life of a sailor who insulted him, Ishmael observed him, saying, "He did not seem to think that he at all deserved a medal from the Humane and Magnanimous Societies. He only asked for water—fresh water—something to wipe the brine off; ... and mildly eyeing those around him, seemed to be saying to himself—'it's a mutual, joint-stock world, in all meridians. We cannibals must help these Christians.'" (Ch.
XIII, p. 61). Possibly Melville was holding a Rousseauian idea of
the noble savage, and yet he went far deeper than that. When Ishmael
said, "... And Heaven have mercy on us all Presbyterians and
Pagans alike—for we are all somehow dreadfully cracked about the
head and sadly need mending," (Ch. XVI, p. 81) Melville must have
been thinking of the much deeper problem of the limit-situation, in
Karl Jaspers' word, of human existence. For Melville, who tried to
see man's nature as it is, those "orthodox" Christians, who boasted
their superiority but did not take it seriously, must have surely have
seemed hypocritical and worthy of despising. He wrote in another
place, "There's your law of precedents; there's your utility of tradi-
tions; there's the story of your obstinate survival of old beliefs never
bottomed on the earth, and now not even hovering in the air! There's
orthodoxy!" (Ch. LXIX, p. 308) Melville would have agreed
with Søren Kierkegaard when he said:

The New Testament seems to entertain high notions of what it
is to be a man. On the one hand it holds up the ideal, on the other
hand, when it depicts wrong actions, one sees that it has nevertheless
a high notion of what it is to be a man; but twaddling, nincom-
poopism, mediocrity, are constantly spared its blow.

So from time immemorial twaddling has taken advantage of this
to establish itself as the true Christian orthodoxy—hence these count-
less battalions of millions of Christians. This orthodoxy, so strong
in numbers, so weak in mind, takes advantage of the fact that one
cannot truthfully denounce it as heterodoxy, hypocrisy, etc. (as
indeed one cannot)—ergo it is the true Christian orthodoxy.¹

This striking similarity between Melville and Kierkegaard does not,
of course, prove their similar beliefs. But they had at least one thing
in common; a religiously existential attitude. And it was this exis-
tential attitude of Melville which also made him critical, quite justi-
fably, of a thing like missionary work. During his trip to Europe
and Middle East in 1856–7, he made various comments on missionary
work in his journal. On December 21, 1856, he wrote; "... With
reference to the American mission here the Agent said that it was
about discontinued; a hopeless affair; all the converts made, merce-

Melville and Puritanism

On January 23, 1857, after meeting American missionaries in Jaffa, he wrote down, "It is against the will of God that the East should be Christianized." Again, on January 26, 1857, he wrote, "Old Dickman seemed a man of Puritanic energy, and being inoculated with his preposterous Jew maniac, is resolved to carry his Quixotism through to the end. Mrs. D. don't [sic] seem to like it, but submits,—the whole thing is half melancholy, half farcical—lie the rest of the world." Such an attitude was quite natural for Melville who was disillusioned with institutionalized Christianity. But it must be noticed that he was not a destructive atheist and that he was rather to be characterized as a seeker for the God who had been lost to him. When he said that missionary work was "against the will of God," he must have had some kind of God in his mind. Possibly he was considering a rather pantheistic divinity, judging from his close knowledge of Plato, Plotinus, Goethe, Schiller, Coleridge and Carlyle about this time.

It would not be an oversimplification to assert that Melville's main concern throughout his life was the problem of "Fate and Free Will." This was, of course, an important problem for the Puritans also. Jonathan Edwards, perhaps the most distinguished theologian among the Puritans, tried to solve this dilemma through the Lockian logic of cause and effect. But in the case of Edwards, he presupposed God as the first cause. And this approach was impossible for Melville. In him, this problem took an expression in the struggle of the predestination—cosmic determinism vs. Free Will. This question was definitely taking possession of Melville's mind about the time he started to consider the theme of Moby-Dick. On October 13, 1849, he wrote in his journal on his way to London: "Walked the deck with the German, Mr. Adler, till a later hour, talking of 'Fixed Fate, Free Will, foreknowledge absolute' &c &c . . ." About seven years later, he wrote on his manuscript of Journal Up the Strait:

Conversation with the colonel
on fixed fate &c.
during the voyage.6

---

2 Ibid., p. 69. 3 Ibid., p. 93.
6 Weaver, p. 1.
Keiichi Harada

The fact that this entry alone occupied a whole page indicates his unusual interest and inquiry in this question. With this basic question of Melville in mind, let us observe briefly how Melville treated it in his later works—*Moby-Dick*, *Pierre* and *Billy Budd*.

