THE MELVILLE REVIVAL

A Study of Twentieth Century Criticism Through its Treatment of Herman Melville

DISSERTATION

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CHAPTER I

Backgrounds of Twentieth Century Criticism

At the time of Melville's death in 1891, the condition of literary criticism in America was amorphous. So dominant had become the demands of a journalism that catered to a flourishing middle-class public determined to achieve an easy method to "culture," that the literary critic of this period, the eighties and nineties, devised an artificial tradition by which he could protect himself against the democratic society with which he was acutely dissatisfied. This tradition was, therefore, conservative in nature. Its values, based on customary taste and training, were selected primarily as a refuge against both the contemporary American society and the contemporary literature.\(^1\) It was presumably devoted to literature - to English and classical literature almost exclusively. In American literature it considered only those established names of the past - Bryant, Longfellow, Whittier, Holmes, Lowell - which persisted through "the inertia of reputation."\(^2\) The method of this criticism was that of biography and history, and its distinguishing feature "was that it was not evaluative criticism but affection pure and simple."\(^3\)

The few books on American literature which had been published up

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to this period attest to the method; they were almost entirely of a historical and biographical nature. The criticism itself is evidence of the atrophying effects of the tradition; it was "anemic with gentry; it hardly rose above the level of gossip about books."^5

American literature continued to receive this treatment well into the twentieth century. The gradual development of realism in literature, the political, economic, and social effects of World War I which renewed the sense of a vigorous American nationalism, the new discoveries in such extra-literary areas of knowledge as sociology, psychology, anthropology, and aesthetics - all of these forces combined to change the status of American literature and to encourage great activity in American literary criticism. With the twentieth century, it seemed as though "the modern consciousness had at last become conscious of itself in literature, and this consciousness demanded that literary work be assimilated in relation to a great many different and complicated interests."^6

In the last decade of the nineteenth century, however, the origins of twentieth century criticism are discernible. There existed, at this time, two general attitudes toward American literature: the academic and the non-academic. In the public schools and the universities -

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especially the latter - the conservative tradition had become so entrenched that the struggle for the recognition of American literature as an expression of a national spirit, a struggle which had been continuing since the early days of the nation, had all but expired. Institutions of learning and the professorial powers of such institutions had declined almost completely to recognize the national development of American literature; instead, they "insisted upon measuring American writers by British standards," claiming that "American literature was a branch of English letters, a subordinate, if locally interesting expression of the Anglo-Saxon spirit." The study of American literature was "a mere footnote to English departments; and it was sometimes even neglected in high schools."

The academic method of the study of literature at this time was derived principally from the techniques of German historical research. This method tried to impose upon the study of literature that scientific treatment, with its thoroughness, its objectivity, its rigorous exactitude in factual data, which American historians, profoundly influenced by the German method, had tried to impose on the study of history. It is little wonder, therefore, that the first volumes of American


8. Jones, op. cit., p. 79.
9. Ibid., p. 97.
"criticism" were, in reality historical studies of American literature, and it is less wonder that the figures who received the most attention were those whose reputations had been firmly established.

On the other hand, outside the academy, a struggle of broad and deep proportions was beginning. It is primarily in this struggle that twentieth century criticism has its roots, for it was not a struggle restricted to literature and criticism; it was a struggle that gradually developed into a war against the conservative tradition. "On the one side, the defenders of various antiquated faiths, by no means in agreement with each other; on the other hand, the exponents of modern tendencies, their mutual antagonisms unresolved even in their conflicts with the traditionalists."11 It soon became obvious that these critical wars were not just aesthetic debates; they involved social, political, moral, and religious philosophies; they were conflicts between ways of life, between classes and between attitudes toward American culture.

Although it remained singularly aloof from this struggle, the university, nevertheless, was more closely allied with the adherents of tradition. The men who produced the "discreet though really unprincipled impressionism that passed for criticism"12 at this time were either the historical scholar, the amateur scholar, or the dilletante, who, if not directly affiliated with the academy, were close kin. In addition, these men held power in the organs of literary criticism - The Atlantic Monthly, Scribner's, Harper's, The North American Review, The Century -

the magazines which were responsible for official criticism. Thomas Bailey Aldrich, Bayard Taylor, Richard Henry Stoddard, E. C. Stedman, Grant White, Richard Watson Gilder, William Winter—all were exponents of the conservatism, the gentility, the moral didacticism which were the criteria by which most literary works of the time were judged, and their opinion was usually instrumental in establishing the success or failure of a literary work. The periodicals to which they contributed were the leading journals of literary criticism in America. "True, in the eighties and nineties there were periodicals like the Literary World, The Dial, and The Critic which catered to a restricted book-buying public, but the criticism in these less popular magazines is hardly to be differentiated from that in the popular monthlies."¹³ Not primarily critics, however, many of these men were also essayists, poets, moralists, and their endeavors in other genres were marked with the same characteristics which saturated their critical perceptions.

On the other hand, this period saw the incipient rebellion against the conservative gentility which these men epitomized. Other creators of literature, strongly influenced by currents from abroad, were producing pictures of American life which were shockingly antithetical to that concept of America which the tradition had fostered. Applying the romantic idealism of Emerson and Whitman to an examination of conditions as they existed, these men were precursors of both the literature and the literary criticism which proliferated in the twentieth century. Most important, perhaps, among them was William Dean Howells, who was

¹³ Lutwack, _op. cit._, p. 271.
eminently exhortative in gaining recognition for realism. Much of his best critical work, particularly his Criticism and Fiction (1891), which "offers, in its disconnected and unpretentious way, some of the wisest advice that can be given to critics,\textsuperscript{15} and his Literature and Life (1902), was a rebuttal of the vituperative attacks against realism by the "genteel" critics. "The range of his articles included Spanish and Italian writers, French and German ones. He was one of the first enthusiasts on Russian fiction and an intelligent champion of Tolstoi. More than any of his compatriots who write about literature or teach it in colleges, he avoided adopting the provincial prejudices of English writers and he understood the originality of the American novel should lie \ldots{} in profiting freely from three or four European literary traditions, and not from one alone."\textsuperscript{16}

In this war of traditions, the century-old question of whether or not America had developed a national literature assumed new, more dynamic implications. And so urgent, on a non-academic level, became this question of a useable past, that the universities themselves were forced to recognize its validity. Not without a long struggle did the academicians concede that American literature had enough stature to be studied as an independent subject in the college curriculum. \textsuperscript{14}William B. Cairns at the University of Wisconsin seems to have been the sole professor of American literature until 1917, when Fred Lewis Pattee was granted a similar title at Pennsylvania State College, thus increasing

\textsuperscript{14} For a complete discussion of the battle over realism, see Lutwack, \textit{op. cit.}, Chapter VIII, pp. 400-437.
\textsuperscript{15} Henri Peyre, \textit{Writers and Their Critics} (Ithaca, N. Y., 1944), p. 68.
\textsuperscript{16} \textit{Ibid.}
by 100 per cent the number of chairs specifically devoted to the national letters."¹⁷ Conservatism, tradition, and Anglophilism withstood the encroachments of those who advocated a recognition of American literature as expression of a national spirit even after great strides had been made by American writers in the fields of the novel and the short story, and by American critics in a criticism that was shaped by the new forces of sociology, psychology, and aesthetics.

The pressure for this recognition was gradually intensified by those who were associated with the academy itself. The publication, for example, of The Reinterpretation of American Literature in 1928 was a collaboration of scholars who were interested in achieving respectability for the subject which Departments of English has traditionally eschewed. In 1929, American Literature, a quarterly magazine of American literary research, was established, and in 1930, an autonomous group of American literary scholars was instituted within the conservative body of the Modern Language Association itself. There is little question, at the present writing, as to which way the pendulum has swung. The establishment of courses in American literature in colleges and universities throughout the country, the preponderance of graduate students who are interested in American literature, testify to the fact that the academy has accepted it as a proper subject for study; and the question of a national literature, consequently, has become less important, less controversial.¹⁸

It is interesting to note, however, that the concerted efforts on the part of those scholars and students of American literature to achieve an academic respectability for it, to give it a recognized status independent of its Anglo-Saxon origins, was a movement in the universities which emphasized subject matter rather than method. The aim was not to study literature as literature, or to incorporate into the study of literature the critical ideas which were exposited in the extra-academic literary criticism being written in America. The aim was merely to gain acceptance in the academy for American literature; the method of treatment of this literature remained essentially historical and biographical, and this method, with its pretensions of science, with its pedantry and antiquarianism, was hardly impugned.

The Reinterpretation of American Literature, for example, indicates a peculiar ambivalence in attitude; on the one hand, it restates the importance of literary history and biography; on the other hand, it pleads for a closer relationship between literary history and literary criticism. Norman Foerster, who edited the volume, was a follower of Irving Babbitt and Paul Elmer Moore, leading figures in the New Humanist movement, a movement which has been described as setting "its face sternly against the most characteristic movements of the modern spirit." His contributions to this volume illustrate this ambiguous attitude. "A thoroughgoing historian," he writes in his introduction,

19. This treatment of American literature is discussed in an article by Hyatt Waggoner, "American Literature Re-Examined," University of Kansas City Review, XIV (Winter, 1947) 114-116. This article introduces "a series of critical re-evaluations of the chief American writers" published by the magazine.
"must also be a critic. Hence, as we deplore criticism unconcerned with knowledge, so we must deplore knowledge unconcerned with criticism." And in his full-length article for the volume, he writes, "It is time for us to abandon the paradox involved in our theory that American literature is only a branch of English literature while in practice we treat it as a thing apart." But later, in the same essay, he declares, "Although literary history is of course only a department of general history, we have egregiously failed to keep pace with the historians." Professor Pattee, in the leading essay of the collection, which had been previously published in 1924, indicates the same conflicting attitude. The essay, entitled "A Call for a Literary Historian," lists "the fundamental ten commandments" for a history of American literature. These commandments are predominantly a restatement of the methods of literary history, but the eighth one acknowledges the necessity of literary criticism. "The new historian must be a literary critic of poise and acuteness," Pattee wrote, "for if American literature has suffered from any single inadequateness that inadequateness has been in its criticism."

In recent years, however, this conflict has been more thoroughly aired, and the chasm between the university scholar and historian and

22. Ibid., p. 23.
24. Ibid., p. 19 ff.
the non-academic literary critic has narrowed. The university has been forced, in a sense, to recognize the prodigious activity of literary critics who do not belong to it; and, on the other hand, many literary critics have been drawn, as teachers, into the academy. As, in the early part of the century, intellectual life in America expanded, there was a concomitant interest in literary criticism in extra-university areas. Such reputable journals as The New York Times, The Chicago Daily News, The Boston Evening Transcript assigned increased amounts of space to book reviews and criticism, and some of these newspapers established supplements devoted entirely to these departments. "The founding of such weekly journals of opinion as The New Republic, The Nation, The Freeman, The Masses, The Commonweal, and The New Masses and the establishment of The Saturday Review of Literature gave outlet to a number of older and younger critics, and by a gradual discrimination of their aesthetic and social views, drew fairly sharp lines between opposing political and critical camps." The publication of numerous anthologies of literary criticism and discussions of critical problems testified to the increased interest in the subject; and finally, the multitude of "little" magazines, some of them ephemeral, and most of

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24. Rene Wellek and Austin Warren, Theory of Literature (New York, 1949). Chapter XX of this work as well as Chapter VI of Jones, op. cit. describes the conditions of contemporary American scholarship, in addition to raising important questions concerning the conflict between literary history and literary criticism.


26. Frederick J. Hoffman, Charles Allen, Carolyn Ulrich, The Little Magazine (Princeton, N. J., 1947). This volume is an excellent supplement to F. L. Mott's A History of American Magazines, a work which only goes as far as the eighties of the last century.
them primarily interested in the presentation of avant garde stories and poetry, also produced new perspectives in the judgment of literature.

Thus, criticism today has gradually become more closely related to the academy than it was in the early part of the century. In addition to the recognition accorded to American literature, courses in creative writing - the short story, poetry, the essay - have become embodied in the curricula of English departments; 27 and many poet-critics, novelist-critics have found niches in the heretofore strictly scholarly atmosphere of the universities; in addition, many professors turned from literary history and scholarship to the tasks of creative criticism. If we examine, for example, the careers of prominent contemporary literary critics, we realize how greatly the breach between the university and extra-university American intellectual life has narrowed. For many of them are professors of literature, specializing in some aspect of creative writing or literary criticism. John Crowe Ransom, Austin Warren, Rene Wellek, Cleanth Brooks, Yvor Winters, Mark Schorer, Richard Chase, Newton Arvin - to name a few - are all affiliated with the academy.

The quarterly magazines, which the interest in literary criticism engendered, continue on a non-academic level; but along with such journals as Partisan Review, Hudson Review, and the late Chimera, there are such quarterlies as Kenyon Review, Sewanee Review, University of

27. Some universities have gone so far as to accept creative writing as partial fulfillment for graduate degrees. The University of Michigan accepts work in creative writing toward a Master's Degree; the University of Iowa accepts it toward a Doctor's Degree.
Kansas City Review, Accent, the recently established American Quarterly, all of which are subsidized, more or less, by the academic institutions which publish them. Indeed, there are more quarterlies at the present time which bear the imprint of a university than there are independent quarterlies.

The emphasis and importance given to literary criticism within the last twenty-five years has frequently corroborated the idea that this century in American literature is a century, like the eighteenth of England, of criticism rather than creative productivity. This idea, of course, is a controversial one; but there is little doubt that the amount of literary criticism produced in this country has been great and valuable. English men of letters, who have heretofore generally patronized American creative effort, now generally praise American critical effort; so much so, for example, that V. S. Pritchett, an English critic and novelist, has said of his contemporary F. R. Leavis that he is closer "to American than to English criticism today."

The development of American literary criticism may be analyzed as follows:

1. The struggle for the recognition of a national literature and the disintegration of the conservative tradition resulted in the gradual acceptance of American literature as a respectable study in the universities. With this acceptance came the revaluation of American literature and a series of revivals whereby certain neglected figures achieved new prominence and stature.

Nor has the process of revaluation and revival been restricted to American literature. Under the impetus of the so-called New Criticism, an approach to literary criticism based primarily on close textual reading, new interpretations have been given to the classics of English literature, and Continental literature has established for itself a more solid place in the development of American literary criticism. In English literature, Shakespearean criticism has received added attention by the New Critics, and the seventeenth century has been studied from new perspectives, with special interest being accorded to the Metaphysical poets - Donne, Herbert, Crashaw, and Vaughan. There has been a revived interest in Trollope, Conrad, George Eliot, and Jane Austen. In Continental literature, attention has been focussed on French poetry, particularly the Symbolist movement and its Anglo-Saxon ramifications, and on such figures as Gide, Proust, and Dostoevsky; Franz Kafka, through the amount of interpretation devoted to him, has almost achieved the stature of a modern classic.

2. The development of psychology as an important branch of learning contributed to the development of literary criticism. With the introduction of Freudian thought into America in the early part of the century and the interest in the work of his European colleagues, particularly Jung, Rank, and Adler, psychology and psychoanalysis became a new means for critical interpretation. Such interpretation, of course, was a modern variation of the older, established biographical method. It differed, however, in that the scholarly biographer relied almost exclusively on historical data, whereas the psychological or psychoanalytic critic attempted to relate literary and creative work to the
psyche of its creator in terms of Freudian theory; or to study the psychological types and laws inherent in those works, by the same terms.

3. The increasing importance of sociology, anthropology, and economics had marked effects on both the creative writer and the literary critic. For the literary critic, economics, sociology, and anthropology became still another means for literary interpretation. Such interpretation attempted to study literature in terms of an expanding knowledge of society and culture; or to study the economic roots of literature. Loosely called "sociological," this type of criticism focusses on the socio-economic status of the writer as it is inextricably related to the audience he addresses, or the socio-economic laws inherent in the work he produces. Although such criticism also entails biography, it usually widens into a study of the whole milieu from which the literary man comes and in which he lived; or, in reverse order, literature itself, used as social document, can be made to yield the outlines of social history. 29

4. With the development of "the history of ideas," the study of literature in its relation to philosophy took on new qualities. For the historian of ideas considers that literature is primarily an agent for the expression of "ideas," and thereby reflects the history of philosophy. Criticism which has been produced with this principle in mind has been written mostly by philosophers who have attempted to study, in addition to the systematic interpretations of life and the cosmos, the derivative and creative works of poets and men of letters. In this

country, the figure most eminently associated with "the history of ideas" has been Arthur O. Lovejoy, and the publication which has concentrated on it has been the *Journal of the History of Ideas*.

5. The New Criticism, rebelling against all interpretations of literature which are extrinsic to the work of art itself and attempting to study literature through close textual reading and exegesis, has perhaps had the most profound effect on twentieth century criticism. The call for a New Criticism was first made by Professor Joel E. Spingarn in 1910 in an address entitled "The New Criticism." The movement, if it may be so called, has since retained that title, although the ideas expounded by John Crowe Ransom in a volume of the same title (1941) differ somewhat from Spingarn's. Because the New Criticism enters the realm of aesthetics and gives important emphasis to form and structure, it has also been called formalistic criticism. Although their work has contributed enormously to the development of American criticism, the New Critics are constantly engaged in a sort of internecine warfare; and the term "New Critic" has been loosely used to designate a variety of critics whose fundamental attitudes toward their profession are widely disparate. For example, in addition to such figures as Ransom, Tate, Blackmur, R. P. Warren, Cleanth Brooks, Yvor Winters, "the most legitimate descendant of the Babbitt-More dynasty," Morton Dauwen Zabel, Phillip Rahv, both of whom tend toward a socio-psychological interpretation of literature, and Kenneth Burke, with his "perspective by incongruity" have also been categorized as New Critics.

These five major forces have shaped the direction of twentieth
century and contemporary criticism. There still exists, however, a two-camped situation in which literary history and literary criticism are in general opposition to one another. The historical approach is still primarily the academic one, the approach of scholarship; but since the proponents of literary criticism, with their multifold methods of interpretation, have invaded the universities, the battleground has become the universities, and the issues have ramified into the great framework of education itself.

Out of this critical opposition and ferment has come a series of spectacular revivals and revaluations in American literature. New verdicts on Emerson, Thoreau, Poe, and Whitman have been presented; and the reputations of such figures as Hawthorne, Melville, and Henry James have been given revitalized study. At the present time a prodigious amount of material is being published on F. Scott Fitzgerald. Even in these revaluations, however, the battle between the traditionalists and the anti-traditionalists persists. The traditionalist is pre-occupied with literary history and biography; he has almost "divorced himself from criticism." And the results of his efforts are the continuous unearthing of factual data, sometimes without any critical value. The magazine American Literature illustrates the traditionalist point of view; for, despite the occasional publication of a critical or literary article, its pages are primarily filled with the carefully documented articles of the pattern set by PMLA and other strictly scholarly journals. The papers read before the American literature section of

MIA still remain literary history rather than criticism. In the universities the method of study imposed on American literature remains essentially the traditional one, and the graduate student is still required to take a course in Anglo-Saxon and is still disciplined by the three-by-five card file.

There have been, however, noteworthy dents in the traditionalist pattern. The attempt to study literature through its sociological roots has been begrudgingly accepted by the traditionalist, and much American scholarship within recent years has been devoted to the "sociology of literary history." More and more volumes have been produced illustrating the relationship between cultural and historical forces, and such volumes as *On Native Grounds*, *American Renaissance*, and the recent *Virgin Land* are landmarks in the merging paths of literary history and literary criticism.

On the other hand, the "little" magazines and literary quarterlies continue to present critical rather than historical material; and they have so emphasized the importance of contemporary literature and the various non-historical interpretations that they have been frequently accused of ignoring that fact that men had written and criticized before this century.

31. A definite effort has been made by William Riley Parker, present editor of *PMLA*, to liven its pages. Critical articles and articles on contemporary literature now occasionally appear in the magazine.
34. William Arrowsmith, "The Partisan Review and American Writing," *Hudson Review* (Winter, 1949). This is a highly critical attack on the *Partisan Review*, but much of what it says is applicable to the other literary quarterlies.
It becomes a question, then, of which camp is responsible for the prodigious activity of revival and revaluation. Which camp, and what factors, for example, generated the marked contemporary interest in Melville, James, Hawthorne, Scott Fitzgerald? Is the respectable status accorded to American literature responsible for these revivals, or are they spontaneous results, springing from the less tangible, intellectual, cultural, social upheavals which are part of the twentieth century? Or, are these revivals merely fashions in literature, and if so, what, in the lives and works of the literary figures who have been revived and revaluated, made them fashionable?

Although the work of the literary historian, like the work of the historian himself, is a continuous process of discovering new material and clarifying the past, irrespective of the importance of the literary figures involved, he is not immune to the sway of fashion. The Melville revival, for example, illustrates how scholarship can succumb to fashion. Although it was a book by a professor - Raymond Weaver - which did much to start this revival, until 1928, when the revival had become well-established, Melville was almost ignored by scholarship. After that year, however, the scholars took over, so to speak, and proceeded to study Melville with diligence. The result has been that Melville has since become an exceedingly fashionable figure in the world of scholarship.35

On the non-academic level, however, literary revivals may have strong sociological roots. That almost all of these revivals have taken

35. For a brief discussion of fashions in both literature and scholarship, see Jones, op. cit., p. 179 ff.
place within the last thirty years, i.e., since World War I, and that many of the figures who have been revived and revaluated suffered serious critical neglect both during and after their lifetimes, is more than coincidental.

The cultural and intellectual ferment stirring in this country in the period following World War I (the period starting at 1915) had profound repercussions in American criticism. Whereas the conservative critic hesitated to criticize openly the values of American life and, indeed, devised a tradition, artificial and essentially un-democratic, to protect himself against these values, the twentieth century critic began vigorously to examine and to question them. The literature of realism was instrumental in promoting this examination and criticism, for realism, as a presentation of American life and values, had won its battle for acceptance. The result of this explicit criticism of American values was that the American intellectual, the non-academic critic, felt himself isolated and alienated from his society, ignored by the bourgeois Philistinism he ventured to inveigh against and eschewed by the academician who still clung tenaciously to the vestiges of the conservative tradition. To assuage this sense of alienation, the critic-intellectual sought to find in the canon of American literature figures with whom he could identify himself. The divorce between the American intellectual and the American public has "never anywhere been so complete as in the America of 1910-1940, when all writers of any worth

36. Henri Peyre, op. cit. "America has enjoyed a true critical renaissance in the last twelve or fifteen years; no province of literature attracts today so many eager talents as criticism, not even poetry." p. 285.
have been opposed to the established order, have satirized the reigning values or have contemptuously ignored them."\(^{37}\) The critic-intellectual needed to find in American literature those who had suffered the same alienation he was suffering. It is not peculiar, therefore, that he should find, in rummaging in the past, an affinity with such figures as Melville, Poe, Whitman, and James, figures who had suffered at the hands of their contemporaries, who, in their writings expressed the kindred emotions of despair and disillusionment which twentieth century intellectuals were enduring; for "in no country, not even in France when Flaubert heaped invectives upon the bourgeois or in England when Matthew Arnold assailed the Philistines, did writers of the middle of the last century live in so bitter and tragic an isolation, harshly rejected by a narrow and moralizing criticism," as in America.\(^{38}\)

The interest in Melville, in particular, exemplifies this tendency to seek affinity. For Melville, too, was misunderstood by his generation, suffered from the censorious treatment of his contemporaries. Here was a figure whom the non-academic intellectual and critic could take to his figurative breast and embrace as a fellow exile, a man he

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38. *Ibid.* For further discussion of the isolation of the poet, see William Van O'Connor's *Sense and Sensibility in Modern Poetry* (Chicago, 1948), Chapter XI. O'Connor touches briefly on the Melville revival. "An Englishman," he writes, "caught the explanation of the recovered reputation. Melville's contemporaries tended to see the world as a 'perfectly clear-cut and comprehensible affair ...We feel that Melville's oceans and Leviathans are credible symbols. That man hunts through a great deep who looks into himself.' In Melville the moderns found an artist profoundly concerned not only with the metaphysics of evil but with its representation in pervasively meaningful symbols." p. 97. The Englishman to whom O'Connor refers is undoubtedly E. L. Grant-Watson. Cf. Chapter II.
could extol with a kind of esoteric passion because Melville, too, could be interpreted as a victim of isolation and loneliness, shouting, in his wilderness, imprecations against a society and culture which disowned him. To understand this hypothesis more clearly, one need only read some of the criticism of Melville by his contemporaries, and that which has been produced by the literary quarterlies of this century.

The problem here shall be an examination of the Melville revival, an examination of the treatment accorded Melville by both the academic and non-academic critic of the twentieth century. It is hoped by such an examination to shed light on the process of revival and revaluation, and to set forth possible reasons as to why this process has become a kind of literary phenomenon of the twentieth century.

39. For such criticism, see Hugh Hetherington, The Reputation of Herman Melville in America, unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Michigan, 1933.
CHAPTER II

British Origins of the Melville Revival

In a review of the Melville revival of the 1920's, two important conclusions become apparent: there is sufficient evidence to show that British critics and literary men were more instrumental than Americans in instigating the phenomenal renewal of interest in Melville during the period; and it was the British critics who recognized in Melville the author of *Moby Dick*, rather than the author of "sea tales" and the "man who lived among the cannibals." It is the latter revaluation which lifted *Moby Dick* from comparative neglect among Melville's works and placed it among the world's masterpieces of fiction. The vast amount of critical, historical, and biographical material on Melville from the twenties to the present is also a result of that revaluation. Because of it, *Moby Dick* became Melville's first claim to greatness.1

There is little question that the revival began in 1919, the centennial of Melville's birth. Hetherington writes that that year "marked the real beginning of the revival."2 Riegel, who, in his study of Melville's reputation, tries to show a series of revivals dating from the 1880's, says that "the last revival began with the Melville

1. Anderson, however, disagrees with the importance accorded *Moby Dick*. "The survival value of Melville's reputation," he writes, "lies in the fact that he was the literary discoverer of the South Seas..." Charles R. Anderson, *Melville in the South Seas* (New York, 1935) Introduction. For further discussion of Anderson's work cf. Chapter III.