In his letter to Hawthorne on June 29, 1851, Melville wrote, "... Shall I send you a fin of the 'Whale' by way of a specimen mouthful? The tail is not yet cooked, though the hell-fire in which the whole book is broiled might not unreasonably have cooked it ere this. This is the book's motto (the secret one), *Ego non baptizo te in nomine—but make out the rest yourself."

In a sense *Moby-Dick* was a test case for Melville's heroes. Ahab's pursuit of the White Whale was his declaration of war against Heaven. To Starbuck, who remained critical as representing common sense, Ahab's attempt was blasphemous. But Ahab tells him:

All visible objects, man, are but as pasteboard masks. But in each event—in the living act, the undoubted deed—there, some unknown but still reasoning thing puts forth the mouldings of its features from behind the unreasoning mask. If man will strike, through the mask! How can the prisoner reach outside except by thrusting through the wall? To me, the white whale is that wall shoved near me. Sometimes I think there's naught beyond. But 'tis enough. He tasks me; he heaps me; I see in him outrageous strength, with an inscrutable malice sinewing it. 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. Talk not to me of blasphemy, man; I'd strike the sun if it insulted me. (Ch. XXXVI, pp. 161–2).

The Puritans also saw the "reasoning thing" behind the "unreasoning mask." They saw the first cause, goodness, harmony and beauty of God behind the tribulations and unreasonable sufferings of this world. Ahab shared this symbolic mind, but he did not find what the Puritans had found. He could see nothing but "an inscrutable malice" of the universe, and his experiences confirmed his view. When he saw Pip's misfortune, Ahab could not help exclaiming, "Oh, ye frozen heavens! look down here. Ye did beget this luckless child, and have abandoned him, ye creative libertines." (Ch. CXXV, p. 514) Further, when he said, "Come, then, to my cabin. Lo! ye believers in gods all

---

goodness, and in man all ill, lo you! see the omniscient gods oblivious of suffering man; and man, though idiotic, and knowing not what he does, yet full of the sweet things of love and gratitude. . . .” (Ch. CXXV, p. 515) he definitely indicated his decision to depart from orthodox, Calvinistic God. Thus his war against the White Whale became not only the war against the Fixed Fate in a mechanical world view, but also the war against the living, personal God which orthodoxy had taught. Being no more able to believe in “a conventional pattern of belief,” Ahab perceived “an acute consciousness of how that conventional pattern can be violated” in his attempt to fight with God, and thus he was doomed to be a tragic hero. When he declared, “Ego non baptizo te in nomine patris, sed in nomine diaboli,” he traded his free will for diabolism. When Faust sold his soul to Mephistopheles, he knew that he was to lose his eternal blessings of God. But when Ahab declared his independence, free will, and man’s infinite possibility, he did not realize that he was yielding himself up to the control of the devil. He thought he made himself a master of fate when he declared “in nomine diaboli,” but after all he had to realize that it would not make any difference as far as Free Will was concerned. Sooner or later he had to realize this fact. Ahab’s soliloquy in the chapter called “Symphony” shows his wonder and doubt; “What is it, what nameless, inscrutable, unearthly thing is it; what cozzening, hidden lord and master, and cruel, remorseless emperor commands me; that against all natural longings and longings, I so keep pushing, and crowding, and jamming myself on all the time; recklessly making me ready to do what in my own proper, natural heart, I durst not so much as dare?” (p. 536). And then he asked the most important and fundamental question which Ahab thought that he had solved in his diabolism, “Is Ahab, Ahab? Is it I, God, or who, that lifts this arm? But if the great sun move not of himself; but is as an errand-boy in heaven; nor one single star can revolve, but by some invisible power; how then can this one small heart beat; this one small brain think thoughts; unless God does that beating, does that thinking, does that living, and not I.” (p. 536). At the second day of his chase of the Whale, he finally had to face the dreadful truth about Fixed Fate and Free Will. He exclaimed, “This whole act’s immutably decreed. ’Twas rehearsed by thee and me a billion years before this ocean rolled. Fool! I am the Fates’ lieutenant; I act under orders.” (Ch. CXXXIV, p. 554). Thus Ahab had
to realize his defeat in his fight against Fate and Eternity. Nonetheless, there was something in his madness which made Starbuck say, "... my captain! noble soul! grand old heart, after all!" (Ch. CXXXI, p. 335). Probably Melville himself, with Starbuck, might have exclaimed at the courage of Ahab. At any rate, nature did not show a bit of interest in what Ahab did with his whole existence. Nature was not challenging Ahab, it was Ahab, as Starbuck told him, "Moby-Dick seeks thee not. It is thou, thou, that madly seekest him." (Ch. CXXXV, p. 361). This ending shows, despite Ahab's superhuman diabolism, that he is a mere prisoner of fate after all.