Centenary in 1919 and still continues." Van Doren, who mentions
Melville very briefly in his chapter, "Contemporaries of Cooper," in
Cambridge History of American Literature (1917) but compiled the first
detailed bibliography of Melville for the same history, has also said
that "what is called the Melville revival may be said to have begun
with the Melville Centennial in August, 1919. And the British critic,
Leonard Woolf, in a review of Melville's sea tales published in 1923,
writes that in 1919 "the ashes of Melville's reputation began to glow."

With the publication of Raymond Weaver's biography of Melville in
1921, the revival had grown considerably, and after that year, the

ature, III, 195-204 (May, 1931).
4. Herman Melville, Billy Budd, Benito Cereno, and The Enchanted
Isles, with a foreword by Carl Van Doren, (The Readers Club, New York,
1942). In this foreword Van Doren gives a brief history of his ac­
quaintance with Melville. He was introduced to Moby Dick by Wilbert
Snow. "I did not know till later," he writes, "that there had been and
was a Melville cult in England, with such notable admirers as Robert
Louis Stevenson, James M. Barrie, and Masefield...American criticism
and scholarship paid little attention to Melville....I compiled the
first detailed bibliography of Melville (1917) and encouraged Raymond
Weaver to undertake the first biography (1921). What is called the
Melville revival in America may be said to have begun with the Melville
Centennial in August, 1919, which Weaver celebrated by an article in
The Nation, of which I was literary editor, and F. J. Mather, later in
the month by two articles in The Review. Within two or three years,
particularly after Weaver had published his biography, everybody was
reading Melville or claiming to have read him. Throughout the decade
of the 20's, Melville was subject to many swimming enthusiasms. During
the 1930's he came to be a favorite subject of many scholarly investi­
gators. In 1921 I had roused questions by writing that nobody knew
American literature who did not know Melville (The American Novel). In
1940, revising the book in which this statement appeared, I dropped it
as now too obvious."
5. Leonard Woolf, "Herman Melville," Nation and Athenaeum, XXXIII,
688 (Sept. 1, 1923).
6. Van Doren, op. cit.
amount of attention given to Melville and his works in books and articles testifies to its vigor. As Riegel declared, it was still thriving in 1931, and it still continues to thrive—to such an extent that the Melville Society, established in 1945, could announce in 1947 that its first objective, to "stimulate the study of Melville's life and works," can almost be said "to have been achieved, and present activities appear only a foretaste of what lies ahead." 7

Despite some skeptical assertions concerning its vitality, the revival persisted. As early as 1921, when it had already gained impetus, a critic, reviewing an edition of the sea tales for The Freeman, wrote rather flippantly, "Well, it was only a matter of time.... Next year, Melville will have been forgotten again... But for the next six months there is to be a Melville boom. Ishmael is to emerge at last." 8 In his 1923 review, Mr. Woolf implies a similar attitude, attributing the whole revival to the fact that "some clever person" saw a profitable venture in the coincidental occurrence of the Melville centenary in 1919 and the decision on the part of the "great American reading public that they must have works of fiction with the plot located in the South Seas," and that "Melville had not only been born exactly a century ago, but had been one of the first persons to write a book of fiction with

the plot located in the required part of the world." In 1947, however, the Melville Society can triumphantly write that "while only a few years ago many critics were willing to declare that the so-called Melville boom represented a temporary and esoteric enthusiasm for a fifth-rate literary figure, Melville scholars continue to multiply, and the world of scholarship is making a rapidly enlargening place for Melville in its calculations."^10

Although it is noteworthy that the revival began in 1919, and that the centenary may have been a direct cause, the British had always had more serious interest in Melville than American critics and historians. Riegel, Braswell,^11 and Hetherington have all shown the extent of Melville's popularity from as early as the 1880's until 1933. But none of the studies of Melville's reputation has examined closely enough the strong British influence on the origin of the revival in the 1920's, nor intimated to what extent the British have been influential in the revaluation of Moby Dick.

9. Woolf claims to have derived this theory from "Melville's American editor." Since Melville's only American editor was Arthur Stedman - at least to the date of Woolf's review - and Stedman was a Melville enthusiast, it is unlikely that the information came from him. It is probable that Woolf meant Melville's American biographer, in which case he would be referring to Raymond Weaver. Woolf might also be referring to the great vogue in America at this time of South Sea fiction, a vogue stimulated by the exceedingly popular novel of Frederick O'Brien, White Shadows in the South Seas (1919), an account of life in the Marquesas.

10. The Melville Society News Letter, III, 1 (May 15, 1947). The anonymous critic of The Freeman wrote: "His (Melville's) talent was quite as great as that of a dozen seventh-rate poets and romancers who had been his contemporaries."

As early as 1891, the year of Melville's death, there was American acknowledgment of the exceptional British interest in Melville. The obituary notices in both the New York Times (Oct. 2, 1891) and the New York Tribune (Oct. 1, 1891) mention this fact. Although the writer for the Tribune asserts that Melville's seclusion was "a matter of personal choice," he admits that "much has been written, particularly in English journals, concerning the alleged neglect and disregard of Mr. Melville by contemporary authors." The writer for the Times strikes the same note. "To the ponderous and quarterly British reviews..." he writes, "the author of 'Typee' was about the most interesting of literary Americans, and men who made few exceptions to the British rule of not reading an American book not only made Melville one of them, but paid him the further compliment of discussing him as an unquestionable literary force." In 1921, in one of the earliest American articles heralding the revival, Hudson writes, "Continued protest from England concerning American disregard of Melville's memory has had some effect." Even our critic of The Freeman generously says in 1921 that "it was only in England that Melville has been justly appreciated."  

The most pointed summary of English interest, however, may be found in Mr. Strachey's review in The Spectator of Weaver's biography of Melville, in which he notes, with slight reproof, even Weaver's lack of awareness of the strong British influence on Melville's fame. Mr.

12. The Critic, 203 (Oct. 17, 1891) also published an obituary of Melville's death. This notice, however, consists of an excerpt from the notice in the New York Times.


Strachey sums up as follows:

Before I leave the subject of Melville, I should like to point out that the latest biographer of the great American does not seem to realize how strong the feeling about Melville has always been in England. I well remember some thirty years ago writing a review in The Spectator on a new edition of Melville’s works which had just appeared. A reference thereto shows that a Melville boom was then proceeding. But this is not all. I remember that when my article appeared a lady of letters who could remember the fifties remarked to me that she was glad to see people were reading Melville again; 'I can't tell you how enthusiastic we all were, young and old, at the end of the forties and beginning of the fifties over Typee, Omoo, and Moby Dick. There was quite a furore over Melville in those days. All the young people worshipped him.'

The number of other Englishmen who were Melville enthusiasts is indeed impressive. They might be described, as Thorp described them, as "a cult." Among them were Robert Louis Stevenson, who commends Melville highly in his letters; Sir Alfred Lyall, to whom Augustine Birrell acknowledges indebtedness for acquainting him with Melville’s works; and Henry S. Salt, who edited the sea tales in 1892.

15. J. St. L. Strachey, "Herman Melville," The Spectator, 559-560, CXXVIII (May 6, 1922). The review of which Strachey speaks was "Herman Melville," The Spectator, LXX, 858-859 (June 24, 1893); it was a review of Typee in which he compares Melville with Stevenson.


17. Much of the material used by Salt in his editions had previously been published in an article "Marquesan Melville," Gentleman’s Magazine, CCLXXII, 248-457 (March, 1892) and was reprinted in Eclectic Magazine, n.s. LV, 517-523 (April, 1892). Salt, who did much to keep Melville’s fame alive in England, had published another article on Melville a few years earlier, "Herman Melville," Scottish Art Review, II, 186-190 (June-December, 1889). In this article he does not express the enthusiasm he later showed for Moby Dick in his review of Weaver’s biography in Literary Guide (May, 1922).
Russell, to whom Melville dedicated *John Marr and Other Sailors* (1888),18 James Thomson, Barrie, and Masefield19 were also admirers of Melville.

There were, naturally, some staunch American admirers, but American enthusiasm for Melville was neither as widespread nor as consistent as British. Arthur Stedman, Melville's literary executor, tried to renew interest in him in the year immediately following his death by publishing two articles20 and editing a four-volume edition of the sea tales. William P. Trent's *A History of American Literature, 1607-1865* (1903) is perhaps the only early history of American literature which devotes any space to Melville, and this fact may be related to Trent's editing of *Typee*, published in Boston the previous year. Titus M. Coan,21 Charles Warren Stoddard, himself a Polynesian adventurer,22 who was instrumental in stirring Stevenson's interest in Melville, and the Canadian Archibald MacMechan23 made some effort to secure for Melville's work

18. In an article in *The North American Review* (Feb., 1892) entitled "A Claim for American Literature," Russell declares that "Until Richard H. Dana and Herman Melville wrote, the commercial sailor of Great Britain and the United States was without representation in literature.... They were the first to lift the hatch and show the world what passes in a ship's forecastle...."


22. Stoddard in his *South Sea Idyls* (New York, 1892) devotedly traced the ramblings of Melville and Long Ghost over Tahiti.

the position they felt it deserved. But the attitude of the American literary world toward Melville is most clearly expressed by Frank Jewett Mather Jr., who published the first two important biographical articles on Melville in this century. In a review of Lewis Mumford's biography of Melville published in 1929, Mather discloses the American attitude in respect to his own earlier attempts to stir an interest in Melville. In describing his activity in Melville's behalf, Mather claims that about 1904, when he proposed "a modest biography in one volume" of Melville to an American publisher "whose list is heaviest with our classics," the answer was "friendly but decisive: Herman Melville was a hopelessly bad risk, and one that no prudent publisher could undertake even to the extent of a few hundred dollars."

It is ironically surprising, in view of this information, that the revival, in addition to its new emphasis on *Moby Dick*, should center so greatly on the biographical problems of Melville, and should disinter such of Melville's works as were previously ignored. Or, as Riegel expressed it in 1931, that the new interest was "not so much belle-lettristic as biographical" and "that it was the biographical interest that was responsible for the reclamation of the literary 'failures'" - the previously unpopular books, *Mardi*, *Ferre*, and *The Confidence Man*.

Other evidence of British interest in Melville should not be overlooked. A number of Melville's editors were British. The first British

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editor was Henry S. Salt, who edited the British edition of the sea tales in 1892, the same year as Stedman's edition. W. Clark Russell, an English friend and correspondent of Melville, edited Typee and Omoo in 1904 and 1911. Other British editors include Ernest Rhys, who edited the sea tales for Everyman's library in 1907, 1908; and Viola Meynell, who edited Moby Dick for the Oxford University Press as one of the series of Oxford World's Classics (1920). By the time of Miss Meynell's edition, however, the interest in Melville had been revived, and the project of an edition of his complete works, edited by Weaver and published by Constable & Co., a London firm, 1922-1924, undoubtedly was underway. The Constable edition, printed in a limited number of 750 copies, is still the standard edition of Melville's work, although it is being supplanted by a complete American edition, three volumes of which have already been published.

Nor did the British neglect the Melville centenary in 1919. In America the centenary was heralded by Weaver's article and the two articles by Mather in The Review. In England, in the same month these articles were published, two tributes commemorating the anniversary followed, one in the Literary Supplement of the London Times, and the other, an article by F. C. Owlett in The Bookman.

In the first article the orthodox judgments on Melville as a writer of sea stories, with particular emphasis on Typee and Omoo, are presented. In Owlett's article, however, there is praise for Moby Dick

the like of which it would be difficult to find in any American estimation of that book up to that time. True, the article does not attempt to analyze the book as an allegory, nor is it in anyway profoundly critical in its analysis, but the praise is lavish. "One feels the utter futility of any attempt to convey a just idea of that marvelous tale," Owlett writes. "'In that wild beautiful romance' - the words are Mr. Masefield's - 'Herman Melville seems to have spoken the very secret of the sea and to have drawn into his tale all the magic, all the sadness, all the wild joys of many waters. It stands quite alone; quite unlike any book known to me. It strikes a note which no other sea writer has ever struck." Heaping his own encomiums upon Masefield's, Owlett concludes: "As far as I have been able to discover there has never been more than one opinion touching its greatness. Writing people...unites in claiming Moby Dick as the finest sea book ever written in English. That a finer will ever be written is simply not to be conceived. The crown of this king of the sea writers is as secure as Shakespeare's own."29

In 1919, D. H. Lawrence contributed an article to the English Review,30 in which he proposed to deal with Melville and Dana as writers of the sea; unfortunately, however, his propensity for digression takes him far afield from the subjects of his study. This article does not appear in his Studies in Classic American Literature (1923), in which

two extended chapters are devoted to Melville; it does attest, however, to the fact that Lawrence, like so many of his British contemporaries, was aware, in 1919, of the stature of Melville as an American writer and coupled his name with that of the well-known Dana’s.

Two articles of importance were published in England on Melville in 1920. Both are significant because they indicate the incipient revaluation of Melville as the author of Moby Dick rather than as that of the earlier, more popular sea tales.

Miss Viola Meynell’s entire article is devoted to a discussion of Moby Dick. It describes the novel as a sea tale and does not attempt to analyze the allegory; and although the praise is unstinted, it becomes apparent that Miss Meynell is merely promulgating an interest in a book which she felt was theretofore seriously neglected. In referring to the centenary tribute which had appeared in the Literary Supplement of the London Times a few months earlier, she concludes her article on a note of reproof. "Great isolated fame Herman Melville must have in many an individual mind, which, having once known him, is then partly made of him forever. But how little Moby Dick is generally known is exemplified by a writer in the TLS recently, who, in a clever article on Herman Melville, did not even mention this book, as if his fame really rested on those better known and comparatively insignificant stories, Typee and Omoo. Though Moby Dick has been published in England and has been included in the Everyman series, it is at present out of print."

31. In the final collection of these studies, published in 1923, there is a chapter devoted exclusively to Melville as a writer of Typee and Omoo, and another chapter devoted to Moby Dick. Cf. Chapter IV for discussion of Lawrence on Melville.

The hint in her concluding sentence bore fruit, for later in the same year the Oxford University Press published *Moby Dick* in its series of Oxford World's Classics and Miss Meynell contributed the preface to this edition. In reviewing it for *The Athenaeum*, Augustine Birrell, bestowing on it rhapsodic praise, concludes with the note that since *Moby Dick* "is in the World's Classics and can be had for half a crown.... excuses of Ignorance or Concealment can no longer be urged on anyone's behalf in the High Court of Taste."\(^3\)

Two years later, in a review of the Standard Edition which Constable & Co. was then publishing, further light is shed on the status of *Moby Dick* and the significance of Miss Meynell's edition by H.M.T. (H. M. Tomlinson). He writes in the *Nation and Athenaeum* as follows:

Much that Melville had written was to be bought, including that one book which is as remarkable a prose narrative as there is in English, and is itself sufficient to justify the independence of the American republic...For it is little more than two years since Oxford University Press in the World's Classics published *Moby Dick* with a preface by Viola Meynell giving the White Whale just measure. That little edition dates the accession of Herman Melville.

As a consequence of the publication of that edition, he has been lifted out of the estimable company of oddities whose literary works we will not willingly let die but seldom read, into the company of the great....\(^4\)

H. M. T. goes on to relate his own introduction to *Moby Dick*.

"When I began to read *Moby Dick,*" he writes, "I did not believe it. Moreover, I had come to it late, for I had ridiculed at least one rare exciting rumor about it." Then, in an anecdotal vein, he describes how

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34. H. M. T., *Nation and Athenaeum*, XXXIII (April 7, 1923).
he got the editor of the magazine for which he was working interested in the book. The editor, being skeptical, H. M. T. casually left a copy of Moby Dick for him to read. In a little while he peeped in. The editor, he saw, "had passed hence. He was not writing politics; transfigured and tense, he was hunting a monster amid the shadows and the profounds that are quite beyond soundings. He was making noises of wonder, awe, delight...."

The importance of the second article, published in 1920 in The London Mercury by E. L. Grant-Watson, cannot be minimized. The British interest in Moby Dick had been kindled and the Oxford World's Classics edition was available. Grant-Watson's essay is one of the first in which Moby Dick is not considered merely as another romance of the sea, but is given interpretive analysis in which its symbolism and allegory are emphasized. The article, in essence, anticipates the innumerable articles of the same nature published on both Melville and Moby Dick during the revival and up to the present; it anticipates the tenor of many of the succeeding analyses and interpretations, and is, perhaps, the first article to touch upon the recurring theory of Melville's madness.

After a brief introduction, Grant-Watson launches into his, for that time, unorthodox exegesis:

36. Grant-Watson has also published a critical interpretation of Pierre, in which he analyzes the work from a moderately psychological point of view. "Pierre," New England Quarterly, III, 232 (April, 1930); and another in which he analyzes the symbolism of Billy Budd, "Melville's Testament of Acceptance," New England Quarterly, VI, 319-327 (June, 1933).
The Pequod, he writes, with her monomanic captain and all her crew is representative of his own (Melville's) genius, and in this particular sense that each character is deliberately symbolic of a complete and separate element...The interplay and struggle between them are but portrayals of the vehement impulsion and repercussion of a richly endowed spirit that draws inevitably and yet of its own volition towards the limit of human sanity.

The whale, too, is symbolic. "The symbol of the nameless thing that they pursue, he is the sensuous symbol of nature's beauty and terror." And the relationship between Ahab and the whale is thus further elucidated:

In this story the white whale is the symbol or mask of that outer mystery, which like a magnet, forever attracts, and in the end overwhelms the imagination. Ahab...is its counterpart. He is the incarnation of the active and courageous madness that lies brooding and fierce, ready to spring to command, within the man of genius. He is the atheistical captain of the tormented soul.

Starbuck...The symbol of unaided virtue and right-mindedness, tragically destined to be overborne by madness... Stubb, the laughing philosopher... Fedallah, the fatal inspiration of Ahab's madness...but a symbol, a shadow, he and Ahab are as shadow and substance.

That its high quality as a piece of psychological synthesis has been so much neglected is due to this very richness of material...A profound wisdom is here joined with a suffering and courage which gropes beyond the limits of sanity. 'There is a wisdom that is woe; and there is a woe that is madness.' Both the wisdom and woe are here mingled in this history of a soul's adventure.

In 1921, the British interest in Melville grows. H. M. T., inspired by Hoyt Hudson's article in The Freeman, devotes an entire column in the Nation and Athenaeum to the subject of Melville, and H. M. T's

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article, in turn, propagates a series of letters from subscribers to that magazine, published in its Letters to the Editor column.

Mr. Hudson, in his article, mentions the World's Classics edition of *Moby Dick* and declares that "continued protest from England concerning American disregard of Melville's memory has had some effect." He closes his article with a plea for a biography of Melville. "Surely," he writes, "Melville has suffered long enough for the gross error of not having been a 'Boston author'."

It is this plea for a biography upon which H. M. T. seizes and which he reiterates. After permitting himself some humorous aspersions on American literature - "as a world of books, America lived before, and continued after 'David Harum!'" - and some indulgent gibes at the "devotion which most American seats of learning give to 'studies' in literature," he expresses the following request: "While thanking America for its devotion to our classics, may a Britisher suggest to any American who has the leisure and the will for a little research work that what whole crowds of us over here would be delighted to get would be a monograph, as weighty and crowded with detail as he likes, of Herman Melville?"

Not only does the article by H. M. T. reflect the British attitude toward Melville, but it also indicates the transformation of his reputation from the writer of sea stories to the author of *Moby Dick*. For H. M. T., in demanding a biography of Melville, describes him solely as "the author of *Moby Dick*" and continues by dwelling solely on that work.
He writes:

It is clear that it is time this task was undertaken by an American who is properly aware that his country has produced a work which is not only unique of its kind, and a great achievement, but is the expression of an imagination that rises to the highest, and is amongst the world's great works of art...How was it that the author who did two merely lively and observant books of travel, and a story 'White Jacket' which does not call for any special attention, on one occasion soared into the empyrean, and maintained himself among the stars through all one long work.

In the first letter in response to H. M. T's article, he is taken to task for limiting his interest in Melville to Moby Dick. The letter is written by Michael Sadleir, author and eminent bibliographer, who, although he would "applaud" the request made by H. M. T. for an "historical and critical inquiry into the life and ideas of Herman Melville," would, at the same time, "cavil at his bibliography." "It can hardly be," Mr. Sadleir continues reprovingly, "that H. M. T. conceives of no Melville beyond Moby Dick, White Jacket, Typee, and Omoo. If from literary conviction he suppresses the further work of this mysterious and tremendous author, he will at least allow to another admirer a word in praise of 'Benito Cereno,' that superb item in 'The Piazza Tales'; of 'Pierre', strange, contorted story; of 'The Confidence Man'; even of 'Redburn.' There are others; but these may serve to evidence a veneration, humbler perhaps than that of H. M. T., but at least more catholic."38

In the same issue in which Mr. Sadleir's letter is published, we have another sample of British interest in Melville. The writer, James

38. "Letters to the Editor," Nation and Athenaeum, XXIX, 396 (June 11, 1921).
Billson, both relates the extent of his enthusiasm for Melville and illuminates another cranny in the storehouse of Melville's extensive literary knowledge. "It is more than thirty years," Mr. Billson writes, "since I first became a Melville admirer — my introducer was James Thomson, author of 'City of Dreadful Night'." Mr. Billson goes on to tell of his correspondence with Melville, and reveals that Melville sent him, in addition to a list of his published works, a copy of "Clarel," which, according to Mr. Billson, Melville described as "a metrical affair or pilgrimage admirably adapted for unpopularity." "His letters showed a very keen appreciation of James Thomson's works with which he was very well acquainted," Mr. Billson concludes.

The Nation and Athenaeum, evidently aware of the current interest in Melville, next mentions him in announcing the forthcoming publication in America of Weaver's biography. It publishes in its letter column, in addition, still another enthusiastic response to H. M. T.'s article; this a letter from one Frederick Page, who begins: "Melville is certainly returning, bringing his sheaves with him," and adds the already superfluous information concerning Weaver's imminent biography.39

Finally, the magazine publishes the complete correspondence between Melville and Mr. Billson.40 There are eight letters in all, and they are fully taken into account by Mr. Matthiessen in his discussion of Melville's "dark period" in his American Renaissance. These letters,

however, elicit still another letter to the magazine, in which the writer quotes an appreciative paragraph by James Thomson in an article by the latter published in the National Reformer (Aug. 30, 1874) on the merits of Melville as an American writer.\footnote{For a discussion of this article, J. H. Birss, "Melville and James Thomson," Notes and Queries, CLXXIV, 171-172 (Mar. 5, 1938).} This is the last letter dealing with Melville published in the Nation and Athenaeum in 1921.\footnote{"Letters to the Editor," Nation and Athenaeum, XXX, 213 (Nov. 5, 1921).}

With the publication of Weaver's biography at the end of 1921, the revival in this country was definitely underway. Subsequent chapters shall attempt to trace its course. It is necessary, however, to say, that from all indications, previous to the publication of Weaver's volume, the interest in Melville was much greater in England than it was in America; and that the revival during the twenties was, to a great extent, instigated by this interest. It is interesting to note, for example, that Weaver, in his biographical research, journeyed to England for material. One may conclude, also, that this British enthusiasm for Melville changed his reputation from that of a writer of sea romances to that of a novelist of more serious magnitude, from the writer of Typee and Omoo, to the author of Moby Dick, and eventually Pierre and The Confidence Man. Or, as Riegel puts it, "Since 1919, English criticism has concerned itself chiefly with style and story. Its main enthusiasm has been for Moby Dick, atoning for former blindness."

In the subsequent boom, there is little doubt that American criticism also atoned for its former neglect of Melville, in respect not only to Moby Dick, but to all his work. For in America, during the revival
and since, Melville achieved the status of literary titan; and in the analyses of his writings the result has been typically American, following the general pattern of the development of criticism in the century. Says Riegel, "The new Melville criticism, the reinterpretation of the character of Melville and his work in the light of modern psychology and philosophy, is essentially an American phenomenon." We shall see to what extent the revival and American criticism shed mutual light upon each other.

The British interest, however, did not cool. Opinion on Melville in England did not seem to alter after 1921. There, Melville had always been a highly respected writer, and the fact that in the period 1919-1921 the British suddenly discovered that he had written *Moby Dick* merely embellished his reputation. In 1926, John Freeman's biography of Melville included him in the English Men of Letters series.