Melville's necessitarian pessimism had no single source. Henry Murray suggests that the chief supports of it may be Jonathan Edwards (Freedom of the Will,) Hartley (Observations of Man,) Godwin (Caleb Williams,) and Shelley (Preface to "Queen Mab"). Besides them, he was not a little influenced by Shakespeare, Goethe, Sir Thomas Browne, Coleridge, Spinoza, Schopenhauer, or Carlyle. His letter to Hawthorne written on June 29, 1851, shows that he was considerably influenced by Goethean pantheism, and that it was also the thing he was trying to fight against. The letter reads:

... In reading some of Goethe's sayings, so worshipped by his votaries, I came across this, "Live in the all." That is to say, your separate identity is but a wretched one,—good; but get out of yourself, spread and expand yourself, and bring to yourself the tinglings of life that are felt in the flowers and the woods, that are felt in the planets Saturn and Venus, and the Fixed Stars. What nonsense! Here is a fellow with a raging toothache. "My dear boy," Goethe says to him, "you are sorely afflicted with that tooth; but you must live in the all, and then you will be happy!" As with all great genius, there is an immense deal of flummery in Goethe, and in proportion to my own contact with him, a monstrous deal of it in me.2

Moby-Dick shows that he was too God-conscious in a Calvinistic sense to follow any of those people mentioned above. Perhaps the closest person that expressed Melville's feeling might be Philip James Bailey

---

1 Pierre, ed. Henry Murray (New York, 1949), pp. 469-70.—All the following references to Pierre are based on this edition.

2 Metcalf, Herman Melville: Cycle and Epicycle, p. 110.
whose poem, *Festus: A Poem*, was very much discussed in the Duyckinck circle. It goes:

Necessity, like electricity,  
Is in ourselves and all things, and no more  
Without us than within us ...  

* * * * *

Free Will is but necessity in play,—  

* * * * *

... And thus with man;  
However contrary he set his heart  
To God, he is but working out His will;  
And, at an infinite angle, more or less  
Obeying his own soul's necessity.  
He only hath freewill whose will is fate.\(^1\)

This thought that appeared in *Moby Dick* is also expounded in his next work, *Pierre*. The motto of *Moby Dick* was "*Ego non baptizzo te ...*" and Melville did not forget to have another one for *Pierre*. This time we find; "*Nemo contra Deum nisi Deus ipse,*" which was taken from Goethe's *Truth and Poetry*. Apparently Melville already had this idea when he was writing *Moby Dick*. We discern it in Ahab's soliloquy on light. He says, "Light though thou be, thou leapest out of darkness; but I am darkness leaping out of light, leaping out of thee!" (*Moby-Dick*, Ch. CXIX, p. 500). Ahab's attempt was, in a sense, to be "*Contra Deum,*" and at the same time, it led him to an attempt to be "*Deus ipse,*" in his diabolism. God was both Light and Darkness; good and evil. And this discovery of Ahab was the starting point of *Pierre*.

Pierre had the same kind of searching mind for the mysterious truth that Ahab had. When he felt a dark secret in his beloved father, he made a decision, which pararells Ahab's "pasteboard" remark. He said, "... Fate, I have a choice quarrel with thee, ... Thou Black Knight, that with visor down, thus confrontest me, and mockest at me; lo! I strike through thy helm, and will see they face, be it Gorgon!" (BOOK III, VI, p. 76). He succeeded in discovering the truth, but the price was high. The discovery of the truth—his father's secret—meant a total destruction of his faith, for his father had been his idol and god. Put into a merciless despair, he exclaimed, "Eternal-