So strong had the effect of British opinion been on Melville's reputation, that in 1931, Hugh Hetherington could show that "Even today British criticism is not without its influence on American writers of Melville." 43

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43. Hetherington, *op. cit.*
CHAPTER III

Melville and the Methods of Literary History

The conflict between literary history and literary criticism has, in recent years, been particularly acute. There is little doubt, however, that in this struggle the literary historian has consistently held the better hand. For the literary historian has been established in the university, and his point of view has primarily molded the status of American literature in the university curricula. We have already noted how,¹ in the early part of this century, the efforts of students and scholars in American literature resulted in the acceptance of it as a respectable field of study and research. We have also noted that, although this gradual concession was made to American literature, the method of study, the approach, remained almost unalterably that of the literary historian, a method inherited from the nineteenth century absorption in German scholarship and rooted indubitably in the nineteenth century exaltation of science. For with the nineteenth century emphasis on the scientific point of view, a point of view devoted to the causal analysis of natural phenomena, the literary historian endeavored to emulate the scientist and to approach the literary work as something whose origins, sources, etc., whose causes, were of more importance than the work itself.²

Howard Mumford Jones, in his Theory of American Literature, has described the curious enthusiasm in the nineteenth century for German

1. Cf. Chapter I.
methods of scholarship, particularly in philology, and he has very properly excoriated this influence as a detriment to the acceptance of American literature in the universities. He has also depicted the struggle wherein American literature and its "usable past" gradually evolved from being "a mere footnote to English departments" into a study of respectability and stature.\(^3\)

In 1928, however, the climactic year in this struggle, the problem of methodology, of approach to literature, was a clear issue, and *The Reinterpretation of American Literature*, which Jones describes as "the key to much that has been written since,"\(^4\) indicates that the literary historian still predominated. Both Foerster and Pattee, in their contributions to this volume,\(^5\) manifest an awareness of the relationship between literary history and literary criticism, although their awareness is fraught with ambivalence. Other contributors, however, indicate no such awareness, and Professor A. M. Schlesinger, the historian, in his essay, upholds an almost absolute division between the two. "It remains," Schlesinger writes, "that literary criticism and literary history are two distinct branches of scholarship, each with its own point of view, and having no more in common than, say, history in general and the study of ethics. Until the historian of letters frees himself from the domination of the literary critic, his work is certain to fall short of the highest promise."\(^6\)

Prof. Schlesinger's statement defines the major literary conflict

\(^3\) Jones, *op. cit.* , p. 95 ff.
\(^4\) Ibid., p. 168.
\(^5\) Ibid., p. 163.
\(^6\) Ibid., p. 163.
of the twentieth century, a conflict which is expressed fundamentally in the attitude of the man of letters - be he scholar, critic, teacher, or writer - toward the work of literature. This, succinctly, is the contemporary conflict also, one which roughly divides men of letters into two camps - that of the literary historian and that of the literary critic. The more recent tendency, however, is to dissent from Prof. Schlesinger's conclusions, rather to achieve an alliance between literary history and literary criticism than to "free one from the domination of the other." Jones, for example, ends his discussion of the problem with the very significant question, "How shall literary criticism and literary history be fused?" And Wellek and Warren write, "The literary critic needs such knowledge as the historian assembles, as the literary historian needs criteria supplied by the same theory. The common nineteenth century divorce between literary criticism and history has been detrimental to both."^8

Although Wellek and Warren have also pointed out that the attempts "to isolate literary history from theory and criticism" have been unsuccessful,^9 the distinction must be made simply because, for good and/or bad, it has already been made de facto. And it is germane to our

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8. Wellek and Warren, op. cit., p. 37. Foerster himself is not unaware of the interdependence of literary history and literary criticism. "A thoroughgoing historian must also be a critic," he writes in his introduction to The Reinterpretation of American Literature. "Hence, as we deplore criticism unconcerned with knowledge, so we must deplore knowledge unconcerned with criticism." p. xiv.
purpose in this chapter to get at this distinction by analyzing the methods of the literary historian. The question arises as to what precisely his business entails.

First, and probably foremost, the task of the literary historian is to reconstruct the past, "to enter into the mind and attitudes of past periods and accept their standards," deliberately excluding the intrusion of his own perceptions. This, of course, is the "historicism" which was predominant in nineteenth century Germany; it allows for little distinction between the literary historian and the historian himself. It is, moreover, the viewpoint advocated by such eminent scholars as Hardin Craig ("Shakespeare's own meaning is greatest of Shakespeare's meanings") and E. E. Stoll, who works on the theory that the recreation of the author's intention is the purpose of literary history. Other advocates of this strictly historical approach may be found in almost all the scholarly journals from PMLA to American Literature. The fallacies of this approach, including the utter futility of

10. Ibid., p. 32.
12. e.g. in Poets and Playwrights, Minneapolis, 1930, p. 217; and From Shakespeare to Joyce, New York, 1944, p. ix. In a recent article on Moby Dick, Stoll both reiterates his critical position and attacks many symbolic interpretations of the novel. "In general," he writes, "obviously earlier literature should not be mistaken for what is peculiar to our present day notions or practices in politics, ethics, in philosophy or psychology." He later adds that "the critic's function is not creation but open-minded reception and a judicial, though sympathetic response." His opinion on Moby Dick is that "it is, of course, a good story, even a great one; but not, I think, one of really ecumenical or perennial importance." "Symbolism in Moby Dick," JHI, XII (June, 1951) 440-465.
achieving its full purpose, are carefully enumerated by Wellek and Warren.¹³

The end result of this method is the production of history, the presentation of facts related, it is true, to the specialized field of literature. More often, it results in the presentation of facts whose relationship to literature is exceedingly tenuous.

With respect to method, the approach of the literary historian embodies several tasks. Primary is the task of bibliography, the study and editing of texts and documents, and the compilation of data concerning those texts and their writers; or, as Wellek and Warren put it, "the careful undoing of the effects of time, the examination as to authorship, authenticity, and date."¹⁴

This task of the literary historian is tremendously important. Its problems are multifaceted and have been analyzed by Wellek and Warren, and also by Andre Morize in his *Problems and Methods of Literary History*. The danger of bibliographical and textual studies is that they may become ends in themselves and eclipse the importance of other studies in the field of literature. Mr. Morize's book, for example, gives the impression that literary history itself is almost solely confined to problems of editing and authorship. The value of such studies is illustrated by the fact that they can aid and enlighten literary criticism, and restrain it from error and factual misrepresentation. Such a textual correction as Nichol, for example, makes in showing that the

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 49.
first editions of *White Jacket* used the word "coiled" instead of "soiled" completely weakens Matthiessen's critical interpretation of a crucial passage from that book.\(^{15}\) And the work of Forsythe in emending textual errors in both Mumford's critical biography of Melville\(^{16}\) and Weaver's edition of Melville's *Journal Up the Straits*\(^{17}\) does much to clarify those respective works.

The connection between bibliography and literary history is obvious; any dictionary will define bibliography itself as history - the history of books and manuscripts.

Two other important, related tasks of the literary historian are the "influence" study, and the source study or, as it is more commonly called, "source-hunting." Both of these types of literary history reflect the attempt to recreate the intention of an author or the history of a period. They may be valuable when they show the influences of his own age and the traditions of the past upon a writer. Their value is dubious, however, when they merely point out via parallel passages or similarity in idea and language that an author used material of other writers for his own work; or when they attempt to demean creative effort into plagiarism. The real assumption behind such studies is that they describe the continuity of literary expression; by inference, however, they may simply serve as a denial of originality and creativeness.

The primary aim of the influence and source studies is to find out

\(^{16}\) R. S. Forsythe, "Mr. Lewis Mumford and Melville's *Pierre*," *American Literature*, II (Nov., 1930) 286-289.
\(^{17}\) R. S. Forsythe, "Review of *Journal Up the Straits*," *American Literature*, VIII, 85-96.
which authors of his own time, or previous time, the creative writer was interested in or familiar with. This may be accomplished through acquiring information concerning the writer's own library, the books he borrowed from public and private libraries or the libraries of friends; or by tracing the course of literary friendships and the influences produced by such friendships. In unearthing this material, the literary historian may produce a convincing influence study. If close examination of the writer's work yields striking similarity of passages or ideas with works which he had known, the literary historian has material for a source study. To a perceptive literary critic, the source study may prove exceedingly valuable. Matthiessen, for example, uses a source for a passage in *White Jacket* unearthed by Charles R. Anderson, to illustrate how Melville transformed prosaically written material into stylistic art.

The reconstruction of patterns of literary thought and literary traditions may also make the influence and source study valuable. When the influence study is broadened to include the manner in which a writer has absorbed the philosophical ideas and attitudes current in his time, the result may be more a contribution to the "history of ideas" than directly to the history of literature; or if the ideas which are studied are political or economic, the result might very well be a contribution to the political or economic history of literature, verging toward sociology. The literary historian, in attempting an influence study,

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frequently finds, like the historian himself, that he is invading the areas of philosophy and the social sciences.

Another task in which the literary historian is interested is the "reputation" study. Such a study involves the massing of critical material - reviews and articles - from periodicals, reviews, and newspapers to illustrate how an author was received by his contemporaries, or to illustrate changes in attitude toward an author and his works in subsequent times.

In addition to a reconstruction of the past by the study of the environment of a work of literature, the second major preoccupation of the literary historian is with biography, or the life of the author himself. In accord with the principles of science, the attempt in this task is to present chiefly the external data of an author's life, to maintain as much as possible a non-interpretive objectivity. The material with which the literary historian operates here is also multiple: previous biographies, diaries, letters, accounts by eye-witnesses, autobiographical statements, and frequently, the statements of friends and relatives of his subject. Although the aim of the literary historian in guise of biographer is to explain and illuminate the actual products of the creative writer, "his writings may appear as mere facts of publication, as events like those in the life of any active man. So viewed, the problems of a biographer are simply those of a historian."\(^{20}\) The questions he deals with are in no way specifically literary. Should he, however, use as a basis for biographical data evidence from the works of his

subject, the result of his study may easily turn out to be a psycho-
logical, psychiatric, or even psychoanalytic analysis of the personality 
of the writer.

Finally, in this discussion of literary history, we cannot overlook 
that work which professionally prepares the literary historian for his 
task, the doctoral dissertation. Although in recent years, some uni-
versities have begun to accept critical and creative dissertations in 
partial fulfillment for the Ph. D. degree, most universities still de-
mend that the dissertation adhere to the nineteenth century traditions 
of scholarly research. Most dissertations are still examples of the in-
fluence of German historicism on American learning. In addition to cer-
tain prescribed courses in philology and grammar, in the history of the 
English language, the graduate student must also learn the methods of 
bibliographical research and textual editing. His dissertation suppos-
dedly illustrates his mastery of these elementals of research, and they, in 
turn, impose upon him the disciplines of literary scholarship. The 
doctoral dissertation, therefore, becomes the literary historian's pre-
liminary exercise, the work which officially prepares him for his pro-
fessional career.

From the literary historian, Melville has received the standard 
treatment. It is interesting to note, however, that it was not until 
the thirties that the literary historian took up Melville as an Ameri-
can literary figure and subjected him to research. As Pattee notes, in 
his The New American Literature, Melville had never been given much 
consideration by the literary historians who had dealt with American
literature. "John Nichol in 1882 dismissed him from his British survey of American letters with ten words - he was a mere traveler...Richardson in his two-volume history, which devoted forty-seven pages to Longfellow and sixty to Hawthorne, accorded to him scant half a page.... At the opening of the new century, Barrett Wendell in his Harvardo-centric survey which accorded to Holmes eighteen pages summed Melville up in forty words... Higginson did not mention the man; Abernethy referred to him simply as 'another forgotten New York novelist'.

Even in the twenties, when the revival was established, most of the material which appeared on Melville was of a non-academic nature, and until 1928 there were no articles on Melville in the so-called scholarly journals.

This treatment of Melville is very much in accord with the fact that it was not until the late twenties and early thirties that the Americanists were successful in establishing stature for American literature as a study in the universities; and it lends evidence to the idea that revaluations in general, and the Melville revival in particular, were, on an academic level, due to this new status accorded American literature in the universities. For it was not until 1929 that the quarterly magazine of American literary research, *American Literature*, published in Boston, 1902.

was founded, and it was not until 1930 that an autonomous group in American literature was established within the Modern Language Association. Since 1930, by far the greatest proportion of articles on Melville has appeared in *American Literature*, but other scholarly journals have not been remiss, since the thirties, in giving space to Melville scholarship.

Textual problems offered by Melville still remain good material for the literary historian. Although the standard edition, published 1922-24 and edited by Raymond Weaver, has not as yet been completely replaced, three volumes of a projected fourteen-volume edition, each volume prepared by a specialist, have already come off the press. Only two of the novels have had careful editing. Melville's published...

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22. Both Thorp's *Representative Selections* (New York, 1938) and *Literary History of the United States*, ed. by Spiller, Thorp, Johnson, Canby (New York, 1948) III have excellent lists of Melville editions and reprints. There are four repositories for original Melvilleana: The Duyckinck Collection, and the Gansedoort-Lansing Collection, both in the New York Public Library; The Melville Collection in the Widener Library at Harvard; The Aldis Collection in the Sterling Library at Yale.

23. *Collected Poems*, ed. by Howard P. Vincent, who is general editor for the entire edition, Chicago, 1945; *The Piazza Tales*, ed. by Egbert S. Oliver, New York, 1948; *Pierre*, ed. by Henry A. Murray, New York, 1949. Reviews of these volumes have not been very favorable. William Braswell writes of *Collected Poems*, "It is regrettable, and in a way astonishing that a book showing so much scholarly endeavor should have been so carelessly printed," (AL, XIX Jan., 1948: 366-68). An errata sheet lists seventy-three errors. Spiller says of *The Piazza Tales*, "In the present bull market for Melville study, perhaps nothing more definitive than this could well be provided by the editor; yet one could wish for a more detailed and perceptive discussion of Melville's art, here at a moment of firm but precarious balance, and of the bearing of the tales upon the problem of the collapse, so soon, of the artist." (AL, XXI (March, 1949: p. 138).

letters have not, as yet, been collected, and Meade Minnigerode's slim volume has generally been cited as having many inaccuracies. Many errors in Weaver's transcription of *Journal Up the Straits* have been pointed out by Forsythe. An important article pointing out differences between the first English and American editions of *Moby Dick* has appeared, but material of this nature still remains unexplored. Nor can one ignore, in discussing Melville texts, the excellent variorum volume of *Billy Budd*, edited by F. Barron Freeman.

Much valuable bibliographical research has been done on Melville. A comprehensive bibliography, which will contain a calendar of letters and manuscripts, is in preparation by Birss, who has been carrying on with the task alone since the death of his collaborator, Forsythe. The forthcoming Melville log, compiled by Jay Leyda, will undoubtedly contain much important bibliographical data.

Melville has proven especially profitable for the literary source hunter and for the student who wishes to compose an influence study. His works abound with references to his omnivorous reading, and he absorbed what he read in a fashion that strengthened his own unique talent;

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29. Excellent bibliographical material is included in Thorp's *Representative Selections and Literary History of the United States*, III.
as Matthiessen says, "The books that really spoke to Melville became an immediate part of him to a degree hardly matched by any other of our great writers in their maturity." In taking account of this fact, the literary historian has turned out a prodigious amount of material devoted to the influences of various writers on Melville's ideas and writings, and more particularly, to the sources which Melville used for his work. As we have hinted at previously, one wonders at the fundamental value of these efforts. Some of them, of course, have done much to illuminate Melville's art, but "one soon exhausts both the interest and the critical importance of Melville's or any writer's sources; they are worth an allusion only because compared with most of his contemporaries, he drew upon them so heavily and sublimated them with such power."  

As an aid to the intensive research in the area of Melville's sources, and on the influence of other writers upon him, much scholarship has been concentrated on his reading. First efforts in this direction were made by Luther Mansfield, but the latest and most complete cataloguing of Melville's readings has been published in Merton M. Sealts' "Melville's Reading: A Check-List of Books Owned and Borrowed." This can prove a fruitful area of research, and undoubtedly

32. Luther Mansfield, Herman Melville: Author and New Yorker (an unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Chicago, 1936). Chapter VIII of this dissertation was privately printed in Chicago in 1938 under the title Some Aspects of Melville's Reading.
more and more titles and authors with whom Melville was directly or indirectly familiar will be unearthed.

Possibly the most illustrious example of literary source hunting is found in Anderson's *Melville in the South Seas*. Mr. Anderson's volume, which Forsythe praised as having done the job "for all time," is an impeccable work of scholarship; but it also illustrates how unfair, and often inadequate, the literary historian can be when he ventures into the realm of criticism. For Anderson makes rather unjust accusations against his literary predecessors, and his own critical evaluation of Melville does not come close to the picture of Melville developed by such a perceptive scholar-critic, for example, as Matthiessen. In his introduction Anderson deplores the "vast majority" of Melville articles published in the twenty years before his work as being "journalistic essays, vitiated by special pleading: interprettive analyses, which do not hesitate to chart the devious career of the author's psyche...; and discipular eulogies, which unblushingly bracket *Moby Dick* with *Faust* and *Hamlet*, and its author with Cervantes, Rabelais, and Homer." His own work, Anderson claims, will explore the source material for the period of Melville's life in the South Seas, which "is the most significant part of his life for the literary biographer," but his study "is not particularly concerned with literary source hunting, it is


concerned with an analysis of Melville's technique of composition."

In his first aim, that of exploring source material, Anderson has been eminently successful. His work shows scrupulous attention to the details of fact, all possible alleys of research have been investigated; there are chapters on "Missionaries and Cannibals," "Noble Savages of Typee," "Mutiny on the Lucy Ann." One receives from this book as comprehensive an itinerary of Melville's South Sea peregrinations as the literary historian can possibly present from available sources. In addition, there is massive evidence of materials which Melville consulted in the composition of Typee, Omoo, and White Jacket.

In his attempt to analyze Melville's "technique of composition," however, Anderson falls far short of his aim. One need only compare Anderson's result with that of Matthiessen, whose aim is essentially the same, to see how deficient Anderson is as a critic. As Anderson says, his purpose is literary biography, and he informs his reader quite emphatically of the kind of Melville which he expected to emerge from his pages, a figure "simpler and more convincing than the conventional dramatization." And the books that embody Melville's South Sea experiences will be set forth "less as masterpieces of creative imagination than as deliberately manufactured travel records." The result of his efforts, and they have undoubtedly been exhaustive, is that the figure of Melville which emerges is that of a kind of imaginative plagiarist, a writer whose creations were lavishly borrowed from "writings of other voyages, partly fictionized biography, embellished and pointed for the sake of propaganda." In attempting, thus, to deal with Melville as a
writer, Anderson depicts him as a travel writer; Matthiessen, on the other hand, depicts him as an artist.

Anderson's historical pre-occupation, consequently, leads him to treat lightly problems not amenable to his kind of literary history, and, therefore, he makes little effort to discuss the revival. He limits his allusion to the revival to the one comment that the various interpretations of Melville as a "mystic" appealed to the "post-World War imagination," and that "the fad for ethical nihilism had somewhat abated and it is apparent that Melville's philosophic offering is rather a meager one."

Another important source study is Howard P. Vincent's *The Trying-Out*

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36. *Ibid.* Sedgwick strongly disagrees with Anderson's critical judgment of Melville. In an extended footnote, he writes: "It is the opinion of the author of the most extensive work on Melville to appear recently that the subjective element in his works is of little account; is, for that matter, and always has been, a decided liability to his reputation, and constitutes a real setback to the intrinsic value of his books. Melville's popularity, writes Mr. Charles Roberts Anderson, 'was not based upon the overwrought satire of *Mardi*, the sailor metaphysics of *Moby Dick*, or the philosophico-nonsensical ambiguities of *Pierre*. And the popular judgment today seems to be a sound one. The survival value of Melville's reputation lies in that fact that he was the literary discoverer of the South Seas. *Typee*, *Omoo*, *White Jacket*, and *Moby Dick* (as a romance of the sea and not as "a hideous and intolerable allegory") have been all along his most popular books; and, as literature, they are beyond question his best.' With Mr. Anderson's opinion, in so far as it is a critical judgment, I disagree emphatically, and I shall take a wholly opposite point of view in this study. Moreover, it appears to me incredible that any critic could suppose that without the subjective element in his works Melville could have assumed his full stature in literature. It is not Melville's recapitulation of his novel experience, but his resourceful use of it to body forth his inward sense of being, that makes him the great and fascinating writer that he is." William Ellery Sedgwick, *Herman Melville: The Tragedy of Mind*, Cambridge, Mass., 144, n., p. 14.
of *Moby Dick*. According to its author, this volume was five years in
the making, and from the point of scholarship, the result is gratifying.
It is, as Willard Thorp termed it in his review, "source-hunting at its
best." The book not only explores exhaustively all Melville's whaling
sources, but also ferrets out many short cuts which Melville took in
his search for whaling lore. The fourth and longest chapter in this
book, "The Cetological Center," presents in careful detail, including
the inevitable parallel passages of a source study, all the important
material which Melville consulted and used in *Moby Dick*. It is a com­
mendable accomplishment.

Like Anderson, however, Vincent has critical pretensions for his
work, and it is precisely in this area that he, too, falls short. He
understands and acknowledges the necessity of scholarship for criticism.
"The study of source materials," he writes, "is but the beginning for
criticism...The fundamental meanings of a work of art may be learned by
direct study of the work itself." And with this in mind, he makes
certain claims for his book. *The Trying-Out*, then, interprets the
novel in its parts and in its entirety. It moves from the safe shore
of source-hunting through the shoals of interpretation." One might say
that in such a statement Vincent exposes himself, for it is on the
critical shoals that his book, so to speak, wrecks itself. Vincent is
a thorough scholar, but he is not a very good critic.

He himself must be acutely aware of his critical inadequacies, for
he is constantly buttressing his interpretive remarks with references
to renowned poets, novelists, psychologists, and philosophers who have
preceded him. Seldom does one come across a book with such a multitude of "as so-and-so says," "in the words of so-and-so," "as so-and-so wrote in," etc. Seldom is one so frequently confronted with quotation crudely inserted to establish a point which the author himself has failed critically to examine. The only other possible reason for so much literary allusion is that Vincent is desirous of showing off his erudition. There is, for example, his description of *Moby Dick* "as a study of aloneness and isolation." This quality of the book, Vincent tells us, places the book "directly in the main cultural current of modern times." The discussion which follows this generalization, however, is a hodgepodge of Stephen Spender, Freud, the Renaissance, Rousseau and Romanticism, and industrialism in the western world. The concluding paragraph of this discussion is typical of Vincent's critical efforts:

...As Friedell says, 'What are tone-sequences and orders of battle, skirts and regulations, vases and meters, dogmas and the shapes of roofs, but the outpoured philosophy of an age?' Most vividly does the isolation theme appear in the *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* when, 'Alone on a wide sea,' the mariner cries out that 'Even God scarce seemed there to be.' Aloneness is the theme of *La Belle Dame Sans Merci,* and it is the dramatic center of Keats' greatest letters. Aloneness looms large in the lyrics of Matthew Arnold and in the better poetry of Tennyson. It is found spread over the black roots of Eliot's wasteland, and so frequently has it been voiced in modern poetry that Louis MacNeice complains: 'These are the times at which Aloneness is too ripe.' Aloneness is painted in the canvases of Blakelock and Ryder, of Chirico and Feininger. It sounds in the harmonic and contrapuntal patterns of Beethoven and Vaughan Williams. It is carved in the durable stone of St. Gauden's masterpiece, the Adams Memorial in Rock Creek Park, Washington. James, Royce, and Dewey have discussed its philosophical aspects; Freud, the psychological. Only a long doctoral dissertation could even list the contemporary treatments of the many phases of aloneness; as nationalism in politics, as *laissez-faire* in economics, as Protestantism
The words of the concept—such as 'egoism,' 'individualism,' 'collectivism,' 'socialism,' etc.—are not even two hundred years old in general usage.\textsuperscript{37}

Thorpe takes Vincent gently to task for these critical excursions. In his review, he writes that Vincent has much to say about the problems and difficulties of the creative artist in general. "Some of this," he adds, "is not quite relevant and often impedes the expository flow."\textsuperscript{38}

Although Anderson and Vincent are perhaps the most noteworthy, others have not been negligent in tracking down Melville's gleanings from the achievements of men who wrote before him. There are innumerable articles in the scholarly journals whose sole purpose is to present evidence of Melville's indebtedness to his readings; doctoral dissertations have concentrated on the same subject. Indeed, except for the poetry, almost everything Melville has written has been investigated for sources.\textsuperscript{39}

The question of influences has also attracted the literary historian. In this area, however, there has not been as much activity as in the business of source hunting. Undoubtedly, the task of proving influence is more difficult than that of citing parallel passages and certainly less conducive to the scientific objectivity which is supposedly the chief characteristic of the method of the literary historian. Anderson's remarks concerning the bracketing of Melville with "Cervantes, Rabelais, and Homer," might indicate the attitude of the more conservative literary

\textsuperscript{37} Howard P. Vincent, The Trying-Out of Moby Dick, Boston, 1949, p. 61.
\textsuperscript{39} Listings of source studies for the various works may be found in Thorp's Representative Selections.
historian to the less exact area of influence study. The line, however, between the source study and the influence study is an artificial one; for even the author himself might be unable to state categorically in what respect he had directly used sources and in what respect he had merely been influenced. If anything, all that the source hunter proves in respect to Melville is that he was a consummate artist in transforming the raw material of others into work that was uniquely his own.40 The results of the source hunter are, in a sense, flattery to Melville's genius; the influence study is an extension of such flattery.

One of the best influence studies published thus far is Nathalia Wright's *Melville's Use of the Bible*.41 Although Miss Wright proves herself a diligent scholar in this book, she leaves the paths of scholarship for the more precarious territory of criticism and gets along with confident success. For as her principal guide she uses Melville's work itself; she adheres closely to text. With keen insight and meticulous evidence, she shows us not only how Melville was influenced by Scripture, but also how Scripture was important to his development of craft. There are no parallel passages here, none of the ordinary paraphernalia of the source hunter; but there are chapters in which Miss Wright carefully points out how the Bible was an inextricable part of Melville's imagery, how it affected his themes and plots, his very characters. This is an influence study which achieves the chief purpose of such studies, illumination of the writer's work itself.

40. For an excellent analysis of this question see pp. 390-396 in the chapter "Autobiography and Art," in Matthiessen, op. cit.

Other attempts to trace literary influences on Melville have been as varied as his own prolific reading was varied. In addition to the Bible, Shakespeare has been considered an important influence. Olson's *Call Me Ishmael* attempts to discuss the Bard's influence on Melville, but by no stretch of the imagination can this volume be included in a discussion of literary history. Matthiessen, who acknowledges indebtedness to Olson, also discusses at length the Shakespearian influence on Melville, but Matthiessen also points out the striking stylistic similarities between Melville and Sir Thomas Browne. Thorp has also noted the influence of Sir Thomas Browne.

A survey of Melville's reputation has been made in an unpublished doctoral dissertation, and two articles on the same subject have been published.