---

\(^1\) Printed in Explanatory Note in *Moby Dick*, pp. 647–8.
ly inexorable and unconcerned is Fate, a mere heartless trader in men’s joys and woes.” (BOOK V, V, p. 124). The quality of Ahab’s pursuit was earthly. His vengeance was an incarnation of his egotism. His madness came from “nomine diaboli”—anti-God. But Pierre’s attempt was to put himself in the absoluteness of God, as he said, “If ye forsake me now,—farewell to Faith, farewell to Truth, farewell to God; exiled for aye from God and man, I shall declare myself an equal power with both; free to make war on Night and Day, and all thoughts and things of mind and matter, which the upper and the nether firmaments do clasp!” (BOOK V, VI, p. 126). Here is shown the quality of tragedy—an “acute consciousness of how that conventional pattern can be violated”. Like Ahab, Pierre also decided to wage war against heavenly power, and declared his free-will. According to the orthodox, Calvinistic viewpoint, as Edwards pointed out, every benevolence was selfish. Pierre openly challenged this idea. Melville described Pierre’s decision: “Thus, in the Enthusiast to Duty, the heaven-begotten Christ is born; and will not own a mortal parent, and spurns and rends all mortal bonds.” (p. 126). Thus Pierre put himself in the position of Christ who lived in an absolute morality or in the Chronometricals, as Melville called it. But Pierre was not aware that he was not Christ, that he was a man who lives in a reality of the Horologicals. Melville wrote in a chapter called CHRONOMETRICALS AND HOROLOGICALS: “Though Christ encountered woe in both the precept and the practice of his chronometricals, yet did he remain throughout entirely without folly or sin. Whereas, almost invariably, with inferior beings, the absolute effort to live in this world according to the strict letter of the chronometricals is, somehow, apt to involve those inferior beings eventually in strange, unique follies and sins, unimagined before.” (BOOK XIV, III, pp. 249–50). And this was exactly the case with Pierre. His attempt was, unlike Ahab’s, constructive, at least in his intention. But it turned out to be destructive, “unimagined before.” The result of follies and sins of this false-Christ was nihilism and confusion. He was following the Virtue of Heaven in a chronometrical order. But the sin of putting the finite over and above the infinite, the false-Christ over Christ, resulted in chaos. Finally Pierre had to exclaim, “The demi-gods trample on trash, and Virtue and Vice are trash! . . .” (BOOK XIX, II, p. 321). His nihilism destroyed everything including himself. Ahab realized at the end that he was “Fortunes’ lieutenant.”
Melville and Puritanism

Pierre also realized that he was "the fool of Truth, the fool of Virtue, the fool of Fate." (BOOK XXVI, IV, p. 422). Yet he was not aware that he was against the truth. Just before the total catastrophe, he cried in the city prison to Lucy and Isabel: "Away!—Good Angel and Bad Angel both!—For Pierre is neuter now!" (BOOK XXVI, VI, p. 425). As the motto of Pierre says, the situation here is "Nemo contra Deum nisi Deus ipse." The world Melville described here was a nihilistic and ambiguous world. "God is dead!" in Pierre and what was left was utter confusion and chaos. It was not even the world of retribution. All there was left was the world which is determined by some dark power unknown to man.

Although there was a considerable duration between Pierre's publication and Billy Budd, Melville's quest for "Fixed Fate, Free Will", depravity of man and sin had not disappeared. On the contrary, Melville, in Billy Budd, showed his profound interest in the problem of the relationship between the chronometricals and the horologicals, of the evil in the world, and of the "mystery of iniquity."

There are three main characters involved in this novel. Captain Vere is an intellectual and a man of common sense. He is a symbol of civilization in general. Claggart is presented, like Ahab," as "the mania of an evil nature." Billy Budd is an incarnation of innocence and an ideal figure in the Platonic sense—beauty of body which represents beauty of soul.

Claggart's malicious injury to Billy's innocent heart makes Billy furious and Billy kills him in his indignation. Captain Vere who knew the Christ-like character and innocence of Billy, believed that it was "the divine judgment of Ananias!" (Ch. 20, p. 228). And yet he had to face the horological interference—that is, to keep the order of the ship. Finally he had to say, "Struck dead by an angel of God. Yet the angel must hang!" (Ch. 20, p. 229). He further explains this statement: "But something in your aspect seems to urge that it is not solely that heart that moves in you, but also the conscience, the private conscience. But tell me whether or not, occupying the position we do, private conscience should not yield to that imperial one formulated in the code under which alone we officially proceed?" (Ch. 22, p. 246). Captain understands a chronometrical order, but,

1 Billy Budd, ed. F. E. Freeman (Cambridge, Mass., 1948), Ch. 11, p. 187.—All the following references to Billy Budd are based on this edition.
for him, expediency is a more important and acute problem. What solution could he find? He said, "Ay, there is a mystery; but to use a Scriptural phrase, it is a 'mystery of iniquity,' a matter for psychologic theologians to discuss. But what has a military court to do with it?" (Ch. 22, p. 241). Here is a perfect picture of mediocrity and civilization. For the Puritans, and certainly for Melville, this was the core of the whole problems of life. But Captain Vere simply turned it down as a job of "psychologic theologians." The horologicals won. Christ was crucified in Billy's hanging. Like Christ, Billy shouted while being hanged, "God bless Captain Vere!" (Ch. 26, p. 265). Ironically enough, Captain Vere was killed later by the Athéiste. But Melville does not give answer to the question: who is to blame?