Melville's life was one which has particular appeal for the contemporary biographer. It offers, more than most American writers, fertile material for the two most important evolutionary fields of study in the twentieth century, sociology and psychology; in addition, his works have proven valuable for that corollary to sociology, anthropology. And most of the Melville biographies manifest the influences of these branches of learning, their effects on literary and critical biography. Except for Anderson's study of Melville's four years in the South Seas,

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42. Cf. Chapter V.
43. Brooks has also pointed out the influence of Rabelais, Thomas More, Butler, and Carlyle. Van Wyck Brooks, "Notes on Herman Melville," *Emerson and Others*, New York, 1927, 171-205. For a discussion of this work cf. Chapter V.
44. Hetherington, *op. cit.*
which, in addition to its source hunting, presents the biographical facts of that period in Melville's life, there are no biographies of Melville which can be summarily classified as having strictly used the historical method. Even Weaver's biography, the first and forerunner, deviates from strict adherence to fact into interpretations which might reasonably be considered as psychological.

Previous to Weaver's biography, the only significant material published on Melville in America in the first part of the century was Frank Mather's articles in 1919 in The Review. These articles were written primarily in honor of the Melville centenary, although Mather had attempted to gain recognition for Melville earlier.

Weaver had been stimulated to do his research on Melville while he was a graduate student at Columbia University under Carl Van Doren. "I remember talking with a graduate student - Raymond Weaver - " Van Doren writes, "about what I thought was his ability to deal with a speculative subject... Mr. Weaver had barely heard of Melville's name. He quickly read Melville with a mounting, lasting excitement, and proceeded to write the first Melville biography."46

Weaver's biography illustrates his basic training in the historical method, for it is primarily factual despite excursions into interpretation. Melville's genealogy is carefully presented, the external course of Melville's life is, for the first time, charted in detail. In addition, there is a short history of the Marquesas and Tahiti, and a short explanation of the vital role of whaling in the early nineteenth century

The book, however, is undocumented, nor is there a bibliography, although there is frequent acknowledgment of sources within the text itself. The book was evidently designed as a popular rather than a scholarly biography; it was published by George Doran & Co., a publishing house which did not usually print scholarly publications.

As a first biography of Melville, the book is notable for the fact that it was a precursor to the vast amount of biographical data on Melville which subsequently appeared. It was the source for John Freeman's *Herman Melville* (London, 1926) which was published in the English Men of Letters Series; and Lewis Mumford evidently found it valuable for the biography he published in 1929. With several exceptions, Weaver tries to use the conventional biographical method of the literary historian, presenting his facts with impartiality and objectivity.

The occasions in which Weaver deviates from this method are indications of the inroads which psychology and psychoanalysis were making on biography in this period. He works on the assumption that Melville's first books were almost entirely autobiographical, and he makes lavish use of these volumes for his biographical sources. *Redburn*, for example, is used to fill in Melville's early years, and frequently the reader is puzzled in distinguishing Melville's life from Redburn's. The same procedure is followed with *Typee*, *Omoo*, and *White Jacket*. *Moby Dick* is also used in such fashion. The most useful source, however, is *Pierre*, which Weaver declares to be Melville's "spiritual autobiography," and he borrows extensively from *Pierre* to substantiate psychologically much of his biographical interpretation. Admittedly, he writes, "Pierre
is a book to send a Freudian into ravishment."47

Weaver, unfortunately, was not a Freudian; in comparison, for example, with Newton Arvin's psychoanalytic insights, his deductions are jejeune and superficial. He is a literary historian, balking at the restrictions of his method and determined to use the psychological method gaining currency in his time. His use of Melville's work to corroborate biography and his psychological deductions indicate to what extent Freudianism was gaining influence in the period. It is also his clumsy and inadequate attempts at a psychoanalytic method which probably colored much of the figure of Melville which emerged in the early years of the revival.

In particular, he makes a potent case for the maternal influence on Melville. He describes Melville's mother as a "cold, proud woman, arrogant in the sense of her name, her blood, and the affluence of her forbears."48 He depicts Melville as a boy whose "passionate cravings for sympathy, for affection were rebuffed by her haughty reserve"; and he quotes from Pierre to show that Melville, like Pierre, felt "entirely lonesome and orphan-like...driven out an infant Ishmael into the desert, with no maternal Hagar to accompany and comfort him." Melville's attitude towards his wife, he claims, was fraught with a conflict stemming from the idealization of his mother. He makes no effort, however, to extend his Freudian insights, for although there is frequent allusion to Melville's pre-occupation with masculine friendship (Hawthorne, allusions

47. Raymond Weaver, Herman Melville, Mariner and Mystic, New York, 1921, p. 54.
48. Ibid., p. 34.
in *Clarel*, etc.) and Melville's general admiration for handsome youths, there is no mention at all of Melville's probable sexual ambivalence.

The later books, *Israel Potter*, *The Confidence Man*, are almost completely ignored for their possible autobiographical material.

There are minor indications, also, that Weaver was aware of the sociological influences on his subject. Such sentences as, "Melville sinned blackly against the orthodoxy of his time," "He did not fit into any recognized socket of New England respectability," and other references to Melville's status as a declasse, a youth who could not throw off the material and cultural appurtenances of a wealthy and aristocratic background, manifest, if hazily, Weaver's dalliance with a sociological interpretation. But the theorizing in this area is not nearly as marked a deviation from biographical fact as Weaver's excursions into Freudianism.

Aesthetically, Weaver makes only innocuous value judgments. He does not consider the individual works, in any sense, as works of literature. Of *White Jacket*, he says, "The predominant mood of this book is rollicking good humor of high animal spirits." Of *Moby Dick*, he says, "It is indeed a book of adventure, but upon the highest plane of spiritual daring...an allegory designed to teach woeful wisdom." He does, however, praise unstintingly E. L. Grant-Watson's article on *Moby Dick...*49 "There has been published no criticism of Melville more beautiful or more profound."

The importance of Weaver's book is that it was a precursor, the

first book to give Melville a comprehensive treatment. It was a book long overdue, and to do it credit, one must admit that Weaver laid the groundwork for the subsequent material on Melville with reasonable thoroughness. It also opened new areas for further exploration by both Melville scholars and critics. In the light of Weaver’s dalliance with Freudianism, the book indicates to what extent psychology and psychoanalysis were having an effect on literary criticism, particularly literary biography, in the early part of the century.

With the establishment of American literature as a respectable field of study in the university curricula, the number of graduate students specializing in American literature increased sharply. The revival, coming as it did at the same time, attracted a number of these students to Melville, and from the thirties on, a great number of doctoral dissertations dealt with one Melville problem or another. Almost all of these problems, however, were historical and biographical rather than critical in nature; and it is especially interesting to note that the great majority of unpublished doctoral dissertations on Melville were produced at Yale University, where the traditional, Germanic treatment of literature is emphasized.  

50. Out of twenty-two doctoral dissertations written on Melville within the last twenty years, half were accepted at Yale University. Some Melville dissertations which have been published are: Nathalia Wright, op. cit.; William Braswell, Melville’s Religious Thought, Durham, N. C., 1943 (Cf. Chapter VI); Henry F. Pommer, Melville and Milton, Pittsburgh, 1950. Announced for publication by New York University Press is William H. Gilman’s Melville’s Early Life and “Redburn”, a Yale dissertation, 1947. Walter E. Bezanson, who edited Clarel for his dissertation, Yale, 1943, will edit the volume for the complete Melville edition; and Elizabeth S. Foster, whose dissertation subject was Herman Melville’s "The Confidence Man," Its Origins and Meaning, Yale, 1942, will edit The Confidence Man for the complete edition.
To minimize the results of literary history with respect to Melville would be to minimize literary history as an aspect of literature; one cannot deny the fundamental value of this aspect. It involves a method which is powerfully entrenched in the academy, and its roots are as deep as the roots of history itself. It correlates well with the impact of the scientific method of research on learning, and it is the literary man's rebuttal to the encroachment of this method on the general thinking of civilized men. If the scientist, who has so greatly usurped the place of the humanist in Western culture, achieves his transcendence through this method, why should not the historian and literary man use this method, relying as it does on purely ascertainable fact? The method of literary history, therefore, becomes a transmutation of the method of science. The fallacy involved in this transmutation is that the literary historian tends to ignore the essential fact that the world of man is not as conducive to the scientific method as the world of nature and physical phenomena.

Melville has been exposed to this method, and the results have been gratifying. The biographical data of Melville's life have been brought forth from almost total obscurity, so that only very few of the external facts of his life are missing. Even a log of Melville's day to day existence is forthcoming. 51

The most interesting conclusion concerning the treatment of Melville by the literary historian is that the revival was in existence almost a

51. Jay Leyda, who edited The Complete Short Novels of Herman Melville (New York, 1949) has prepared this "log" for publication in September, 1951.
decade before the literary historian began to recognize Melville as an important American writer. Through the incentive of his British popularity, and the scattered interest of the non-academic literary critic, the revival gained vitality. For, as we have noted, in the twenties the preponderance of articles on Melville appeared in the literary quarterlies. It was not until 1929 and the thirties that the specialized journals, the scholarly journals, began to consider Melville. And this is explicable on the grounds that it was not until 1929 that American literature itself was given respectability by the academy. After 1930, the material produced by the literary historian on Melville was prodigious, and the production still continues, apparently unabated.\(^{52}\)

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\(^{52}\) The most recent statistical report on research on Melville shows that during the period 1940-40, there were 244 items of research and publication dealing with him. He is surpassed only by Clemens and James in the number of such items. Within this period, 1940-50, he is the author who elicited the most scholarship of the major figures of 1840-1885; "he leads the runner-up, Whitman in every category except one (and that minor). Concerning Melville there were: 159 articles, totalling 1290 pages; 26 books; 30 theses; 25 research projects; and seven MLA projects....It appears...that though Whitman may have dominated the scholarship of the 'twenties, Melville took the lead in the 'forties." In the period 1929-39, it is interesting to note, 80 articles, totalling 805 pages were published. Report of the Committee on Trends in Research in American Literature 1940-1950, American Literature Group of the Modern Language Association, 1951.
CHAPTER IV

Melville and Sociological Criticism

Both literature and the language of which literature consists are, in the fullest sense of the term, social products. It is through language and literature that the animating ideas of a society receive expression; but in a reversed role, language and literature may also generate new ideas and influence and modify old ones. In their function, therefore, these products may become exceedingly complex. They embody, beyond their plain, literal meaning, all the customs, feelings, and beliefs of the group in which they originate.

Since language and literature express the ideas of society, they may be studied for their ideological content - political, social, economic, philosophic, etc. When these ideas pertain principally to the interaction of forces which bring human beings together - political, social, and economic - the resulting analysis of the literature may be called sociological. An analysis of a work of literature from a political point of view, for example, in this sense may be considered a sociological analysis. Emphasis is, in such an example, on the content of political ideas.

We may say, for purposes of analysis, that the literary critic who

1. Or, as Harry Levin puts it: "Literature is not only the effect of social causes; it is also the cause of social effects." "Literature as an Institution," Accent, VI (Spring, 1946). This essay has been reprinted both in Criticism: The Foundations of Modern Literary Judgment, ed. by, Mark Schorer, Josephine Mile, and Gordon McKenzie (1948), and Literary Opinion in America, ed. by Morton D. Zabel, revised ed. (1951).

attempts to work sociologically is confronted with three distinct di­
visions in his task. First, he may concentrate on the sociology of the
writer, a concentration which involves him inevitably in biography. He
must then examine, for example, the social status of the writer, his
allegiance, and his ideology - an examination which may lead to the so­
ciolo gy of the writer as a general type, or as an individual at a par­
ticular time and place. Second, he may examine the social content of
the works themselves. In such an examination, he is frequently con­
fronted with the problem of whether the social content is strictly re­
lated to the sociology of the writer, or whether it is merely reflective
of the period of the writer. In the latter event, he is close to histo­
ry. One may discern in this problem a parallel with psychological in­
terpretation, viz. to what extent the psychological content of a liter­
ary work can be used legitimately as biography. Third, he may consider
the importance of a literary work with respect to its sociological in­
fluence.

One must point out here, however, that these divisions are simply
a matter of convenience. For the sociological critic cannot examine
the sociology of the writer without, more or less, examining the social
content of his work. Nor can he validly examine the social content of
the work without consideration of both its sociological origins and in­
fluences. It may be seen, therefore, that the three parts of the task
blend into an exceedingly complex one which involves criticism through

4. In the relationship between literary history and sociology, we
must acknowledge the importance of the sociology of literature. An ex­
cellent discussion of the problems of the sociology of literature is
found in Levin L. Schucking's The Sociology of Literary Taste, London,
1944.
The sociological critic, then, is one who, in focussing on the social, the political, and the economic, assumes that these are primary values and tends to ignore aesthetic values in the work of literature. Or, if he admits aesthetic values, it is with the assumption that these values are sociological in origin and that origins are more important than end-products. What distinguishes him, above all, is his attempt to explain aesthetic values in terms of those values to which he gives primacy.

Most critics and literary historians agree that the first important work of modern sociological criticism was Taine's *History of English Literature* (1864). Although it is true that Taine's influence did much to encourage the writing of literary history, his theory of race, milieu, and moment was instrumental in shaping the direction of modern sociological criticism in which political, economic and social ends have been emphasized. Taine, therefore, performed a dual service: his theory of environmentalism abetted literary historiography, for it was a theory which many scholars interpreted in terms of history; but it was also a theory which, placing literature in a social context, as a "result of changing society, the product of race, epoch and environment," established a foundation on which later sociological critics were to build.

Although they still remain as a convenient classification, the ambiguity of Taine's terms has long since been pointed out. The term "race," for example, is "an unknown fixed integral with which Taine and

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his followers operate very loosely"; "moment" implies a limitation of time, and quickly takes us into the corresponding element of "milieu" which, in turn, does not lend itself to exact definition. For "milieu" incorporates in its meaning the concepts of tradition - both linguistic and literary - and these concepts cannot be completely isolated from the general cultural climate in which they are embodied, the social, political, and economic.  

The sociological critic, however, has struggled primarily with the influence of "milieu" on literature, with the social, political, and economic matrix from which literature, in part, originates, and which, in turn, literature shapes and influences. It was the Danish critic, Georg Brandes, who broadened the range of sociological criticism and narrowed the tendency of literary history in Taine's theories. For in his *Main Currents of Nineteenth Century Literature*, Brandes tried to show literature as a socially determined product, and to explain that the critic's function was to chart its repercussions. Although both aspects of Taine's influence have been evident in American criticism, the sociological critic in this country has taken the cue from Brandes, directing his efforts toward a study of the social, political, and economic elements which have found expression in literature, and which he has considered to be contributory to the liberal tradition. Farrington, for example, is an excellent example of such a critic. He wrote literary history, but he wrote it in such a fashion that only those figures - even the imaginative writers - who dealt with social, political, and

economic problems received primary emphasis. He thus extended and modified Taine's formula, dramatizing New England puritanism from the viewpoint of western populism, and pitting Jeffersonian democracy against Hamiltonian federalism; but his chief debt, which he acknowledges, somewhat, in his title, *Main Currents in American Thought*, is to Brandes. Parrington, however, could not successfully cope with the conflict his critical method presented between the sociological and the aesthetic values of the work of literature. And, indeed, this is the dilemma of every sociological critic, the problem of how to explain aesthetic values in sociological terms. Parrington attempted to solve this problem by either depreciating or castigating those writers who did not lend themselves to his interpretation; and, as a result, his treatment, for example, of Poe and Henry James has been quite severely criticized for its unfairness. Other sociological critics either assume aesthetic values, try to explain them in sociological terms, or simply ignore them.

The Marxist critic, for example, ignores artistic standards. He is, however, the sociological critic in extreme, being Marxist in the sense that Parrington was Jeffersonian. His method, too, has its origin in Taine, but he has redefined Taine's concept of "milieu" in economic terms. For Marx's belief is essentially one in which the economic structure of society determines the activities of the mind, in which religious, political, and ethical creeds, laws, art, and literature are a superstructure erected on the foundation of economic conditions and
economic organizations. By thus redefining "milieu," the Marxist critic has presented a more limited theory of historical causation than Taine's and a more fanatical doctrine of political allegiance than Brandes. The result of this type of criticism is to oversimplify enormously the relations between literature and life, and to ignore the warnings of Marx himself, who repeatedly cautioned his followers against expecting the arts to show a neat conformity with his views. "Marxist criticism superimposed its socialistic doctrine on the deterministic method, and judged according to Marx what it has interpreted according to Taine."

Yet, in the thirties, when the influence of Marxist theory was at its height, many critics were attracted by its application to literature. Not only did the literary critic try to interpret by Marxist theory during this period, but many writers saw in Marxism a generative force for their creative ability, and this period witnessed the publication of

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7. Max Lerner and Edwin Mims describe the Marxist approach as follows: "Society must be split into two groups: those of organization and those of ideology. In the first is technology, economic activity, organization of the state, structure of classes, social relations of dependence and domination, important institutions of distribution of power: in the second, intellectual temper, emotional tone, ethical and religious conceptions, and aesthetic achievements. The Marxist approach subordinates the second group to the first, making it a superstructure (überbau) which rests on the first as foundation." "Literature," Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, IX (1933) pp. 523-43. For other discussions see W. Witte, "The Sociological Approach to Literature," Modern Language Review, XXXVI (1941) pp. 86-94; Oscar Cargill, Intellectual America, New York, 1941, pp. 22-25.

8. For criticism of the Marxist approach to literature, see: Edmund Wilson, "Marxism and Literature," The Triple Thinkers, New York, 1938. This article was first published in The Atlantic Monthly, CLX (Dec., 1937), pp. 741-750, and has also been republished in Zabel, op. cit. See also Charles Glicksberg, "The Aberrations of Marxist Criticism," Queens Quarterly Review, LVI (Winter, 1949-50).

much fiction - proletarian novels - extolling the laboring classes, condemning the capitalistic economy, predicting the revolution in which the workers would rise to assume their rightful place in the world. 10 What Freudianism was to the twenties, Marxism was to the thirties. 11

In recent years, however, Marxist criticism has fallen into disrepute, 12 and among the many critics who have attempted to interpret by means of Marxist theory, only two have remained eminent - V. F. Calverton and Granville Hicks. 13 But Calverton is dead, and Hicks has so modified his Marxist position that at present he is no more distinguishable than any other critic who attempts to interpret sociologically, even occasionally reviewing for the New York Times. Bernard Smith, another critic who was attracted strongly to the Marxist point of view, 14 has not published in recent years.

Although the period of Marxist criticism has ended, sociological

10. Some of the more popular proletarian novelists were John Dos Passos, Albert Maltz, Michael Gold, Charles Yale Harrison. Dos Passos, however, is the only one who seems to have survived.
12. The “age of radicalism in aesthetics is happily ended” and literary liberals “have discovered that art and human nature are far more complex than dialectical materialism made them out to be.” Charles Glicksberg, “Literature and the Marxist Aesthetic,” University of Toronto Quarterly, XVIII (Oct., 1948).
criticism has continued to develop. Taine's method has been extended and modified, and the effort has been made to clarify the reciprocal relationship between literature and society, not merely in its economic limitations but in its social and political ramifications. Like Taine, the sociological critic may investigate the social causes of literature; or like, Brandes, he may be more interested in its social effects. So long as he continues to correlate literature with trends of history, his function is relatively clear and the sociological approach is legitimate and may be illuminating. So long as he limits his interpretation to some special partisanship, Marxist or otherwise, or sacrifices his objectivity to a restricting doctrinaire, his method becomes invalid and confusing. Since art may be used, among other purposes, as a polemic weapon, it can be judged by its polemic possibilities. Such judgment may be relevant and significant, but ultimately, it is not literary criticism; it carries the critic far beyond the limits of aesthetic questions into the field of moral values.\(^{15}\)

Parrington, the literary historian, may thus be considered a sociological critic, one who used the method of sociological criticism legitimately. Others who realized the proper use of the method both preceded and followed him. John Macy, for example, in his first book, The Spirit of American Literature (1913), attempted to apply sociological criteria to the major figures in American Literature.\(^ {16}\) Van Wyck Brooks, in his earlier books, indicated his awareness of the powerful social and political forces which influenced literature, as did those who came

\(^{15}\) Levin, op. cit.

under his discipleship, Paul Rosenfeld, Matthew Josephson, and Lewis Mumford. More recently, the difficult task of combining sociological criteria with an appreciation of aesthetic values has been attempted by such critics as Burke, Wilson, and Matthiessen; and Newton Arvin, in his three critical biographies alone, has illustrated how a critic can develop sociological insights along with psychological and aesthetic insights. We shall discuss Matthiessen's work and Arvin's latest biography, *Herman Melville*, in later chapters.

No one has yet endeavored to interpret Melville purely in sociological terms, but the sociological constituents of his work have not been overlooked. Indeed, to overlook the importance of sociological data in this century would be well nigh impossible. Both Weaver and Mumford show insights into the conflict between Melville and the upper-middle class, bourgeois background from which he came. Mumford has presented quite convincingly the conclusion that Melville was a *declasse*, and Arvin echoes this conclusion. Even Anderson, whose book is almost straight literary history, indulges in sociological implications when he presents in great detail, as an important part of the background of *Moby Dick*, the ramified influence of the whaling industry on nineteenth century economy.

Sociological criticism of Melville, however, illustrates the

19. Cf. Chapter III.
difficulty of the critic in keeping clear the divisions of the method which we have discussed. Little of the criticism adheres closely to the text; little of it attempts to consider the text in the light of its sociological origin and influence. Most of it endeavors to use the text to present the sociology of Melville himself. As we shall see, Brooks' efforts become more biographical than sociological; Farrington's examination of the text is superficial, and he seems to rely heavily on biography to arrive at the sociology of Melville; the criticism of the two so-called Marxist interpreters, Calverton and Hicks, cannot be described as successful sociological criticism. Indeed, the only critic who treats Melville adequately from this point of view is Gabriel, who understands the complexity of the method and tries to combine the three divisions of the task harmoniously. The conclusion that one is forced to reach with respect to sociological criticism of Melville is that the critics who treated him did not have a clear understanding of their method. One must agree with the observation of Daiches that, "Only by a proper understanding of the scope of sociological criticism can we ensure that we shall use it to further understanding rather than to increase confusion."20

For all its sociological interests, Macy's book, The Spirit of American Literature (1913), which Jones uses to date this "latest phase of American literary history,"21 does not mention Melville.22 Nor does

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22. Macy's compilation American Writers on American Literature, New York, 1934, does, however, contain a chapter on Melville contributed by Raymond Weaver.
Van Wyck Brooks' *America's Coming of Age* (1915), in which was coined the phrase "America's usable past" and which greatly influenced the recognition of American literature in this century, deal with any degree of sociological insight with Melville. Both of these volumes, we must note, were published in the period before the revival; as we have pointed out, it was not until the twenties that American literature began to take genuine interest in Melville and his work.  

In his later books, however, Brooks treats Melville rather extensively. But if one expects sociological criticism in these treatments, one is disappointed. For the truth of the matter is that Brooks is not a sociological critic in the contemporary sense of the term. His critical method is a variant of Taine's, but it has acquired a special character through his peculiar concept of biography and his preoccupation with psychology. Social and cultural questions he interprets in terms of leading individuals; the works of the individuals he considers in the light of their biography.  

Involved in this method is an aesthetic awareness that is close kin to nineteenth century impressionism. Perhaps the most consistent theme which has emerged from Brooks' commingling of history, biography, psychology, and aesthetics is that which deals with "the artist truncated by society." It is this theme - the difficulty of the artist to realize himself, not only as an artist in America,

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23. Cf. Chapter III.
but as an American artist - which pervades Brooks' work.\textsuperscript{25} It is apparent in The Ordeal of Mark Twain (1920), in which Brooks tries to fuse historical and Freudian perspectives and, at the same time, point out the stultifying effects on a writer of genius of the genteel era; it is also evident in The Pilgrimage of Henry James (1925) in which Brooks has been accused of cutting James to fit his theory rather than examining James' novels themselves. With respect to Melville, however, Brooks does not explicitly reiterate this theory, but he has by no means abandoned it.

Brooks first treats Melville in his "Notes on Herman Melville," published in Emerson and Others (1927). He takes cognizance of the revival. "Melville has come back at last," he writes. "He has come back, moreover, as the author not merely of 'Typee,' 'Omoo,' and 'Moby-Dick,' but of 'White Jacket' and 'Redburn,' which might well have been popular classics all these years, as well as the apocryphal books, as I can only call them. By these I mean 'Mardi,' 'Pierre' and 'The Confidence Man: His Masquerade.'\textsuperscript{26} He continues in this first section of the "Notes" to discuss sketchily Melville's early works. There is nothing particularly illuminating in this discussion, nor is there much profundity in Brooks generalization that "We can understand ... why it was that

\textsuperscript{25} Chase writes of Brooks: "Brooks pictures Melville as he did Mark Twain: as a frustrated genius who suffered and failed, not as a thinking and developing artist who achieved a series of imperfect successes. Brooks' theory of the 'ordeal' of the American artist is still potent in literary criticism, and it still underestimates, because it cannot objectively see, the artist's works." Herman Melville, New York, 1949, p. x.