Billy Budd is a story of "the mystery of iniquity." After his long search for the truth about "Fixed Fate, Free Will, foreknowledge absolute," the answer he got was still a "mystery" and this is where Melville leaves us for ever.

IV. CONCLUSION

As we have seen so far, Melville could not find an abiding place after all in a traditional, Calvinistic belief, and yet he was a spiritual heir of the Puritan fathers. He saw the problem of man and world in terms of God all the time. The Calvinistic doctrine of predestination never left his mind. His inability to believe, and his sincerity to find the truth made him struggle all through his life to "get hold of some definite belief." His scepticism was not epistemological, but ontological and theological. Does it go too far if we assert that Melville was however a faithful man in a paradoxical sense? Have not the great fathers shown the confessions of their faithlessness in history? Melville's agony had the same kind of agony that Samel Sewall had, when Sewall said, "I feared at least that I did not believe there was such one as Jesus Xt., and yet was afraid that because I came to the ordinance without belief, and for the abuse of Xt. I should be stricken dead: yet I had some earnest desires that Xt would, before the ordinance were done, though it were where he was just going away, give me some glimpses of himself but I perceived none." Great

2 In Massachusetts Historical Society Collections, V. 47, Quoted in Murdock, p. 108.
MELVILLE AND PURITANISM

Christian leaders such as St. Augustine, Pascal, and Kierkegaard also shared the same agony. If Melville's struggle is to be considered in this light, is it not possible to rank him among the faithfuls in terms of his sincere search?

Another consideration to be made is that, most probably, his artistic impulse could not find a room in Calvinistic Biblicism. Willard Thorp remarked that "... inspite of a frequent high degree of individualization, the characters and situations of Hawthorne and Melville are fundamentally impersonal, emerging at their best as a fusion of particular and type, but at their worst as types only." Whether they are good or bad, Melville's characters are more types than individuals. This is particularly true in Mardi, Pierre, and Billy Budd. Puritan thought would never approve this approach, as Samuel Mather declared. Melville's problem may be clarified considerably by the comment of Murdock on Edward Taylor: "... the fundamental spiritual verities were too mysterious for logical or prosaic exposition and demanded all the rich emotional and intellectual suggestiveness of complex 'metaphysical' poetry." Melville's anti-Biblicism must have taken a definite stage about the time he was writing Billy Budd. He says in the book, "As it is, one must turn to some authority not liable to the charge of being tainted with Biblical element." (Ch. 11, p. 185). Melville's distrust in Protestantism finally made him say, in his Mixed Essays, Irish Essays and Others, in 1883: "... Catholicism has a great future before it; that it will endure while all the Protestant sects (in which I do not include the Church of England) dissolve and perish. I persist that in thinking that the prevailing form for the Christianity up the future will be the form of Catholicism." It is not easy to conjecture the reasons for this inclination towards Catholicism in his later years, but possibly it is because, as we have already observed, his artistic impulse did not find room to express itself in a strict Biblicism, and because his mind, which had been cursed by his long pursuit and strain, sought a serenity that was to be found in tradition and authority. I am more inclined to take this as an indication of Melville's final acknowledgment of the monstrous power of tradition. In this sense he may be called a prophetic figure who foresaw the coming of

2 Ibid. p. 4 of this article.
3 Murdock, pp. 169-70.
4 Printed in Braswell, op. cit. p. 114.
modern agony expressed in Strether, Raskornikov, or Joseph K.

This does not, of course, reduce Melville's greatness. The thing which makes us humble is his greatness of soul. As Kierkegaard once said that the greatness lies not in what he finds, but how he struggles to find it. Hawthorne's praise of Melville was right, and may be appropriate to close this article:

... he had a very high and noble nature, and better worth immortality than most of us.1

---

1 Julian Hawthorne, Nathaniel Hawthorne and His Wife, p. 134.