\textsuperscript{26} Van Wyck Brooks, Emerson and Others, New York, 1927, p. 172.
Melville seemed to his contemporaries such an enigma. The whole tendency of his work was, in the first place, an implicit assault on the doctrine of progress as the nineteenth century conceived it." The basis for this conclusion is Typee and Omoo, in which Melville "pictured the savages of the South Seas not as rudimentary Europeans that people liked to think them, but as masters of an art of living incomparably superior to ours." "Such things," Brooks adds, "were hard to forgive; and harder still, in a hopeful age, was the note of tragic scepticism that reverberated through his work." 27

All of what Brooks considers Melville's lesser works are touched upon in the first section of these "Notes," including "The Confidence Man," which Brooks says remains "interesting indeed, but the product of a premature artistic senility." The second section treats Pierre, which to Brooks as to Weaver, is autobiographical. There is also some discussion of Melville's style in this section, with emphasis given to those writers who have obviously influenced it, Rabelais, Browne, Shakespeare, and Carlyle. 28

In the third section Brooks indulges his propensity for psychological analysis. Using Weaver as his source and "the random phrases of Melville that help us form a picture of his own character," he comes to the conclusion that Melville "had received some mortal hurt at the very threshold of life," that he himself felt that every man's hand was

27. Ibid., p. 173.

28. Weaver, of course, discusses all of these influences. For the particular influence of Rabelais, see W. H. Wells, "Moby-Dick and Rabelais," Modern Language Notes, XXXVIII (Feb., 1923). The influence of Carlyle is briefly discussed by Forsythe in his introduction to Pierre (pp. xxxvi-xxxvii).
against him. He takes into account the tribulations of Melville's adolescence, his loneliness, and ventures the conjecture that Ahab's vindictive hatred of the white whale symbolized Melville's own accumulated fund of bitterness, "the sorrowful anger of hurt pride, the spleen, the defiant contempt that had rankled in the depths of his heart." His peroration to this section is eloquent rather than accurate. "Melville at thirty-five had outlived the literary illusion; he had come to despise the written word. We see in all this the contempt of the physical man for the work of the brain; but more still, the suffocation of a mighty genius in a social vacuum."

The final section of these notes deals with Moby-Dick, which is discussed with Brooksian elan, allusive, impressionistic, and frequently rhetorical. Brooks' conclusion here is that Moby-Dick "is our sole American epic, no less an epic for being written in prose."

In his The Times of Melville and Whitman (1947), Brooks has already established his method of piecing together vignettes of literary history and biography and has lost any ambition he may have had of being a sociological critic. Although, in this book, he places both Melville and Whitman in a literary milieu, he makes little effort to analyze the milieu sociologically; his assumption apparently is that his analysis will acquire sociological validity by virtue of being good biography. Perhaps the fairest evaluation of Brooks has been made by Howard Mumford Jones. "Mr. Brooks has charm and insight and reads widely," Jones writes, "he has the unique gift of making the common reader come to like him, and, like Parrington - his opposite in most respects - he has rescued many a name from oblivion. I think it is fair to observe that Mr.
Brooks' volumes have been received with more enthusiasm by newspaper reviewers and other tasters of literary wares than they have been by professional scholars; and so many doubts have been cast upon his critic's methodology by specialists that neither his sociology nor his literary appraisals have gone without serious challenge. The battle centers upon Mr. Brooks' intuitive impressionism and upon his haphazard documentation.\textsuperscript{29} With respect to Melville, Weaver in his biography of 1921 and Mumford, who in his The Golden Day (1926) evidences an attempt to emulate Brooks, show a much keener awareness than Brooks ever did of the social forces which molded Melville and his work.

Parrington, on the other hand, in devoting a short chapter to Melville in Main Currents of American Thought (1927-1930), attempts to impose upon him the criteria which govern his interpretation of all figures included in his work. There is little doubt that these criteria are sociological, that Parrington was chiefly interested in the social, political, and economic forces which received expression in literature. The question is to what extent Parrington permitted his own social, political, and economic beliefs to color the writers whom he discussed. "I was a good deal of a Marxian," Parrington wrote, but he never went so far as to use the Marxian formula completely in his criticism. He understood, too well, the essence of Jeffersonian democracy and he had too much partiality for French political philosophy to be entirely converted to Marx; and what may have seemed Marxist at the time Parrington wrote, is today recognized simply as the liberal position. Perhaps

\textsuperscript{29} Jones, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 174.
Trilling best summed up Parrington's position and influence when he wrote:

It is possible to say of V. L. Parrington that with his *Main Currents in American Thought* he has had an influence on our conception of American culture which is not equaled by that of any other writer of the last two decades. His ideas are now the accepted ones wherever the college course in American literature is given by a teacher who conceives himself to be opposed to the gentle and the academic and in alliance with the vigorous and the actual. And whenever the liberal historian of America finds occasion to take account of the national literature, as nowadays he feels it proper to do, it is Parrington who is his standard and guide. Parrington's ideas are the more firmly established because they do not have to be imposed — the teacher or the critic who presents them is likely to find that his task is merely to make articulate for his audience what it has always believed, for Parrington formulated in a classic way the suppositions about our culture which are held by the American middle class so far as that class is at all liberal in its social thought and so far as it begins to understand that literature has anything to do with society.  

Parrington, as both Trilling and Howard Mumford Jones point out, had his limitations; his approach inevitably led him to devote more


31. Winters is strongly critical of Parrington. On Parrington's treatment of Melville, he writes: "The essay on Melville...is merely a pseudo-poetic summary of the sensational and uncritical book by Mr. Raymond Weaver. One coming upon it, with no knowledge of Melville, would receive no clue whatever to the subject-matter or to the form of any of Melville's books, to Melville's own intellectual history, or to the intellectual history of which Melville is in some part the product. The value of the essay, if it has any, lies wholly in the soundness of Parrington's unguided personal impression (not to mention Weaver's), and in the beauty of his prose; the virtues are purely belletristic." *In Defense of Reason*, p. 560-561. Michael Kraus writes of Parrington: "Historians complain that Parrington did not know enough history, while students of literature often disagree with his estimates of literary figures." *A History of American History*, New York, 1937, p. 480. Another criticism of Parrington's work: "A noble work that is still the best comprehensive history of American thought; inspired by a militant liberalism, consequently hostile and unsympathetic to Puritanism; based upon lamentably insufficient familiarity with the sources, and therefore to be read for stimulation, not for fact or accuracy." Perry Miller and T. H. Johnson in a bibliographical note from *The Puritans*, New York, p. 805.
attention to some figures than to others, to follow, in his own words, "the broad path of our political, economic, and social development, rather than the narrower belletristic," and to create "the body of ideas from which literary culture eventually springs." As a consequence of this emphasis, his aesthetic judgments were frequently distorted and far-fetched. His treatment of Melville, perhaps, illustrates both his merits and his deficiencies. He presents Melville in nine pages, and all of his biographical data is derived from Weaver, to whom he frankly acknowledges his indebtedness. "There is no other tragedy in American letters," he writes, "comparable to the tragedy of Herman Melville." But he makes little effort to analyze that tragedy, and that little effort is, at best, superficial. As apology, perhaps, for this inadequacy - of which he was probably aware - he says, "There is no simple clue to his mystery, no common pass-key to unlock his mind," and he excuses himself from the task by declaring that Weaver "has perhaps done all that the critic can do to light up the darkness."32

Parrington touches upon the thesis of the artist's alienation from society with respect to Melville, but these imputations are straight out of Weaver. "Lifelong," he writes, "he Melville was lacerated by the coldly moral in his environment, and harassed by the practical... Life could not meet the demands he made on it, certainly not life in America in the eighteen-fifties; the malady lay...in the futility of life itself." "A bitter sense of aloofness and alienation from the

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intimacies of family sympathy seems early to have taken possession of him, and he felt himself quietly thrust out of respectable contacts." The phrase, "amidst the nameless obscenities of an alien environment," recurs. From Weaver, Farrington accepts the depiction of Melville's mother as a "cold, proud woman," and he uses Weaver's description of Pierre as being Melville's "spiritual autobiography."

Most startling perhaps is Parrington's attempt to describe Melville as a frustrated transcendentalist. He writes:

That Melville was the spiritual child of Jean Jacques, that the consuming nostalgia he suffered from was mortal, the most casual acquaintance with his passionate rebellions should make clear; and that his pessimism was a natural end and outcome of his transcendental speculations, once those speculations had come to intimate contact with life, is perhaps equally clear. Transcendentalism in Concord village and at Walden pond, was one thing. But transcendentalism in the forecastle of the whaler Acushnet, transcendentalism that drove fiercely into the blood-red sunsets of dwarfing seas, transcendentalism in the hot and passionate heart of a man whose vast dreams outran his feet - this was something very different from the gentle mysticism of cooler natures and unembittered hearts where no Promethean fires were raging.33

Parrington also attempts to analyze Melville's political and social beliefs, but the result is highly impressionistic and eloquent generalization. "Like all transcendentalists," he writes, "Melville was a democrat, but his democracy sprang from his sympathies rather than from his philosophy..... from his pessimism rather than from any transcendental

33. Ibid., p. 264; for further discussion of Melville's attitude toward transcendentalism, see Egbert S. Oliver, "'Cock-A-Doodle-Do!' and Transcendental Hocus Pocus," New England Quarterly, XXI (June, 1948); Van Vechten considers The Confidence Man, "great transcendental satire." In this book, he writes, "Melville simply carried Brook Farm to the deck of a Mississippi steamboat....Emerson is The Confidence Man....here, Melville has his revenge on those who accused him earlier in his career of transcendental leanings." "The Later Work of Herman Melville," Excavations, New York, 1926, p. 87. This essay was first published in The Double Dealer, III (1922). See also, Egbert S. Oliver, "Melville's Picture of Emerson and Thoreau in The Confidence Man," College English, VIII (1946) 61-72; William Braswell, "Melville as a Critic of Emerson," American Literature, IX (Nov., 1937) 317-334. Matthiessen, also, disagrees with Farrington's concept of Melville as a transcendentalist. "At no period," he writes, "not even in Mardi, does it seem right to think of him as other than a critic of transcendentalism." op. cit., f.n. p. 472.
faith in the divinity of man." And he continues by comparing him with Whitman. "He was as comprehensive a democrat as Whitman, of the same all-embracing school that denied the common social and ethical categories of excellence; but alienated from his fellows, not drawn to them as Whitman was. It was not a sense of social aloofness that held him apart, but the loneliness of isolation...." Certainly this is an oversimplification of Melville's position as a democrat.

There is also the conclusion that Melville was a critic of society in a fashion that it could not understand, and that it was just as well that it could not understand him for it would have cried out to crucify this maligner of all tribal fetishes. "To turn scornfully away from the triumphs of his fellows - from the fruits of the industrial revolution and the romantic gospel of progress - this was incomprehensible blasphemy!"34 But this is simply rhetorical paraphrase of the same conclusion we find in Weaver, who had written, "There can be no forgiveness in this world for a man who calls the wisdom of this world a cowardly lie, and probes clinically into the damning imperfections of the best. His Kingdom is surely not of this world. And if this world evinces for his gospel neither understanding nor sympathy, he cannot reasonably complain if he reaps the natural fruits of his profession."

Weaver had continued in the same vain: "A majority judgment, though it has the power, has not necessarily the truth. It is theoretically possible that Melville, not the world, is right. But one can assent to Melville's creed only on the penalty of destruction; and the race does not welcome annihilation. Hence the world must rejoice in its vengeance upon his blasphemy; and the self-righteous have washed their

34. Ibid., p. 265 ff.
feet in the blood of the wicked." 35 We are forced to notice that Parrington's use of "crucify," and the image involved are the same as Weaver's.

But Parrington concludes his passage with some generalizations of his own. "He was not even greatly concerned with political democracy, although in his time he had been as hot a republican as the best of them. The shoddy democracy of his time made his gorge rise; and to this shoddy democracy that proclaimed its excellence, he paid his respects..." And Parrington cites a long passage from Clarel denouncing democracy, in which Melville vilifies the concept as he had seen it practised in his times, terming it "Harlot on horseback," and "Arch strumpet of an impious race." 36

Although Melville passes muster when considered by political criteria, Parrington gives his work little examination by literary or aesthetic criteria. Indeed, as with many of the other figures whom Parrington discusses, there is little attempt to analyze his work as literature. Titles are mentioned, and there are a few synoptic passages, but even Moby-Dick, which, by the time Parrington was writing his work, had boomed as a significant work of American fiction, is passed over cursorily. His comparison of Melville with "the incomparable James Branch Cabell," to whom he devotes a much lengthier later chapter and whom he terms "the supreme comic spirit thus far granted us," 37 now seems quite gauche. Even his description of Melville as "the spiritual

35. Raymond Weaver, Herman Melville, Mariner and Mystic, p. 343.
37. Ibid., III, 335-346.
child of Jean Jacques," seems inappropriate, indicating a rather limited concept of the complexities of romanticism.38

But Parrington's inclusion and treatment of Melville is important to us if for no other reason than that it manifests the fact that by 1927, Melville's reputation had so far undergone a change as to establish him as an eminent American author. It also indicates that Melville lent himself favorably to the approach of a predominantly sociological critic. It becomes apparent, however, that, although Parrington may have deemed Melville good material for a sociological interpretation, he neither examined him carefully enough nor understood him thoroughly enough to do him justice.

Both V. F. Calverton (The Liberation of America, 1932) and Granville Hicks (The Great Tradition, 1933), who treat American literature from the Marxist point of view, give brief mention to Melville. In the years in which their work was published, they could not possibly have ignored him.

Calverton, "the first and worst of the local Marxist literary historians,"39 gives little evidence of having ever read Melville. His criticism is inexcusably shot with fabrication verging on the downright

38. D. H. Lawrence also coupled Melville with Rousseau. "Here at last," he wrote, "is Rousseau's Child of Nature." Studies in Classic American Literature, p. 199. Thorp disagrees with this conclusion. In a footnote in his Representative Selections, he writes: "Melville's nearest approach to pure Rousseau is found in a passage in Omoo which describes the native in the interior of Tahiti (Works, II, 77), but it should be noticed that he is there recording the effect which the beauty of the island has exercised on European travelers ever since it was discovered." p. cii.

falsehood. He casts Melville, as well as other contemporary New England writers - Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, into a chapter entitled "The Frontier Force." Its thesis is that "it was the petty bourgeois individualism of the frontier which provided the basic psychological determinant of our national psychology." (In line with his point of view, Calverton uses the pejorative term "petty bourgeois individualism" no less than four times on one page.) "Industrialism," he tells us, "was rapidly converting New England into a vast octopus of factories and mills. In order to escape that octopus Thoreau moved to Walden - and Melville, by necessity rather than by choice, to Typee." This is a peculiar statement in the light of the fact that Melville was not a New Englander, that he was a New Yorker; and what exactly, one would like to ask, was the "necessity" that caused Melville to escape.

"Typee," Calverton continues, "represented the revolt of an individual who hated the corruption of his own civilization, who saw through its shams and hypocrisies, and yet knew no other way of dealing with it than to flee... All his novels, including his masterpiece Moby-Dick, in which, in symbolic form, our whole capitalist society was indicted, advanced no further in its solution. Nevertheless, Melville escaped more of the influence of the middle-class ideology of his day than did any of his contemporaries, and, enchanted by the primitive felicity of Typee, fell upon a purer and remoter vision." How, one might ask, does Calverton reconcile this "purer" vision with the ideas which Melville later expressed in Moby-Dick, Pierre, or The Confidence Man. Calverton,

41. Ibid.
one is forced to conclude, did not read Melville.

In a footnote, Calverton has the temerity to venture a critical comment on Mumford's biography, which, if he had read with any care, could not possibly have led him to the extravagant observations in his own text. "Although, in my opinion," he declares, "Mr. Mumford makes Melville into a more significant author than he really is, and reads a good deal of himself into Melville's work, his life of Melville provides an inspiring picture of the man and his work." 42

Calverton's concluding paragraph on Melville is the epitome of inaccuracy. "In terms of America, however, Melville, like Emerson, looked to the West for the coming of the new race - the native, the representative American race. It was the America of the East, of New England, that had repelled him and driven him from its shores. Critical as he was of the 'happiness boys' who had risen in the West at that time, the romancers and the humorists, he, nevertheless, did not surrender his faith." 43 Certainly these statements cry out for documentary evidence.

It is in Hicks' favor that he gives indication of having read Mumford's biography with more care and judgment than Calverton. 44 Nor does Hicks manifest as vehement a Marxist bias as does Calverton; he is undoubtedly strongly influenced by Marxist theory - much more, for example, than Parrington - but he forgets, occasionally, his sociological bias and indulges in observations that reveal an aesthetic awareness.

"...his first books," Hicks writes, "mingle a warm and spontaneous joy

42. Ibid.
43. Ibid.
44. For a discussion of Hicks' work, see Blackmur, "A Critic's Job of Work," in Zabel, op. cit., p. 778-779.
in life with an acute and detailed perception of the realities of human conduct." Melville's "pre-occupation," he tells us accurately, if over-simply, was to be with cosmic themes, "with the nature of evil and the mysteries of life and death."

Indeed, with respect to certain of Melville's works, Hicks shows a sensitive insight that belies his bias.

To what extent his first voyage had revealed to him the evil in the world Redburn shows, just as White Jacket suggests how inevitably a ship symbolized for him the world of men. What more natural than that, for his supreme effort, his great symphonic development of his chosen theme, he should find in the Pequod of Nantucket the epitome of the world, in its captain the titanic protagonist of a cosmic drama, and in a great while whale the perfect symbol of blind, unreasoning evil? What had been for him the world of reality, what would remain to the end - as Billy Budd shows - the most vivid setting for his allegories that his experience had revealed or his imagination could conceive, gave him in Moby Dick a flawless metaphor.  

Even when Hicks attempts to explain the failure of Moby Dick to impress and influence the generation after the Civil War, he does not resort to Marxist rhetoric; in contract with Calverton's, hiw remarks seem almost dispassionate. "After the war," he says, "men were wrestling with the problem of evil as it presented itself in concrete economic phenomena. Melville's problem was real enough, but the terms in which he stated it were irrelevant." And he concludes by praising the novel as a great metaphysical epic. It is the "greedy, machine-dominated" post-war generation that Hicks castigates, berating it for its neglect and flagrant misinterpretation of the writers who had preceded it. 

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46. Ibid., p. 8.
post-war generation not only failed to rise to the level of the heroes of the past; it brought them down upon its own plane.\textsuperscript{47}

Irrespective of what these volumes—Calverton's and Hicks'—may have contributed to sociological criticism—and the passage of time has already shown that this contribution has been minimal—they have not added much to Melville criticism.\textsuperscript{48} Calverton, by his own admission, does not consider Melville a significant author; Hicks' opinion of Melville is certainly more fair and reasonable, but he is not particularly at ease in trying to appraise Melville in terms of his bias. As Marxist criticism, both of their treatments of Melville are failures. In comparison, Parrington, who at least understood the rationale of sociological criticism with perception and clarity, presents us with the best evaluation of Melville. But Parrington too, despite this dubious distinction, serves to illustrate that literature is too encompassing, too ramifying, and too complex an aspect of life to be understood purely in terms of sociological criteria.

Among other treatments of Melville that might appropriately be discussed in this chapter is Ralph H. Gabriel's in his The Course of American Democratic Thought (1940). Gabriel's excellent book is not history, nor is it sociology; it is a carefully propounded attempt, as

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{48} Concerning Hicks' work, Chase writes: "In the 1930's progressive writers like Granville Hicks brought Parrington's earlier strictures up to date and attacked Melville because he failed to 'participate' and because the moral center of his thinking (which Hicks mistakenly supposed to be a doctrinal concern with evil) could not be immediately stated in economic terms. Do we not see in this attitude a disinclination or inability to perceive what was in fact a most crucial 'participation' in American culture?" Chase, op. cit., p. xi.
its title indicates, to trace the patterns in the growth and development of democratic thought in America, using history, sociology, and biography to achieve its end. Thus, if one were to classify it, one might call it the study of the history of an idea; Gabriel himself, in his subtitle terms the work "An Intellectual History since 1815."

Gabriel's chapter on Melville, "Melville, Critic of Mid-Nineteenth Century Beliefs," is included in the first section of his book "in which the doctrines of American democratic faith are examined and set against the social and intellectual background of the Middle Period." His only biographical source is Weaver, although he acknowledges the "influence" of Norman Pearson, co-editor of the Oxford Anthology of American Literature on his interpretation; he has read Melville carefully, keeping the end of his own book strictly in mind. The result is an admirable analysis of both Melville's philosophic ideas as they bear on the subject of democracy and Melville's position in the developing stream of democratic thought in America. In addition, there are numerous references to Melville throughout the volume, illustrating how his democratic beliefs compare and contrast with the beliefs of other important American statesmen, journalists, historians, and philosophers.
whom Gabriel discusses.

As one might expect, the chief purport of this chapter is philosophical. Gabriel, in briefly presenting biographical data, tells us that Melville arrived at two basic, philosophic conclusions: first, that "the soul of man comes out of mystery and to mystery returns"; and second, that "Melville saw in his remembered images of the whalesmen against the sea a symbol of the insecurity of human life," that "The life of man is a voyage in a whaleboat across a dangerous sea." Melville's conclusions, however, are not presented in vacuum. Gabriel skillfully sketches in their relationship to the America in

49. Among the figures with whom Gabriel compares Melville are: Beard, Calhoun, K. Carey, William James, Royce, and W. G. Summer. Of Oliver Wendell Holmes, Gabriel writes: "Holmes was a twentieth century Melville. Striking parallels bind the two in intellectual kinship. Both were skeptics. Neither found sustenance in the dogmatic social faiths or in the Christianity of the middle of the nineteenth century. Both saw human life enveloped by mystery....Both Holmes and Melville looked reverently upon the mystery. In it they found strength. It was their religion. For both the central commandment of religion was the same: If man, lost in enveloping mystery would save his soul, let him act." The Course of American Democratic Thought. New York, 1940, pp. 392-393. Holmes himself was familiar with Melville. The Holmes family were summer neighbors of Melville at Pittsfield, and Holmes' father was, for a time, the Melville family physician. It was Holmes' father who examined Melville when his family was worried about his sanity in 1852, and who wrote the poem "The Last Leaf," reputed to have described Thomas Melville - Melville's grandfather. In a letter dated May 18, 1921 to Sir Frederick Pollock, Holmes wrote: "Did I mention Moby Dick by Herman Melville? I remember him in my youth. It seemed to me a great book - as ten years later may some of George Borrow's Things, possibly influenced by him - but I should think a much greater man. It shook me up a great deal. It is wonderful already that a book published in 1851 doesn't seem thin now. Hawthorne did when I last read The Scarlet Letter. Not so Moby Dick." Holmes-Pollock Letters: The correspondence of Mr. Justice Holmes and Sir Frederick Pollock, 1874-1932, Harvard University Press, 1941, p. 68. For an allegorical interpretation of "I and My Chimney" in which Holmes' father is a major figure, see Merton Sealts, "Herman Melville's 'I and My Chimney'," AJ, XIII (May, 1941), pp. 142-154.

50. Gabriel, op. cit., p. 69.
which Melville lived.

Nationalism was in the air. Men talked of saving the western wilderness for democracy. The democratic faith guaranteed the justness of the war the War with Mexico, save for a critical minority who saw in it a plot to extend slavery. It was this smugness of the American democratic philosophy, the conviction of its prophets that God and the constitution of the universe were on their side, which roused the rebel in Melville. As he looked at the democratic faith against the background of his experience at sea and in Polynesia, he saw it for what, in truth, it was, a philosophy of security. In partnership with Protestant Christianity it explained the meaning of human life and the destiny, not only of men, but of America. It gave to Americans the comforting assurance that, in their democratic institutions and ideals, they had discovered the ultimate truth. In the democratic faith Americans had the truth; their only intellectual problem was how to realize this truth in human institutions.... Protestant Christianity, together with the democratic faith, provided for Americans of the Middle Period the socially sanctioned answers to the questions of belief and conduct. Melville, looking at the pattern, thought that the security which it offered was false and that most of its basic assumptions were illusions. He considered its doctrines - the God-given moral law, progress, the free individual, and the destiny of America - and was troubled at the neatness and the finality of the manner of their statement.51

In wrestling with the philosophic questions which pre-occupied him throughout his life - such questions as "What is God?" "What is man?" "What is the fundamental moral law?" - Melville, according to Gabriel, arrived at conclusions which were strongly antithetical to the beliefs which were endemic to the society in which he lived. Melville, for example, "founded his philosophy of individualism on the hard doctrine that security is an illusion." Ahab was the personification of this philosophy of individualism, for "Ahab saved his soul, maintained inviolate his personal integrity, by going down in unconquered defeat

51. Ibid., pp. 70-71.
while Moby Dick swam on for other Ahabs to pursue." All positions to Melville, according to Gabriel, must be tentative except two: "the eternal dualism between good and evil, and man's destiny to make war on wrong." Gabriel's summation of Melville's struggle is that, as early as 1851, he formulated a philosophy of morals founded on naturalism in a generation whose thought was permeated with romanticism and theism. "He was a lonely immigrant in his age, a troubled soul who, in coming to earth, had opened the door upon the wrong century." 52

Thus, we find in Gabriel, the same image of Melville that was depicted in both Weaver and Parrington, the image of a man, misunderstood and rejected by his time, the prophet whose tribe ignored him. "His doctrines jarred with those of the democratic faith, the almost universal religion in America at the time of Melville's great literary period. His was a discordant voice in the chorus of democracy. In an age whose thought was dominated by philosophies of individualism, Melville spoke of an individualism whose acceptance required more hardihood than his generation possessed." 53 Of the three who have given us this image of Melville, Gabriel's is probably the most sharply delineated and the most convincing. And Gabriel's method, in comparison with the other two, is more clear-cut. He is concerned only with content; he goes to his sensitive scrutiny of Melville's work with certain specific ends in mind; he is not obstructed by either aesthetic or psychological considerations. The other two, however, must consider Melville as a literary figure; Gabriel is not so constrained, but his work as a whole does illustrate

52. Ibid., p. 76.
53. Ibid., p. 77.
the dynamic interrelationship between history, biography, and sociology as they explain human ideas.

A number of articles and brief discussions in larger works also attempt to consider Melville from a sociological point of view; some of these are general in nature, others specifically treat Melville's work. Edward Dahlberg's *Do These Bones Live* (1941), for example, a book which reiterates the familiar charge of inhibition and sterility for the artist in America, and traces the cause in the curse of Puritanism, includes discussion of Melville to substantiate its thesis. An article by Joseph Schiffman\(^{54}\) attempts to show that although "Benito Cereno" is not an abolitionist tract, the moral victory of Babo at the close is really an indictment of slavery; Henry Wells points out that the social-mindedness expressed in Melville's novels reveals that the common man found in him a humanitarian spokesman, "that Melville's own experiences strengthened the sociological point of view in his major novels."\(^{55}\)

The theme of the isolation of the American is also dealt with by Henry Bamford Parkes, who tries to show that not only Melville, but Poe and Hawthorne commonly portrayed characters who showed both painful isolation and sexual immaturity, two traits which, he claims, seem to have marked America of the 1840's and which anticipated the twentieth century.\(^{56}\)

In recent years, an important adjunct of sociology, the study of

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social forces, has been anthropology, the study of cultural forces. There is no clear-cut line between these studies, but whereas sociology has focussed on comparatively modern societies, anthropology has studied primitive societies. For convenience' sake, however, anthropology has usually been considered subsidiary to sociology, and in most universities, departments of anthropology are associated with departments of sociology.

Both studies become involved with the study of psychology; for the sociologist, psychology is a vital developing force in the social organism; for the anthropologist, psychology is vital in the cultural development of society. The anthropologist, however, has been the more influenced by Freud and Jung, and modern anthropologists have not been averse to utilizing both Freudian and Jungian insights in presenting the mores, myths, folklore of primitive societies. Indeed, modern anthropologists have not always restricted themselves to the study of primitive societies; some have ventured into the so-called civilized societies and have come forth with data that reasonably falls into the category of sociological studies.

An approach to literature emerging from the uneasy affiliation of sociology, anthropology, and psychology is one which interprets in terms of myth and legend. In psychology, the basis for this interpretation was presented by both Freud and Jung, who gave the question of myth considerable attention in their respective systems. Sociologists, however, do not generally accept these concepts of myth, primarily because the predominant point of view in sociological research has considered itself to be scientific. If we divide sociologists loosely into two factions,
we may observe that one faction, the more powerful perhaps, presumes to be scientific and statistical; the other faction is concerned with theory. The latter faction has not ignored the importance of myth in a study of society and social theory. It has, however, been left to the anthropologist to explore the subject of myth more thoroughly, it being considered that myth has its roots in the primitive origins of social groups.

Certain literary critics in recent years have appropriated the concept of myth, integrating it in their critical practice in the same fashion that critics have utilized Freud and Jung in psychological criticism. Among such critics have been William Troy, who has published only in literary quarterlies, Francis Fergusson, who has been mostly concerned with drama, and Richard Chase. Chase has made the fullest explanation of critical interpretation through myth in his volume *Quest for Myth* (1949), and has tried to illustrate the method in his *Herman Melville* (1949). We shall discuss both of these volumes in a later chapter.

The task of the critic who wishes to interpret in terms of myth is certainly not as complex as the task of the strictly sociological critic. He is not confronted with the three divisions of method which confronts the strictly sociological critic. His interpretation requires that he adhere closely to the work itself, for it is primarily the content of

the work which provides the material in which he is interested. Occasional­ly, it is true, he may find it necessary to resort to psychological insights, associating the mythological content of the work with the psyche of the author, and he must, of necessity, relate this content with its origins in the culture; but, first and foremost, his task demands a close textual reading of the work. It is for this reason, perhaps, that this kind of criticism has developed almost concurrently with the New Criticism. For the New Criticism, as we shall see, demands, as a first principle, a scrupulous adherence to text.

The first attempt to study the mythological content in Melville was made by Constance Rourke in her *American Humor, A Study of National Character* (1931). In her study, Miss Rourke divides American folk culture into a number of separate categories, some of them dealing with the Yankee and backwoodsman as types; the minstrel show; comic writers and their roots in the "archtypal largeness which adheres in the more elementary poetic forms"; the influential myths of pioneer life. Melville, along with Emerson, Thoreau, Poe, and Whitman, is discussed in a chapter "I Hear America Singing," which purports to show how these writers were influenced by a fast developing tradition of myth and folklore in America, how they established in America the concept of "a national literature."

Melville, according to Miss Rourke, moved with this temper and was supported by it. Without those lusty undirected energies which had persistently maintained the sense of legend he could hardly have created *Moby-Dick* at all, for the primitive

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58. For a discussion of Constance Rourke, see Hyman, *op. cit.*, pp. 127-141.
legend-making faculty lies at its base, with something conscious and involved that was not primitive inwoven with it, that had also appeared on popular levels. Popular comedy had run a long course when Melville began to write in the late '40's; its character, its temper, even its verbal ingenuities, were established. Tall tales out of the West had overspread the entire country; the abundant sea-lore which had grown up at the same time was fully created. These would have reached Melville not only through the common channels of the almanacs and popular journals but through primary adventures of his own. On the wharves at New Bedford and as a sailor to far seas he must have known characters who overflowed with such stories; he would have heard them, for he was himself a master of oral story-telling; the art inevitably draws forth examples of its kind.59

Miss Rourke also points out that even in Typee and Omoo Melville was "linked with the native comic temper of the time, particularly that of the West, with its strong bias toward a naturalistic existence, its lyricism, its continual revelation of the movement toward the farther West and the western sea." And she compares the temperate and sweet quality of the humor in these books with the "underply for popular humor, shown in the more idyllic passages in the life of the cults." With respect to Moby Dick, she declares that the whale resembles one of those illusory marked creatures of the natural world, magic and powerful, which had often appeared in western legends of the jet-black stallion or the white deer, calling attention to parallels between Melville's tale and the "tall tales of the West," and the legend of Mocha Dick which literary historians have cited as one of Melville's sources for his novel.60

60. This possible "source" for Moby-Dick was J. N. Reynolds's Mocha Dick or the White Whale of the Pacific, first published in the Knickerbocker Magazine, May, 1839, and republished with an Introduction by L. L. Balcolm in New York, in 1932. Attention was first called to this source by R. S. Garnett in an article, "Moby-Dick and Mocha-Dick," in Blackwood's Magazine, CGXXVI (Dec., 1929).
Miss Rourke's effort to point out Melville's connection with myth and folk legend is merely tentative. Indeed, her American Humor was a preliminary exploration for a more exhaustive work on the history of American culture from what might be considered an anthropological point of view, with the emphasis on myth and folk legend. Her important contribution to criticism was this method of analyzing formal art in terms of its folk and mythological roots, and it is unfortunate that her death interfered with the completion of her work. Chase considers himself her heir and insists that he is carrying on her labors, and certainly Henry Nash Smith's Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth is a continuation of her efforts.

Smith makes brief mention of Melville in his work. First, he discusses Melville and Charles W. Webber, showing how they were probably the only American writers who made a serious effort to develop a literature of the Wild West in terms of primitivism, for he considers Melville's "idyllic valley of the South Seas" a symbol of primitivism. In this comparison, Smith concludes that Melville went on "to build a new art from the ruins of his earlier doctrine of nature," whereas Webber "could do no more than exemplify the bankruptcy of primitivism." Smith also discusses Melville's attitude toward the Wild West. "But to Melville," he writes, "the Wild West, like nature in general, came to seem in the highest degree ambiguous. It was not more certainly good than bad, yet in either case it was terrible and magnificent. The point is worth making because metaphorical material derived from the Wild West plays such an important part in Moby Dick. Toward the agricultural West of the Ohio Valley Melville had an attitude not unlike that of most
conservative Easterners in the 1840's. *Mardi* makes a conventional at­
tack on Western politicians with their cult of manifest destiny, and
paints an unsympathetic picture of the Gold Rush. But the West beyond
the frontier had a different value for him. The two images developed
at greatest length in the pivotal Chapter XLII of *Moby Dick*, 'The White­
ness of the Whale,' are those of the White Steed of the Prairies and
the Vermont colt maddened by the scent of a buffalo robe. 61 Smith
goes on to quote the passage to which he refers and concludes by saying
that the native wildness of the West served Melville as a means of ex­
pressing one of his major intuitions. (We are forced to notice here
that, although Miss Rourke's and Mr. Smith's conclusions concerning
Melville are similar, there is a disagreement in the images of Miss
Rourke's "jet-black stallion or white deer," and Mr. Smith's "White
Steed of the Prairies." It is Mr. Smith's image, however, which is de­
rived directly from the text.) 62

In his *Call Me Ishmael* (1947) - a volume that stylistically is a
melange of D. H. Lawrence, Melville himself, and echoes of Dos Passos -
Charles Olson has also called attention to the qualities of myth in

61. Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and
62. A second reference to Melville in Smith's book deals with "the
antidemocratic tendency of the notion of the safety valve" as it is ex­
plicitly expressed in *Clarel*. Smith quotes the pertinent passages from
the poem. The safety valve theory is, as Smith explains, that "the
West, the free lands beyond the frontier, would operate as a safety valve
to keep down social and economic conflict in the East." Melville's con­
clusion in his poem seems to be that this theory is untenable, and that
the social and economic conflict which it is supposed to prevent is in­
Moby-Dick. The merit of Olson's work - and it does have merit - is diminished by this extravagant presentation. The broken chapters and paragraphs, the mixture of poetic imagery - metaphor and allusion - with historical fact and data, the lavish capitalization of words, the effect of disorganization - all this tends to mark Olson's work as a kind of critical tour de force. Its merit lies in its endeavor to show the epical qualities of Moby-Dick, to illustrate also the sociological and economic importance of the whaling industry in the mid-nineteenth century, and, principally, the marked influence of Shakespeare, particularly Lear, on Melville during the creation of the novel.

The attempt to get at the mythical elements of Moby-Dick is probably the most significant quality of the book. Olson believes first in the concept of SPACE as part of the American birthright. "The fulcrum of America is the Plains," he writes, and Melville, he tells us, was one of the men who mounted and rode on space - or the plains. Melville was "long-eyed enough to understand the Pacific as part of our geography, another West, prefigured in the Plains, antithetical." In sentences that almost rival Lawrence, Olson gives us a grandiloquent and conglomerate picture of Melville. "He had the tradition in him, deep in his brain, his words, the salt beat of his blood.... History was ritual and repetition when Melville's imagination was at its own proper best...

... He was an original, an aboriginal.... Beginner - and interested in beginnings. Melville had a way of reaching back through time until he got history pushed back so far he turned time into space.... Melville

went back to discover us, to come forward. He got as far as Moby Dick... He was homeless in his land, his society, his self. Logic and classification had led civilization toward man, away from space. Melville went to space to probe and find man... The shift was from man as a group to individual man. Now, in spite of the corruption of myth by fascism, the swing is out and back. Melville is one who began it... He had a pull to the origin of things, the first day, the first man, the unknown sea, Betelgeuse, the buried continent. From passive places his imagination sprang a harpoon... He sought prime. He had the coldness we have, but he warmed himself by the first fires after Flood. It gave him the power to find the lost past of America, the unfound present, and make a myth, Moby Dick, for a people of Ishmaels... He lived intensely his people's wrong, their guilt. But he remembered the first dream. The White Whale is more accurate than Leaves of Grass. Because it is America, all of her space, the malice, the root."

All of this is emotionally intoxicating, but it does not stand up very firmly under intellectual scrutiny. Olson implies that Melville was endowed with the insight to capture the inherent myths and traditions of America, "all of her space, the malice, the root," but he does very little to define the myths of tradition. His generalizations are poetically cavalier. Miss Rourke, on the other hand, makes a more painstaking effort to explain and present evidence for her mythic influence.

Olson also tries to show the symbolical implications of Melville's use of the whaling industry in the book. He associates the background of this industry with an impressionistic description of nineteenth century economic conditions.
So if you want to know why Melville nailed us in *Moby-Dick*, consider whaling. Consider whaling as FRONTIER and INDUSTRY. A product wanted, men got it: big business. The Pacific sweatshop. Man, led, against the biggest damndest creature nature uncorks. The whaleship as factory, the whale boat as precision instrument. The 1840's: the New West in the saddle and Melville No. 20 of a rough and bastard crew. Are they essentials?

 Melville didn't put it all on the surface in *Moby-Dick*. You'll find the frontier all right, and Andrew Jackson regarded as heavy-weight champion...And the technic of industry analyzed, scrupulously described. But no economics. Yes, the year *Moby-Dick* was being finished Marx was writing letters to the *N. Y. Daily Tribune*. But Melville....

It is Olson's theory in this book that *Moby-Dick* was composed in two manuscripts, written between 1850 and August, 1851, and that the first of these books did not contain the character Ahab. Olson contends that the first book was rewritten into the second, the *Moby-Dick* with which we are familiar, under Melville's sudden rapture with Shakespeare, citing parallels between *Moby-Dick* and *Lear* and the characters of Ahab and Lear. Olson's theory, however, remains a theory; it is not a provable fact.

But intermixed with this presentation of the strong Shakespearian influence on Melville are the grandiloquent vaporizings about America, myth, democracy, et al., in which Olson evidently cannot refrain from indulging. Such unorganized passages as the following:

As the strongest literary force Shakespeare caused Melville to approach tragedy in terms of drama. As the strongest social force America caused him to approach tragedy in terms of democracy......

It was not difficult for Melville to reconcile the two. Because of his perception of America: Ahab.....It has to do with size and how you value it. You can approach BIG America and spread yourself like a pancake...be puffed up as we are over PRODUCTION. It's easy. THE AMERICAN WAY. Soft.

Melville did his job. He calculated and cast Ahab. BIG, first of all. ENERGY, next. PURPOSE: lordship over nature. SPEED: of the brain. DIRECTION: vengeance. COST: the people, the crew.

To MAGNIFY is the mark of Moby-Dick. As with workers, castaways, so with the scope and space of the sea, the prose, the Whale, the Ship and, OVER ALL, the Captain. It is the technical act compelled by the American fact. Cubits of tragic stature. Put it this way. Three forces operated to bring about the dimensions of Moby-Dick: Melville, a man of MYTH, antemosaic; an experience of SPACE, its power and price, America; and ancient magnitudes of TRAGEDY, Shakespeare.65

Olson's scholarship has been considered adequate. It was he who brought to light the edition of Shakespeare which Melville had used during the composition of Moby-Dick. Matthiessen, in several notes in his American Renaissance, acknowledges the "painstaking research of Charles Olson." But, perhaps because of his own lack of academic qualifications, Olson evidently did not wish to write his work as literary history. He had grander aspirations, seeing Moby-Dick as a work which had its roots in American myth and THE AMERICAN WAY. And yielding to these aspirations, he has presented his work in a manner that is stylistically bombastic, disorganized, and pretentious. It is an unfortunate method of presentation. To avoid the pedantry of the scholar, Olson has fallen into the abyss of the most unpalatable kind of modern impressionism.

A more recent article on the qualities of myth in Melville is Harry Slochower's "Moby-Dick: The Myth of Democratic Expectancy."66 Slochower

65. Ibid., p. 69 ff.
has a propensity for vast statements that are deceptively epigrammatic:
"The myth is the answer to the question of a basic universal theme."
"Myth is the incarnation of the eternal present and of a chartered future through the remembrance of things past." Coupled with this is a tendency for lavish allusion, running the gamut from classic Greece to A Streetcar Named Desire. Here is a critic, who, subscribing to the dictum that all literature is his province, tries to include all literature in one short piece on Moby-Dick.

The gist of Slochower's essay is that in America "the classic mythical category of creation becomes the category of the newest and the latest"; that the mythic form for this quest of the "newest and latest" is the journey; and that Melville's Moby-Dick "is the first major American literary myth sounding the central motifs of creation and quest." To get at this rather simple conclusion, the reader must journey through paragraphs on individualism, Freudian digressions - "Fraternity, or the myth of democratic expectancy, is the American equivalent of European paternity" -, and two involved sections trying to point out through discussion of Moby-Dick that Ahab has assumed "the collective burden", and that he goes through some incomprehensible process of "rehabilitation." There are a few sharp insights in this article, but they do not compensate for the task of getting at them.67

67. Slochower, for example, points out that Melville has been claimed as a forerunner of Modern Existentialism, citing his own piece, "The Function of Myth in Existentialism," Yale French Studies (Spring, 1948) as reference, and showing how Ahab illustrates the dialectic of the individual's being at the end 'socialized' in a cosmic collective, a dialectic of which Modern Existentialism, according to Slochower, is a variant.
Slochower tries to tell us what kind of myth *Moby-Dick* is; a few years earlier, Clifton Fadiman, a less erudite critic, had told us that *Moby-Dick* was a myth. In the preface to a limited edition of *Moby-Dick*, Fadiman, after saying that we have discovered *Moby-Dick* to be a masterpiece, asked the question, "Why?" and proceeded to answer it: "To put it simply, we have discovered how *Moby-Dick* should be read. We must read it not as if it were a novel but as if it were a myth. A novel is a tale. A myth is a disguised method of expressing mankind's deepest terrors and longings. The myth uses the narrative form and is often mistaken for true narrative. Once we feel the truth of this distinction, the greatness of *Moby-Dick* becomes manifest; we have learned how to read it."68

The difference between such critics as Slochower and Fadiman seems apparent enough. Slochower, despite his deficiencies, attempts, at least, to explain and relate; he indulges in some exegesis and endeavors to use a critical method. Fadiman, the popular critic, assumes that merely to name and describe is sufficient as criticism; he uses the concept of myth as an excuse for saying nothing.

Like literary history, a sociological interpretation of literature, as Wellek and Warren have pointed out, is extrinsic to the work of art itself. The focus of neither viewpoints is on the work of literature; the difference, however, is that the literary historian may almost completely ignore the intrinsic qualities of the work, whereas the

68. Clifton Fadiman in his preface to the Limited Editions Club edition of *Moby-Dick*. 
sociological critic must, in some fashion or other, begin with the work and, even if it becomes tangential, give the work a modicum of attention. In recent years sociological criticism has achieved, even in the universities, a status of respectability and has acquired staunch advocates, more so, perhaps than psychological criticism. The reason is that sociological criticism is more closely related to literary history than psychological criticism, and literary history has been entrenched in the universities. In the development of literary criticism, it has become obvious that the literary historian can no more refrain from entering the area of sociology than the aesthetic critic can keep out of metaphysics.

Sociological criticism is not a recent development, but its importance and significance have been explored more as the study of sociology has grown and established itself in the universities. This investigation, in the last twenty-five years, has been enormous, and the results have been impressive. With respect to literature itself, the development becomes apparent when, for example, one compares such volumes as Macy's early work on American Literature with Gabriel's history of ideas of which literature is an integral part. Melville criticism parallels this growth. From a sociological point of view, Parrington's criticism of Melville seems almost bungling and inept in contrast with Gabriel's.

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69. Jones distinguishes three streams in current writing on American literary history: first, the turning of scholarship to cultural history; second, the study of smaller periods of literary history; third, the study of the history of ideas and its contribution to a better sense of significant values in literature and life. *Op. cit.*, pp. 172-173.
The contributions which anthropology has contributed to this development must also be considered. And we must notice here, also, that Melville criticism has kept pace with this tributary to the mainstream of sociological criticism.

Indirectly, the revival itself might be considered as a sociological phenomenon. For the revival is one aspect of the tendency of critics and intellectuals during the last decades to re-examine and re-evaluate American literature in a socio-economic frame of reference.

Or, more simply, to answer the question: What is the relation of literature to society in the United States? With the sweeping attempt to examine American culture and American values comes the attempt to examine anew American literature, and concurrent with this latter examination comes the revived interest in Melville, with which we are dealing here.

There are, however, more profound implications to the revival. For the revival indicates that, for our time, Melville answers certain questions which he did not answer for his contemporaries, that these questions are, perhaps, different from those which his contemporaries asked. The best statement of these implications and these questions has been made by Gabriel.

The realities of the twentieth century have ended that optimistic nineteenth century philosophy of progress which saw a golden age at the end of the trail of human-kind. This philosophy was also part of the pattern of the American democratic faith. That dream in 1917 of peace founded on justice making the world safe for democracy faded in the years of disillusionment following 1918. It was not an accident that post-Versailles Americans discovered the almost forgotten Melville. He founded his philosophy of individualism on the assumption that evil is unconquerable and that wars will continue so long as
men inhabit the globe. But Melville also asserted that the human spirit is unconquerable and, though the war against evil continue to the end of time, men will refuse to be dragged down to the level of animals. Perhaps Melville's modest belief that, though men cannot transform society into Utopia, individuals can, even in defeat, preserve their personal integrity, will provide a substitute for the old philosophy of progress in an age when men are watching the decline of a great civilization. 70
CHAPTER V

Melville and Psychological Criticism

Psychology, as it relates to literature, may attempt "to explain the 'inner workings' of a work of art and to explain the temperament of the artist as a man."¹ Thus, it may presume to consider either the writer, the work of literature itself, or both. It may, for example, consider the writer as a type or individual and, in this consideration, approximate biography; or it may, in considering the writer, attempt to analyze the motivations and the complexity of the creative process. With respect to the work itself, it may attempt to analyze or examine the psychological types and laws described in it, e.g. the symbols in poetry, the characters and their motivations in drama or fiction. In a broader sense, it may also examine the psychological effects of the work on its audience, or deal with, as it is termed in psychological jargon, the problem of "group dynamics."

Psychological criticism has developed out of the growth of Freudian theory, which has had a strong influence on both the creative writer and the literary critic. Many novelists, for example, have used the analytic techniques and the results of Freudian theory, particularly Freud's theory of dream interpretation which lends itself well as "a convenient summary of character-motivation, and even as part of the plot structure itself."² And psychoanalysis has furnished much symbolic material to both poets and dramatists. But perhaps the greatest influence of Freudian

² Frederick J. Hoffman, Freudianism and the Literary Mind, Baton Rouge, La., 1945, p. 112.
theory has been in the area of literary criticism, on the interpretation of the work of art itself and on the biography of the writer. Until recent years, when the emphasis has shifted to a concentration on the work of art itself, the psychoanalytic critic viewed his task primarily as an exploration of the writer's psyche, using the writer's work as a source for his psychoanalytic interpretations. This propensity is explainable when one considers the differences in function between the creative writer and the literary critic; for the creative writer produces from his psyche and his psychological experiences with life, whereas the critic has only the literary work upon which to operate.

Although the creative writer may use the theories and ideologies of his time in his work, the mere act of literary creation precludes his being objective or, frequently, his being conscious of his use. Thus, the problem of Freudian influence on the writer becomes an extremely knotty one. Freudian theory itself emphasizes the potency of the unconscious in the creative act; thus, the writer's conscious use of its analytic techniques and results becomes rather nugatory. For the implication is that some part of whatever the artist or writer creates will have origin in his unconscious. "No writer is, therefore, a 'Freudian.' One can only say that he may have been interested in the aesthetic possibilities of Freudianism and have exploited them in one way or another."3

For the literary critic, however, whose function, in this discussion, we shall not consider creative, the ideas and theories of his time lend

themselves to more objectivity and certainly are more intellectual in nature than for the creative writer. He is more likely to be interested in and to understand better the current ideologies, he is presumably more sensitive to the zeitgeist in a fashion that the creative writer is not. The critic, in other words, "is closer to the intellectual world, and it is his ideal task to demonstrate the value of aesthetic contributions to it"; his role is "to examine quite objectively the ideologies of his time, with a view toward noticing their applicability to or differences from aesthetics."^4

The popularity of psychoanalysis during the early part of the century and particularly during the twenties made it inevitable for the literary critic to associate its importance, both as theory and as a potential critical method, with literature. Although Freud's first book was not translated into English until 1910,^5 by 1915 psychoanalysis was "fairly well launched in the magazines from which the intellectual of that day drew his information."^6 During the subsequent period, however, the problem was not so much literary as it was general – revolving around the acceptance or rejection of Freudian theory. Before the literary application of psychoanalysis could gain momentum, the slow process of transferring it as an idea from the scientific journals to the popular consciousness was necessary; it had to fight for recognition, first among psychologists, and then among the laity. It was not until the twenties

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4. Ibid., p. 93.
5. Three Contributions to a Theory of Sex, tr. by A. A. Brill. Brill's importance as Freud's translator and as a disseminator of Freudian theory in America cannot be underestimated.
that there was a real penetration of Freudianism into the thought of America. And although the creative writer was "interested in the aesthetic possibilities of Freudianism" during this period, there are not many noteworthy manifestations of it in literary criticism. Most of them were in the field of biography, but "mostly the Freudian biographers were ill-natured Guildersterns who seemed to know the pipes but could not pluck out the heart of the mystery." According to Trilling, of American biographies produced during this period that have a Freudian basis, only two—Joseph Wood Krutch's *Edgar Allen Poe: A Study in Genius* and Van Wyck Brooks' *The Ordeal of Mark Twain* have really survived, and one may doubt the "really."

Although both in Europe and America the creative writer was much influenced by Freud, in America the literary critic developed Freud's potential uses for criticism rather slowly. In Germany, the psychoanalytic viewpoint had been applied to literature as early as 1910 with the publication of William Stekel's *Dichtung und Neurose*, and had developed to the status of an almost systematic school of psychoanalytic criticism with the publication, in 1919, of Otto Rank's *Das Inzest Motiv* in *Dichtung und Sage*. In America, however, it was not until the thirties and forties, when Freud was beginning to gain more stature as

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9. Hoffman, *op. cit.*, Chapter IV.
an important contributor to man's knowledge, that literary criticism began to apply the analytic techniques and results of his theories, and strictly analytic studies, patterned after his *Leonardo da Vinci: A Study in Psychosexuality*, were produced.11

The literary critic who analyzes a work from a psychological point of view has had three correlated choices. First, he has focussed his attention on the biography of the writer, using the writer's work as source material to elaborate his biographical conclusions; or, in reverse, he has used biographical material to explain the writer's work; in either instance he has tended toward psychoanalytic criticism. When he has focussed his attention on the psychological content of the work itself, he has indicated the close relationship between psychology and aesthetics. Second, the critic has explored the cultural and mythological aspects of a work, using the theories of Freudian and Jungian psychology with their relationship to anthropology. Third, he has combined a psychological with a sociological point of view and revealed how

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psychology can extend from the individual to the social organism.\textsuperscript{12}

This threefold development of psychological criticism came as Freudianism and psychoanalysis grew in importance and influence. As we have noted, the first contributions of the psychological critic were principally in the realm of biography, for biography has been the main concern of clinical psychoanalysis itself. It is true that the majority of such studies were published in such specialized journals as the Psychoanalytical Review, but in the early forties such eminent literary journals as the Partisan Review and the Kenyon Review also gave serious consideration to the psychoanalytic approach. The interest in this type of biography has survived, but it was not long before articles indicating the close relationship between psychology and aesthetics began to appear. The old problem of the creative imagination and the meaning of art assumed new aspects under the impact of Freudianism, especially as Freudianism threw light on the symbolism of language. The New Criticism, for example, which stressed the primary importance of text and the close adherence to text, could not avoid, in analyzing the symbolic content in a literary work, the association between psychology and art.\textsuperscript{13} In addition, the second


\textsuperscript{13} This relationship between psychology and art has been explored by Kenneth Burke, The Philosophy of Literary Form, Baton Rouge, La., 1941; A Grammar of Motives, New York, 1945.
of our threefold division, the mythological aspects of the work of art, received attention, also, because of the developing forces of psychoanalysis and the New Criticism. As the ideas of Freud and Jung were extended, particularly in the realm of cultural anthropology, so the work of art became valued, by certain literary critics, for its cultural and mythological implications; the New Criticism, focusing on text, encouraged the exploration of this association. The third relationship of what we have termed psychological criticism, that between psychology and sociology, is still almost untouched by the literary critic, although the critic who has delved into sociological interpretation frequently is confronted with the problem of dissociating his sociological from his psychological insights.

It is important to notice that the literary magazines which published criticisms of a psychological or psychoanalytic nature were not affiliated with the academy, and that they were not founded until the thirties. As was the case with American literature, Freud and psychoanalysis as an interpretive method of criticism had to acquire a modicum or respectability before they could be taken seriously by the academy. And, in a sense, this struggle still continues, not only on a professional level among the psychologists themselves for many of whom Freud is still anathema, but on a literary level, where psychoanalytic criticism is still looked upon with suspicion.

The question now arises as to the specific elements in Freudianism which deal with the artist and creative writer. Freud himself, in the

14. The Psychoanalytic Review was founded in 1913; the Partisan Review, in 1934; Kenyon Review, in 1939.
chief and most significant part of his work, did not concern himself greatly with it. His treatment of the artist is merely an integral part of his more encompassing theories.

The artist is originally a man who turns from reality because he cannot come to terms with the demand for the renunciation of instinctual satisfaction as it is first made, and who then in phantasy-life allows full play to his erotic and ambitious wishes. But he finds a way of return from this world of phantasy back to reality; with his special gifts he moulds his phantasies into a new kind of reality, and men concede them a justification as valuable reflections of actual life. Thus by a certain path he actually becomes the hero, king, creator, favourite he desired to be, without pursuing the circuitous path of creating real alterations in the outer world. But this he can only attain because other men feel the same dissatisfaction, as he did with the renunciation demanded by reality and because this dissatisfaction, resulting from the displacement of the pleasure principle by the reality principle, is itself a part of reality.¹⁵

It is easily inferred from this definition that the common meeting ground between psychoanalysis and literature lies in the sphere of irrational and subconscious forces. This is the basis on which psychoanalytic criticism primarily rests, and from it is derived the fundamental idea of the "neuroticism" of the artist.¹⁶ For the artist is, as Freud implies, a "neurotic" who finds in his creativity a "substitute gratification" for his frustrations.

The artist's imagination, his ability to gather from the substratum of his thoughts and emotions, material which he ultimately molds into

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¹⁶. Trilling, op. cit. This subject is more thoroughly discussed in his "A Note on Art and Neurosis," Partisan Review, XII (1945) 41-9.
the organic shape of his art, is closely related to the Freudian concept of dreaming. The work of art, therefore, contains a multitude of symbols, primarily sexual in nature, which are related ultimately to the psyche of the artist himself. In this symbolism of the work of art may be found, according to the psychoanalytic critic, the psychic nature of the artist, his erotic maladjustments, his incestuous longings, etc.  

Critics who use Freudian theory, work on the assumption that to understand fully works of literature, one must understand the artist's early life; not in the conventionally biographical sense, but in a psychoanalytic sense, in the sense of uncovering, through language and symbols, the sexual life of the writer, stressing the importance of his childhood and his father-mother relationship. This, of course, is essentially the method of psychoanalytic biography, a method "in which a few basic psychological data become linked with whatever variety of formal and philosophical characteristics a work of art may possess."  

Freudian theory, therefore, as it pertains to literature, centers on the infantile and early life of the writer, and emphasizes the erotic and incestuous characteristics of his nature. The theory, then, except when it is used to interpret psychological content of the work of art itself, limits the critic almost entirely to the individuality of the writer; it cannot do justice to the interaction between the individual mind and the social heritage of literature. Nor can it allow the critic

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17. A strong criticism of Freudian symbolism in literature is C. S. Lewis' "Psychoanalysis and Literary Criticism," in Essays and Studies of the English Association, XXVII (1941) 7-21.
to make more than one study of the writer, for subsequent studies are bound to repeat the Freudian deductions of the initial study. Freudianism implies that the writer is always reiterating and reshaping the psychoanalytic material which he presented in his first work. Freudian criticism must of necessity have its roots in biography.

In the field of psychoanalysis, there was eventual disagreement with aspects of Freud's theories, particularly with Freud's concept of the artist as "neurotic." Chief among the dissenters was Carl G. Jung. Jung takes an antithetical position to Freud's theory of erotic and incestuous influences on the writer, and even goes so far as to declare that the artist is greater far than the neurotic: "He is the collective man, the carrier and former of the unconsciously active soul of mankind." For Jung, the Freudian dream did not harbor only the symbolical content of the individual's psyche, but it harbored, to a greater degree, the symbolical content of the collective and racial past. His theory developed what he called the "collective unconscious" which shaped artistic creation by the recurrence in dream of mythical archetypes, a priori ideas residing in the Unconscious. The artist's function, therefore, is to perpetuate the great archetypal myths of civilization; and in this capacity, Jung assigns to the artist more social significance than Freud. He even ascribes to the artist a certain divinity. "To project into the consciousness of mankind such ever nobler ways of

counteracting the blind force of primitive nature was, is, and forever
will be the divine office of art, a task which cannot be taken over, in
its entirety, by any other intellectual or spiritual agency."22 This
"collective and affirmative nature of Jung's psychology is its greatest
advantage for literary criticism."23

Thus, there has also developed a Jungian criticism, which has con­
centrated primarily on the work of literature itself, examining it for
archetypal patterns and for its symbolical representations of the
"collective unconscious." In this respect, there is an apparent rela­
tionship between the Jungian approach and the study of anthropol­
yogy.

Finally, in recent years, much has been done to extend and revise
both Freudian and Jungian theory. The problem of "group dynamics,"
which is essentially a combination of the functions of psychology and
sociology, especially has current importance; and this problem is a
development of the work of such Freudian "revisionists" as Franz
Alexander, Karen Horney, Erich Fromm, and Harry Stack Sullivan. The
Washington School of Psychiatry and the William Alanson White Institute
of Psychiatry have done much in the attempt to relate psychiatric and
psychoanalytic insights to social issues. One might say, however, that
the whole study of social psychology is still in such an embryonic stage
as to lack definition. Nor, at present, has this new combination of

22. Boeschenstein, op. cit.
areas of learning had profound influence on literary criticism; in fact, thus far, the work of the "revisionists" with respect to literary criticism has resulted in much confusion where Freudian and Jungian interpretation is involved.

Melville has been exposed to psychological criticism. In accord with the threefold division which we have described, his life has been interpreted by means of his work, and his work has been used to shed light on his biography. His work has also been used to show the relationship between psychology and aesthetics; indeed, many studies have specifically used his life and work to point out in some way the complicated problems of artistic composition. Nor, with respect to Melville, has the second possible method of psychological criticism been neglected, the interpretation of the cultural and mythological characteristics of his work. Richard Chase's critical volume, which we shall discuss in detail in a later chapter, is almost solely concerned with these qualities. Although Melville has also been considered from a sociological point of view, nothing as yet has been done which might

24. The present state of psychoanalysis is perhaps best summed up by Erich Fromm. "There are today various schools of psychoanalysis ranging from the more or less strict adherence to Freud's theory to the 'revisionists' who differ among themselves in the degree to which they have changed Freud's concepts." Psychoanalysis and Religion, New Haven, 1950, p. 65. For a comprehensive treatment of this subject; Clara Thompson, with the collaboration of Patrick Mullahy, Psychoanalysis: Evolution and Development, New York, 1950, and Patrick Mullahy, Oedipus - Myth and Complex, New York, 1948. Important individual works by the revisionists are: Karen Horney, The Neurotic Personality of Our Time, New York, 1937, and New Ways in Psychoanalysis, New York, 1939; Franz Alexander, The Medical Value of Psychoanalysis, New York, 1936, and Our Age of Unreason, New York, 1942; Erich Fromm, Escape from Freedom, New York, 1941, and Man for Himself, New York, 1947. Sullivan has not published much, but his articles in Psychiatry, III (Feb., 1940) give perhaps the best extant summary of modern psychiatry.
reasonably be considered as a combination of psychology and sociology. As we have already indicated, this combination of studies is too recent to have had any profound effect on literary criticism.

In the area of biography, Weaver attempted to use Freudian theory in his presentation of Melville;\(^{25}\) Mumford, as we shall see, made the same attempt. But the use of Freud in biography, during the last thirty years, has become almost commonplace. So influential and widespread has Freudian theory become, that it is a rare biography which does not, in some fashion or other, apply a degree of psychoanalysis to its subject. Biographers have always, more or less, used a psychological approach in acquiring data from the literary efforts of their subjects, but Freud has given a new focus to and intensified the method; in addition, he has provided a new language and terminology for psychological insights; psychological biography has become psychoanalytic biography. In a study of Melville biography, this conclusion becomes apparent. The most recent study of Melville, Newton Arvin's, illustrates to what extent Freudian theory has gained ground in the intervening years since the publication of Weaver's work.

Nor has the use of the method applied to the works themselves been neglected. Almost all the novels have been examined in the light of Freud; character, plot, and theme have undergone psychoanalytic investigation. In this respect, *Pierre*, perhaps, has received the most attention, but *Moby Dick*, *The Confidence Man*, and *Billy Budd* have also been studied.

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25. Cf. Chapter III.
Although he did not consider either Freud or Jung as influential upon himself, renouncing them both as "scientific," D. H. Lawrence's essays on Melville in his *Studies in Classic American Literature* (1923) both show Freudian and Jungian insights. Or, if one wishes to consider Lawrence, as he evidently considered himself - as independent of psycho-analysis - one might noncommittally describe these studies as uniquely Lawrence; and one might consider their use of Freudian and Jungian ideas as merely coincidental, or as an important aspect of the *zeitgeist* which Lawrence assimilated despite himself.

These studies on Melville, which Arvin has declared to be "unsurpassed in their apocalyptic vein," are two in number; the first deals with *Typee* and *Omoo*, the second with *Moby Dick*. The style in which they are written is unconventional; there is an abundance of the one and two sentence paragraph, a lavish use of the exclamation and interjection, and a heavy flavoring of metaphor and simile. In addition, there is much personal digression, impressionistic in attitude and tone, homiletic in content.

In the first essay, dealing with *Typee* and *Omoo*, Lawrence interprets Melville as a kind of "inhuman creature" who was obsessed with an elemental desire to return to a mythical paradise. First, there is the distinction between blue-eyed people and brown-eyed people. In the

26. The influence of Freud on Lawrence is carefully discussed in Chapter VI of Hoffman, *op. cit.*

27. Newton Arvin, *Herman Melville*, New York, 1950; E. M. Forster in *Aspects of the Novel* (New York, 1923) writes: "It is no wonder that D. H. Lawrence should have written two penetrating studies on Melville, for Lawrence himself is, as far as I know, the only prophetic novelist writing today...He invites criticism because he is a preacher also..." p. 203.
former - to which category Melville belonged - "there is sun and rain and abstract, uncreate element, water, ice, air, space, but not humanity." And for a simile, Lawrence calls up the mythical, archetypal figure of the Viking. Melville is "half water animal, like those terrible yellow-bearded Vikings who broke out of the waves in beaked ships.... Melville is like a Viking going home to sea, encumbered with age and memories, and a sort of accomplished despair, almost madness....He can't belong to humanity. Cannot."

This concept of Melville as an elemental figure unable to accept humanity is carried farther. "The man who came from the sea to live among men can stand it no longer....He turns back to the elements. And all the vast sun-and-wheat consciousness of his day he plunges back into the deep, burying the flame in the deep, self-conscious and deliberate". "It is enough of life. Let us have the vast elements. Let us get out of this loathesome complication of living humanly with humans."

Melville therefore, according to Lawrence, in returning to the elemental, returned to the Pacific, "the heart of which seems like a vast vacuum, in which mirage-like, continues the life of myriads of ages back."

This may be Lawrence, but in its implications there are echoes of Jung. For, if we are to interpret this correctly, Melville was the artist according to Jung, delving deeply into the "collective unconscious" in his search for the paradisiacal past - the years long ago "when the

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29. Ibid.
30. Ibid.
world was a softer place, more moisture in the air, more warm mud on
the face of the earth and lotus always in flower." "To this phantom
Melville returned. Back, back, far back, away from life." And then
again, "Back, far back, in the days of the palm trees and lizards and
stone implements. The sunny stone age."31

Lawrence here is not exactly applying Jungian theory to the novels,
but he is considering Melville, their author, as Jung would consider
him; for Melville, as a figure, represents man's eternal longing and
searching for the mythical paradise, his hatred of the world and his
renunciation of it in the search. "Melville at his best," Lawrence
writes, "inwardly wrote from a sort of dream-self, so that events which
he relates as actual fact have indeed a far deeper reference to his own
soul, his own inner life....Down, down he slides and struggles as we
struggle in a dream, or in the act of birth, to emerge in the green Eden
of the Golden Age....This is a bit of birth-myth, or rebirth myth, on
Melville's part - unconscious no doubt because his running underconscious-
ness was always mystical and symbolical. He wasn't aware that he was
being mystical."32

But, according to Lawrence, Melville was not content with his para-
dise. And in stating the reason for this discontent, Lawrence shifts
from the Jungian to the Freudian. Melville was not happy with his
savages because he "pined for Home and Mother, the two things he had run
away from....HOME AND MOTHER....The two things that were his damnation."

The image of Melville which results from this shift in approach is

31. Ibid., p. 198.
32. Ibid., p. 199.
rather a distorted one, but it does illustrate, in a sense, Lawrence's independence of the psychoanalytic schools. For on one hand, Lawrence describes Melville as author-artist in Jungian terms, "birth-myth, or rebirth-myth," implying that Melville mystically drew from the unconscious depths of his mind and the mind of his culture; he depicts Melville in a kind of archetypal search for Eden; and on the other hand, his analysis contains Freudian overtones - the Oedipal restrictions of familial ties. The figure of Melville which Lawrence draws also serves to illustrate the differences between Freud and Jung. For to Freud, the Oedipus complex, the incestuous fixation, is "the kernel of neurosis"; whereas to Jung, this concept was merely a predicate to the more profound and more encompassing theory of the "collective unconscious."33

Thus the psychological sources of Lawrence's characterization of Melville are not distinct. We can discern in it both the Jungian idea of the "collective unconscious" and the Freudian idea of regression. The build-up of Melville as an archetypal figure, plumbing the depths of man's mysterious past, is certainly Jungian; but the notion of Melville's personal conflict, his inability to cope with the powerful regressive tendencies in his nature is more characteristically Freudian. Lawrence finally seems to favor the latter view, and in a subsequent paragraph he ignores Melville as the symbol he has made him to be, and portrays him as a man who is essentially thwarted by personal inabilities. "One's soul seems under a vacuum, in the South Seas. The truth of the matter is, one cannot go back. Some men can: renegade. But Melville

33. Fromm, Psychoanalysis and Religion, p. 82.
couldn't really go back; and Gauguin couldn't really go back: and I
know now that I could never go back. Back towards the past, savage
life. One cannot go back. It is one's destiny inside one."

The reason for this inability to go back, in Lawrence's terms, is
quite simple. It is that we have been "living onwards, forwards."
"Whatever else the South Sea Islander is, he is centuries and centuries
behind us in the life struggle, in the consciousness struggle, the
struggle of the soul into fulness." But, he adds significantly, "Yet,
as I say, we must make a great swerve in our onward-going life course
now, to gather up the savage mysteries. But this does not mean going
back on ourselves."

Therefore, Lawrence tells us, Melville escaped. To have remained
would have meant decomposition; He had to get away, even if it meant
going back to Home and Mother. And "when he really was Home with
Mother, he found it Purgatory."34

There is another Freudian insight in this chapter which anticipates
the contemporary interest in psychosomatic medicine. For Lawrence, in
describing Melville's sojourn on Typee, says, "...it made him sick.
It made him physically ill. He had something wrong with his leg, and
this would not heal. It got worse and worse..." And then after Melville
escapes, despite the fact that he began "to sigh and pine for the Para-
dise," immediately after, his leg, that would never heal in that para-
dise, began quickly to get well. "His life was falling into its normal
pulse. The drain back into past centuries was over."35

34. Lawrence, op. cit., p. 204.
35. Chase also discusses this psychosomatic ailment in his Herman
Melville, p. 10.
The remainder of the chapter reiterates the theme of the past, "the Golden Age of the past. What a nostalgia we all feel for it. Yet we won't want it when we get it." Included, also, is a cursory discussion of Omoo, in which Melville "is at his best, his happiest." Lawrence's final conclusion concerning Melville is that Melville suffered from disillusion because he could not exorcize from his spirit the search for the ideal, "the perfect fulfillment of love." The final note is that Melville was "at the core a mystic and idealist. He was a mystic who raved because the old ideal guns shot havoc. The guns of the 'noble spirit,' of 'ideal love'."

Lawrence's discussion of Moby Dick, in the second essay, has no Freudian implications, and it is not until its concluding pages, in which he explains what the white whale symbolizes, that it takes on a Jungian tone. There are some judgments on Melville the man - he "is really a bit sententious," ..."rather a tiresome New Engander of the ethical mystical-transcendentalist sort" - and there are many passages from the novel itself. After quoting the concluding passage from the work, which describes the disappearance of the Pequod into the vortex, he writes, "So ends one of the strangest and most wonderful books in the world, closing up its mystery and tortured symbolism. It is an epic of the sea such as no man has equaled; and it is a book of exoteric symbolism of profound significance, and of considerable tiresomeness."

It is in the final passage of the chapter, in which Lawrence attempts to get at the meaning of the white whale, that he is what one might call most Jungian and most "apocalyptic."
What then is Moby Dick? he asks. He is the deepest blood-being of the white race. He is our deepest blood-nature.

And he is hunted, hunted, hunted by the maniacal fanaticism of our white mental consciousness. We want to hunt him down. To subject him to our will. And in this maniacal hunt of ourselves we get dark races and pale to help us, red, yellow, and black, east and west, Quaker and fire-worshipper, we get them all to help us in this ghastly maniacal hunt which is our doom and suicide.

The last phallic being of the white man. Hunted into death of upper consciousness and ideal will. Our blood-self subjected to our will. Our blood-consciousness sapped by a parasitic mental or ideal consciousness.

Hot-blooded sea-born Moby Dick. Hunted by monomaniacs of the idea.  

Lawrence's criticism, one must conclude, is impressionism; not aesthetic impressionism, which tries to convey the writer's ideas and emotions concerning the beauties and defects of the work of art, but psychological impressionism, which tries to approximate the writer's feelings about his material with the critic's conclusions about his own experiences with life. Such criticism demands insight and sensitivity, and it is apparent that Lawrence has these qualities. But such criticism also involves personal digression ("I know now that I could never go back.") and such digression can frequently be more revealing about the critic's own psyche than that of the writer he is attempting to treat. There is much of this revelation in Lawrence's treatment of Melville. Indeed, Lawrence uses Melville to draw certain parallels with his own experience, to show us how, psychologically, Melville's experiences were similar to his own and how, in a sense, he and Melville were kindred spirits.

Lawrence's style is suitable to his method. It is personal,

36. Lawrence, op. cit., p. 238.
informal; it waxes lyrical and rhapsodic, indicating Lawrence's emotional absorption in himself and what he is saying rather than in Melville and what Melville had said. That he comes forth with an acute appraisal of Melville is a credit to his psychological insight and to his own emotional capacity for living; and this penetration has a tone of such fervor—almost inspired attachment to subject—that one is quite frequently willing to excuse the ineptitudes of style, the lack of critical discipline in writing.

Willard Thorp, in the selected bibliography of his Representative Selections, describes the chapters by John Cournos on Melville in his A Modern Plutarch (1928) as "a fictionized study in the psychoanalytic manner." His other estimate of the work is that it is "of little value." One would not disagree with the latter judgment of Cournos' work, but one wishes that Thorp had made a little more clear what he deems to be "the psychoanalytic manner."

Although Cournos' treatment of Melville is obviously fictionized and there are many awkward attempts at interior monologue, there is little, if any, application of creditable psychoanalytic theory in it. The only psychoanalytic interpretation—and it is one whose origin is discernible in Pierre via both Weaver and Freeman—is that of the father image. "Melville's fantasy had hoisted his parent on to a pedestal, an image for worship. Later...he was to modify his filial ecstasy; for disillusion was to dog his steps."38

38. Ibid., p. 79.
One must conclude that Thorp's description of Cournos' inauspicious work is not appropriate. His use of the term "psychoanalytic" indicates perhaps the attitude of the literary man toward Freud and psychoanalysis. For the literary man did not hesitate to use Freudian terminology, frequently not entirely understanding it, for purposes of critical opprobrium.

Homans, unfortunately, manifests the same attitude, directed not at Freud but at the whole field of psychology. In an article on Melville entitled "The Dark Angel: The Tragedy of Herman Melville," Homans begins: "The three novels Mardi, Moby Dick, and Pierre, are an unexplored Marquesas for the psychologist, and the man of letters must respect the province of a superstition which may become a science..." The last clause is another indication of the suspicious, almost derogatory attitude which the literary man had, and even still has, toward the subject. Here the entire study of psychology is impugned.

The ironic aspect of this article, however, is that Mr. Homans, in addition to concentrating on the texts of the novels to be discussed - "the action is complete in the hero's written word," and he will quote "chapter and verse" - makes the statement that "The three novels are Melville's dramatization of a part of his spiritual life, and what is true of his characters must be taken as being true of himself." More simply, then, Melville's characters are an extension of himself; and it must be inevitable that they are also a psychological extension of himself. This is, essentially, a psychological approach, and Mr. Homans,

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whether he is aware of it or not, must be using in his critical analysis the "superstition" which he so condescendingly disparages.

The central theme of Mr. Homans' article, however, is not psychoanalytic but philosophical. He wishes to show, using the three novels as his source material, Melville's failure in his "attempt to find an answer to the questions put by the universe." This theme is reiterated; each of the novels shows, according to Homans, that Melville was searching "for the secret of the universe," the "Ultimate," and that this quest was unsuccessful.

There are, Mr. Homans tells us, two motifs in the three novels: the first is madness, the second is whiteness. He also tells us that Melville was conscious of "a general drift of symbolism" in all his novels, that the symbols are representative, as Melville termed them "of the endless significances of life." Mardi, for example, expresses the search for "ideal happiness," Pierre, the search for "ideal virtue." In Moby Dick, Melville was attempting "to annihilate the subtle demonisms of life." All of these efforts are fruitless, and therein lies the tragedy of Melville. The novels are a "spiritual dramatization" of failure to get a philosophical answer, psychological studies of failure.

Ludwig Lewisohn, who was acutely aware of Freudian theory and psychoanalysis and used them integratively in his own novels, attempted the psychoanalytic method in an interpretive survey of the chief figures in American literature, Expression in America (1932). There is a chapter in this volume which deals with Melville.

Lewisohn's book has been described as typical of the work of "the amateur sexologists and Peeping Toms of criticism,"41 and although his treatment of Melville is not so psychoanalytically severe as his treatment of other American figures - Poe, for example, and Thoreau - it does little to mitigate the description. He relies heavily on Weaver, Mumford, and Pierre, as his sources, and his cursory appraisal presents us with what was fast becoming the psychoanalytic depiction of Melville, that of "an overpowering fixation on his mother, expressed almost to the point of insight in Pierre." Melville, Lewisohn claims, "repressed his intolerably jealous hatred of his father and substituted for it a defensive idealization. This common device of neurotics broke down in later years and Pierre 'is the instrument by which the memory of Pierre's father is desecrated.'" Lewisohn also identifies Melville with Ishmael, "his soul cast out and orphaned.... homeless."

There is, in addition, the allusion to incest, inevitable for a Freudian interpreter. "The incest imagery," Lewisohn writes, "haunts him Melville even as it haunted Shelley. But he found release in neither art nor life." Citing his indebtedness to Rank's Das Inzest Motiv in Dichtung und Sage, Lewisohn explains Melville's artistic career as a "typical reaction toward an overpowering fixation" which "almost always marks the beginning of an artistic career."42

41. Hyman, op. cit., p. 159.
42. It is interesting to note that in citing Rank, Lewisohn ignores the theory presented in Rank's Art and Artist that there is much more to artistic motivation than "fixation." It is in this volume that Rank presents the idea that the artist is also incited by "a will to create." Lewisohn, oddly enough wrote the introduction to Rank's work, which was published in 1932, the same year as Lewisohn's Expression in America.
The "clinical material," Lewisohn tells us, "accounts for the fragmentary, explosive, and unguided character of all Melville's work... It accounts for the atmosphere of homelessness and emptiness, that desolation of the heart," present in all Melville's books.

By the time Lewisohn's work appeared, the process of revaluation in American literature was in full swing and the Melville revival as an important part of the process had already been going on for more than a decade. Lewisohn takes note of the revival, attributing it to "a younger generation in search of that 'usable' American past which Van Wyck Brooks demanded." But in this aim he considers "the recent reestimates.... to have somewhat overshot the mark," for "Melville was not a strong man defying the cruel order of the world; he was a weak man fleeing from his own soul and from life.... He adopted all his life the regressive attitude of the neurotic - of the favorite child who wants the world to reconstitute for it the conditions of the nursery." This attitude shows up, according to Lewisohn, even in Moby Dick.

Lewisohn then proceeds to indulge in judgments. The South Sea books, he tells us, hold up well. But Mardi and Pierre are "sheer phantasmagoria, clinical material rather than achieved literature." "Redburn is the boy Melville, of course," and in Israel Potter, Melville makes John Paul Jones "an image of his own wild and weak rebelliousness."43 As for Moby Dick, Lewisohn takes up the question of its similarity to Pantagruel, and finds that it does not compare with the

Rabelais work. Moby Dick is "fierce and broken and sags...into sheer jejune maunderings....What has caught the imagination is that greatly conceived symbolism and allegory." Lewisohn, however, makes no effort to explain either the symbolism or the allegory, or to tell why they are greatly conceived.

His final estimate of Melville is: "No, Melville is not even a minor master." His works are "curiosities of literature," and he will chiefly be remembered as "the inventor of a sombre legend concerning the evil that is under the sun."

In Lewisohn there is a poor mixture of psychoanalysis and impressionism. He is evidently very willing to use Freudian theory in explanation of Melville's personality, but then, most unjustifiably, he uses his explanation in disparagement of the works themselves. In the latter use, he succumbs to the most insidious kind of impressionism. The psychoanalytic critic must inevitably fail when he attempts to make aesthetic judgments by means of the psychoanalytic method. This method may explain an author's psyche by means of his work, but it can hardly enable the critic to judge that work as distinct and unique works of art.

Lewisohn fails on both levels. His psychoanalytic approach to Melville is that of an amateur, and his aesthetic judgments, cursory and exceedingly superficial, indicate no real knowledge of Melville's works themselves. Lewisohn serves to illustrate, however, to what extent

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44. Lewisohn here is undoubtedly referring to the article by W. H. Wells, "Moby Dick and Rabelais," Modern Language Notes, XXXVIII (Feb., 1923) p. 123.
Freudianism had gained popularity in the early thirties. It was beginning to be used as a literary and critical method, albeit frequently poorly and ineptly used. It is, perhaps, this poor and inept use of it which created so much antagonism against it in the more conservative critical quarters.

The biography of Melville by Lewis Mumford, published in 1929, might be expected, since like Lewisohn's Expression in America it was written during a period when Freud and psychoanalysis were at a kind of zenith, to evidence strong influence of the psychoanalytic approach. A close reading of this biography, however, indicates that, although Mumford was aware of both Freud and Jung - he mentions them in his pages and uses Freudian terminology fluently - he did not use them.

On the contrary, his work shows more the influence of Van Wyck Brooks' approach to literature, a melange of history diluted with sociology, intimate biography, impressionistic criticism, and some psychological insights. Brooks had taken a critical beating for what was considered his unduly psychoanalytic interpretations of Mark Twain and Henry James published earlier in the decade, and one might conjecture that Mumford did not wish to expose himself to the same reception. At any rate, his biography is quite circumspect in its use of Freudian theory.

He acknowledges his indebtedness to Weaver, and except for a more detailed presentation of the later years of Melville's life - which

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45. For a discussion of these biographies, see Hyman, op. cit., p. 114 ff.
Weaver had treated compactly in a last chapter - and some additional biographical data, the material is fundamentally the same as Weaver's. There are, however, grievous factual errors. The most blatant and obvious error is Mumford's assigning the dedication of *Pierre* to Mt. Monadnock instead of Mt. Greylock. But Mr. Forsythe has also shown that Mumford seriously twists the plot of *Pierre*; and in what seems to have been the conclusive word on the subject, E. K. Brown disproves Mumford's idea - also suggested by F. J. O'Brien and Newton Arvin - that Melville modeled *Ethan Brand* on Hawthorne. Another article takes Mumford to account for his misconception of the meeting between Melville and Hawthorne.

On the other hand, Mumford does much more than Weaver in analyzing Melville's individual works and in integrating them with Melville's life. In addition, he gives more detailed synopses of the works, and criticizes them as literature, albeit the criticism frequently verges on the lyrical and rhapsodic. Like Weaver, Mumford relies on Melville's writings for data, citing passages from the novels as being autobiographical when it suits his purpose. There is the same tendency to view the early novels - *Typee, Omoo, Redburn, and White Jacket* - as loose autobiography rather than as fiction. *Pierre*, of course, is assessed for all it is worth in

46. R. S. Forsythe, "Mr. Lewis Mumford and Melville's *Pierre*," *American Literature*, II (Nov., 1930) 286-289; also, Matthiessen's criticism of Mumford, op. cit., p. 488.
47. E. K. Brown, "Hawthorne, Melville, and 'Ethan Brand'," *American Literature*, III (March, 1931) 72-75. This idea is suggested by O'Brien in "Our Authors and Authorship - Melville and Curtis," *Putnam's Monthly Magazine*, IX (April, 1857) 384-393; it is repeated by Arvin in his biography *Hawthorne*, Boston, 1929.
The chief difference between Weaver's work and Mumford's is stylistic. Weaver shows much the influence of literary history in his writing. He presents his factual data almost unembellished, and when he cuts loose from the restrictions of fact, he, too, indulges in fine writing. Mumford, on the other hand, absorbs factual data into a style that is almost egregious with metaphor and image; his figures, allusions, contrasts frequently verge on sheer rhetoric. Here is a typical passage:

But Melville was a realist, in the sense that great religious teachers are realists. He saw that horsehair stuffing did not make the universe kinder, and that the oblivion of drink did not make the thing that was forgotten more palatable. His perplexities, his defiances, his torments, his questions, even his failures, all have a meaning for us: whether we renounce the world, as Buddha did, or, like Whitman, embrace its mingled good-and-evil-ness, our choice cannot be called enlightened until it has faced the gritty, unassimilable substratum Melville explored. Melville, like Buddha, left a happy and successful career behind him, and plunged into those cold black depths, the depths of the sunless ocean, the blackness of interstellar space; and though he proved that life could not be lived under those conditions, he brought back into the petty triumphs of the age the one element that it completely lacked; the tragic sense of life: the sense that the highest human flight is sustained over an unconquered and perhaps unconquerable abyss.49

Like Weaver's book, Mumford's is essentially a popular biography; it is undocumented, contains only a very brief bibliographical note, and when it was published, it was a book choice of the Literary Guild of America.

Mumford's biography comes at a point in the revival when the efforts of scholars to gain recognition for American literature were achieving

49. Lewis Mumford, Herman Melville, New York, 1929, p. 5.
success. Much of the sharper criticism against Mumford's work, therefore, originated in the academy - disagreement, for example, with some of his interpretations and with his factual data. Mumford himself mentions vaguely critics and biographers preceding him, and he calls attention to their conclusions, frequently refuting, elaborating upon, or agreeing with them. Since there is no documentation, and too often critics are mentioned as a general category - simply as "critics" - one does not know to whom Mumford refers. When he does cite references, the critics usually turn out to be those contemporary with Melville, O'Brien, the Duyckincks, or writers for such contemporary periodicals as the Literary World. Although his bibliographical note indicates that he was aware of the small collection of articles published in the immediate period preceding his own work, he seems to have relied primarily on Weaver and critics contemporary with Melville.

Mumford repeats the psychoanalytic pattern set by Weaver that Melville's mother rejected him as a child. "Both Melville's father and his mother were monsters," Mumford writes, "but it took him a long time to discover this, because they were correct and meritorious members of society, and it is difficult to believe that the image of God can err, if it be repeated often enough."50 "Herman must have been a little starved of affection...his hungry claims for sympathy and caresses were no doubt put off by Mrs. Melville's aloof rectitude...Herman stood as in a cold room before an open fire: one side of him was toasted, and another side was chilled. That chilliness remained; and in the parts of

50. Ibid., p. 15.
his emotional frame that were affected, circulation was never quite re-
stored."51 Pierre is used generously as a basis for these speculations.
There is the usual reference to "father-image" with suitable correbo-
rative paraphrase from Pierre. "The image became fixed and when Herman
outgrew his father, he did not simply leave him behind; he rose up and
annihilated him, revenging himself .... for the perfect marble shadow
he had carried in his heart."52

There is the conventional use of Redburn as autobiography; and in
a discussion of Melville's early sexual life, Mumford, using "Fragments
from a Writing Desk" - which he terms "high-flown silliness" - describes
this aspect of Melville's life as being typically romantic. There is,
however, an oblique reference to homosexuality. "In Pierre," Mumford
writes, "Melville pictures a passionate attachment between his hero and
one of his boy cousins and describes how it undergoes the normal subli-
mation through erotic transfer to the person of the opposite sex: Melv-
ille's sharp observation here anticipates by many years the discoveries
of the analytic psychologists."53

The latter part of this statement, which, as we shall see, Murray
affirms with much more insight and conviction, is almost unquestionable.
The former part of the statement illustrates in Mumford's use of Freudian
terminology - "sublimation," "erotic transfer" - only a nebulous concept
of Freudian theory.54 Such "normal sublimation through erotic transfer"

51. Ibid., p. 18.
52. Ibid., p. 24.
53. Ibid., p. 36.
54. For a discussion of the loose use of Freudian terminology, see
is a highly dubious transcription of Freud. To sublimate, in a simple Freudian sense, means to deflect one's energies, primarily the sexual, into creative or socially acceptable channels; this is a process which is considered to be continuous throughout life. "To sublimate through erotic transfer" does not make sense, either Freudian or otherwise. What Mumford probably meant to convey was that Melville illustrated through this episode in *Pierre*, Pierre's gradual development in choice of sexual object from the homosexual to the heterosexual stage. As Brill points out in his discussion of Melville's homosexuality, the homosexual component in the psyche is never fully exorcized, but remains, sometimes dormant, sometimes exerting itself.

It is this half-digested knowledge of Freud which not only mars Mumford's discussions of Melville's sex life, but also prevents him from analyzing Melville's work with any degree of Freudian thoroughness. For example, he ignores completely the multitude of sexual symbols in the works - the more obvious ones in "The Tartarus of Maids" and in *Pierre*, and the less tangible ones in *Moby Dick*, *Mardi* and *White Jacket*. His discussions of Melville's sex life, one feels, are merely a sop to the strong current interest in Freud and sex during the period in which he was writing. They are neither an adequate example of Mumford's knowledge of Freud nor an indication of Mumford's psychological insights.

In addition, there are other uses of Freudian terminology which illustrate how Freud's technical language had seeped down into popular usage and consciousness and had taken on meanings and connotations quite

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remote from their original ones. Mumford's use of "repression"; his concept of the writer and the Unconscious; his use of "libido"; all are Freudian terms applied loosely and inexacty.

Mumford, like Weaver, examines Melville's marriage in the light of the "mother fixation" which he imputes to him. He is, however, cautious in his conclusions. "It may be," he writes, "that Elizabeth, patient as a wife, was timid and irresponsible as a lover; in short there are a dozen possible circumstances occurring long after childhood which may have attributed to Melville's regression.... and the incest attachment in Pierre, so far from being the cause of this, may serve as its emotional equivalent...." Melville's references to sex, he says, do not indicate "the experience of a healthy and well-mated man, or of a mature erotic state: to long for the pre-nuptial condition, to wish for fixation in courtship is the mark of an immature, or at least incomplete attachment." This appears to be a very indirect manner of implying Melville's neuroticism.

Lest this seem an unduly severe evaluation of Mumford's use of Freud and psychoanalysis, one must grant him much on the credit side of the ledger. In his appreciative treatment of Pierre there is evidence of this merit; his conclusions concerning Melville's psychological insight, anticipate Murray's. He writes:

As concerns his Melville's psychological purpose, however, Pierre for all its weaknesses will stand comparison with the pioneer works of its period. Pierre is one of the first novels in which the self is treated as anything but a unit, whose parts consist of the same material, with the grain, as it were, running the same way. Pierre's double relation toward his father's image and toward his mother's actual presence, his mixed attitudes toward Lucy and Isabel, the conflict between his latent interests and his actions and,
rationalizations, all these things are presented with remarkable penetration: if there is slag at the entrance of this mine, there is a vein of exceptionally rich ore running through it. Pierre's identification of his mother's love with a supreme form of egotism, Pierre being the mirror in which she beholds her own proud grimace, is no less penetrating than Melville's account of the relation between Pierre and his cousin, which runs from romantic love into apathy and enmity. While the action of Pierre is full of harsh and even absurd contrasts, the psychological mood is portrayed with infinite retirement and with relentless surgical skill: Melville does not hold the pulse of his characters: he X-rays their very organs.\(^56\)

And again:

...His Pierre's mother's love for her son is self-love and her admiration for him is vanity. His father's rectitude leads to a cold marriage, where an unclerked lover had shown him a little radiant and a little finer at the core. Pierre's purest love is a disguised incest...

Mumford's discussion of the relationship between art and insanity, as it disagrees with the Freudian concept of the artist as neurotic, propounds the same thesis which Lionel Trilling so cogently presents in his article on the subject for the *Partisan Review*.\(^57\) Mumford dispels the apparently prevalent idea that Melville was mad.

Melville realized from his own experience, perhaps, what few people understood until Janet and Freud re-interpreted this whole series of disorders, that the line between sanity and insanity is not a line but a wide gradient band.

The relationship between insanity and art has been the subject of much discussion; and it is important in appraising Melville's life and work ...that we should avoid the notion that genius and insanity are one, or that the fantasies of the neurotic are the equivalent of a work of art. The difference between insanity and what we agree to call normal conduct is largely one of social utilization: given a similar set of circumstances and stimuli, the distinction between a neurotic reaction and a normal one consists largely in the success a person has in

\(^56\) Mumford, op. cit., p. 212.

conversion... This conversion into art signifies health and relative stability, whether the situation that causes the conversion is morbid or not. Indeed, an effectual work of art is not merely a counterpoise to psychical difficulties it is actually an indication that the artist, during the period of its creation, has had full possession of himself. Insanity in many cases befalls those who cannot make this transposition to art, and who, through inexpertness or inarticulateness, produce therefore unusable fantasies—fantasies that do not meet the impact of reality.58

Mumford's remarks concerning The Confidence Man are also valuable in suggesting the psychoanalytic implications in that long neglected work. He points out that many of the incidents of the novel are hard to fit into the logic of the plot, and he suggests that their existence might be based on the fact that "Melville's own torments and suspicions had, for a brief while, taken on a pathological character."

No one who approached The Confidence Man without preoccupation or bias would, I think, impute such personal and neurotic motives to the passages in question; but once the seed of suspicion is sowed, as the misanthropic one-legged man demonstrates in an early chapter, it spreads like a Canada thistle, and is almost as hard to root out. The words suspicion and confidence that recur in these pages increase one's suspicions and weaken one's confidence; in fact, there is no end to the pathological allusions one may discover, if one begins with the unfavorable hypothesis...enough to say that if Pierre partly reveals the causes of Melville's condition, it is in The Confidence Man, if anywhere, that the psychologist will discover, probably, its immediate outward manifestations....59

The importance of Mumford's biography is that it came at a time when the growing interest in Melville demanded a more comprehensive work than Weaver's or Freeman's. It supplied a more detailed, a more expansive figure of Melville than had been available; it tried to be fair in its judgments of Melville's works, and integrated them more closely

59. Ibid., p. 248.
with Melville's life than had previously been done; and despite a definite inadequacy on the psychological level, it did indicate that Freud and psychoanalysis had made a definite impact both on biography and criticism. Mumford thus contributed substantially to the revival and to the accelerated interest in Melville both as a man and as a great American literary figure.

Two recent interpretations of Melville, influenced no doubt by the contemporary trend in criticism toward focus on the work itself, illustrate how Freud may be used as a means of analyzing a writer's artistry in delineating character and in treating the psychological problems of plot. In his introduction to *Billy Budd*, F. Barron Freeman explores the Freudian aspects of one of the principal personages in the tale; in his introduction to *Pierre*, Henry A. Murray, a psychologist of note, uses his professional knowledge to show how the workings of Melville's personality, psychologically considered, determine much of the form and content of that novel.

In a chapter entitled "The Creative Process," Freeman discusses the structure, character, style, and religious aspects of *Billy Budd*. It is in his section on character that he refers to Freud, particularly in respect to the psychologically complex Claggart. He introduces his passage thus: "A few modern critics have noticed the homosexual
implications in Claggart's reactions to Billy. But realizing the difficulty of applying psychoanalytic speculations which could not have been influenced by Freud's concepts, they have merely raised the question and let the reader decide for himself.\(^62\)

He continues by briefly and superficially explaining the "modern" psychiatric attitude toward homosexuality as "an effect – rather than a cause – of deep-seated emotional or mental disturbance which has blocked the normal sexual growth of the sufferer in such a way that he has been unable to make the normal transfer of his 'love' from his own to the opposite sex." And his conclusion concerning Claggart's affliction with the abnormality is that "unconscious or latent homosexuality is all that can reasonably be read into the master-at-arm's make-up. This is as much as Melville allows the reader to infer from an analysis of the psychological reasons for Claggart's 'natural depravity.'"

Referring, however, to the few passages in White Jacket in which Melville very directly alludes to the abnormality, Freeman attempts to show how these statements throw light on the homosexual implications in Billy Budd. In an extended footnote, he also points out other illustrations of Melville's thinly disguised sexual symbolism in Moby Dick and "The Tartarus of Maids,"\(^63\) and more of the "probably unconscious sexual ambiguities and symbols" he uses in the depiction of Claggart. With respect to the latter, Freeman declares, "If Melville intended double interpretation to be put on them, as he did on so many of his

\(^62\) Freeman, op. cit., p. 83.

\(^63\) For another analysis of the sexual symbolism in this piece, see Arvin's Melville, p. 236 ff.; also E. H. Eby, "Herman Melville's 'Tartarus of Maids'," Modern Language Quarterly, I (March, 1940).
symbols, there is no proof that he could have known of the homosexual significance that they take in the eyes of the modern reader." This, of course, is an important point, for according to Freudian procedure, it is precisely those symbols which the writer uses unconsciously which reveal the most to the analytic critic.

Freeman, however, appears to be aware of this, for he makes the following injunctions concerning psychoanalytic criticism: "Unless the critic is careful, he may subjectively impose his own ideas upon an author's words rather than objectively extract the author's conscious or unconscious meaning of them. Be psychoanalyzed before 'psychoanalyzing' a piece of writing would be a sensible, if expensive, rule for psychological critics." Nor does he sanction the critic's attempts "to tie up the authors' personalities with their writings." "I do not feel," he writes, "that a critic can, as yet, go that far with any assurance that he is getting at the truth. Therefore, I do not suggest that any conscious or unconscious sexual symbolism which Melville uses to elucidate Claggart reflects Melville's own emotional make-up. It might; but whether or not it does is of little importance here." For Claggart, he asserts, is more important to the tale in the symbolical qualities which associate him with the philosophical concept of "natural depravity" and "evil" than with any psychoanalytic qualities which may adhere. Considering that the theme with which Melville is dealing in this tale is almost exclusively a philosophical one, one can not take exception to Freeman's conclusion. For this attempt to move from the

64. Ibid.
biographical to the critical is in accord with his effort to delimit strictly the use of Freudian analysis.

Although his introduction to Pierre is badly organized, Henry A. Murray has composed probably the most comprehensive and penetrating interpretation of that novel written thus far. And, if one may be permitted to add, the most brilliant. It is, perhaps, the constant shift of emphasis which gives the impression of disorganization, for Murray is working here on multiple levels of meaning, and he tries to combine philosophical, psychological, and biographical methods. The principal problem, that of biography versus criticism, is solved by Murray's calling the novel an autobiography; yet he is concerned with Melville as Freeman is not. As in Freeman's chapter on the creative process, the focus is primarily on text, but Murray goes much farther than Freeman in using the text to delineate the psyche of Melville; factual biography seems to develop out of the text.

In agreement with Weaver, Murray considers this novel Melville's "spiritual biography." In this conclusion there is obvious disagreement with Forsythe's contention, in his introduction to an earlier edition of Pierre,⁶⁵ that the novel is not autobiographical. Forsythe wrote: "It is true that there is much in Pierre that is factual in origin... Yet it must be observed that these are almost always details used in heightening character or rendering settings more vivid; hardly ever do they enter into plot. And they are employed with Melville's usual disregard for painstaking accuracy, being twisted and distorted to suit his

⁶⁵ Herman Melville, Pierre, or the Ambiguities, ed. by R. S. Forsythe, New York, 1930.
purpose as a novelist."

After reviewing the evidence on the question, and asserting that "it would be dull of us to disregard the indications that he Melville intended his future biographers to recognize that he was writing the hushed story of his life," Murray arrives at quite an opposite view from Forsythe's. His conclusion is: "Thus, several lines of evidence converge to the conclusion that Melville's impelling intention in writing Pierre is better defined by saying that he purposed to write his spiritual autobiography in the form of a novel, than it is to say that he was experimenting with the novel and incidentally making use of some personal experience." 66

This, however, is not the only point of disagreement between Forsythe and Murray. There is sharper cleavage in their respective interpretations of the character of Plinlimmon. "Perhaps Plinlimmon," Forsythe wrote, "is a satiric portrait; very surely his original is not Hawthorne." Murray writes, "The figure of Plinlimmon owes something to Carlyle's Professor Teufelsdorch, as Forsythe noted, and something more to Apollonius, the sophist, in Keats' 'Lamia', but the evidence favoring Hawthorne as chief model seems fairly convincing."

In acknowledging these differences of opinion, we are forced to realize that the two men are operating under different principles. Forsythe is primarily a literary historian; admitting evidence only in accord with the canons of the literary source and influence study, he is extremely cautious in making any speculative deductions from his

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evidence. Murray, on the other hand, a psychologist, speculating on the evidence according to his canons, endeavors to explore the possibilities to which his evidence might lead. Murray's conclusions, one must concede, are stimulating to the imagination, opening new vistas of critical interpretation.

Although it is Murray's opinion that Pierre is autobiographical, he qualifies his assertion: "Melville was not writing autobiography in the usual sense, but, from first to last, the biography of his self-image. These identifications should not be dismissed as inconsequential shadows; they constitute the very core, the mythological and religious core, of personality...Pierre is Oedipus-Romeo-Hamlet-Memnon-Christ-Ishmael-Orestes-Timon-Satan-Cain-Manfred or, more shortly, an American Fallen and Crucified angel."

Murray's introduction chiefly emphasizes the psychological and the mythological aspects of the novel, which he analyzes in both Freudian and Jungian terms. Melville's intention, according to Murray, in Mardi, Moby Dick, and Pierre "was to set forth in symbols, allegories and expository passages his discoveries of the world of mind," and this exploratory process called for "the employment of the psychoanalytical techniques which would eventually, in the hands of others, prove most fruitful for science." More simply, Melville "deserves to be commemorated as the literary discoverer of another and more important part of nature, the Darkest Africa of the mind, the mythological unconscious. As a depth psychologist he belongs with Dostoevsky and Nietzsche, the greatest in the centuries before Freud."

This assertion that Melville was a literary predecessor of Freud is
repeated. For, in analyzing what he calls "the first act" of *Pierre*, Murray makes clear the significance of the mother-son relationship between Pierre and Mrs. Glendinning, adding, "Thus, many years before Freud, Melville opening his mind to undercurrents of feeling and imagery, discovered the Oedipus Complex and unashamedly represented it with colorful embellishments as it would flower in the wishful fantasy of a victimized adolescent." He continues: "There can be no doubt that Melville recognized the incestuous nature of the attachment." Murray resorts to careful examination of the text to substantiate this opinion. Murray's next important analytic insight is Jungian. In this instance, the episode he describes is that of Pierre's seeing for the first time and being so struck with Isabel's Face. It is the Face which begins to haunt Pierre day and night. For Murray, this effect of the Face on Pierre is "the best description in literature..... of the autonomous inward operation of the aroused soul-image, or anima, as Jung has named it."

It is now Jung who primarily dominates Murray's interpretation. There is strong evidence of this in such passages as "Melville intimates--again anticipating the findings of depth psychology--that the image of God is generated out of early idealizations of the father," and "Melville describes....another great archetypal situation, the discovery of unsuspected evil in the revered object.." But it is chiefly in Murray's exegesis of Isabel's character that he indulges in Jungian theory most strongly. For Isabel, Murray tells us, is a perfect example of the dark, or tragic, anima." "Isabel has the elementary mournfulness of one who has been deprived of love from her birth.....Her affections have
been limited to a single object, her mother's guitar, which is wittingly used by Melville as a womb symbol...."

This description of Isabel is continued:

Another important feature of the anima which emerges sooner or later, after she has been snatched from her 'world-wide abandonment' and nourishingly embraced, is her desire to be represented, defended, and championed in the world, to have a way cleared for her acceptance by the society that excluded her and to have what she embodies incorporated in the culture. Every true anima has a potential value; she is a new hypothesis, a forgotten truth, a 'stone which the builders refused' that may be destined to become the headstone of the corner.' Thus the anima is she-who-must-be-served. This is the aspect of the image which Jung has stressed and which was dominant in medieval love....

One reason for the anima's attracting power is that she embodies the repressed and the as-yet-unformulated components of the man's personality: the child in him who felt unloved, the passivity and the death wishes which were forsworn, the grief and the self-pity which have been bottled up, the feminine dispositions which have been denied, and, in addition, the scores of nameless intuitions and impulses, the open expression of which has been barred by culture. Isabel is the personification of Pierre's unconscious....If he can resurrect Isabel from the dead, he himself will be reborn with a solidly founded fortitude.

In this presentation of Isabel, Murray claims, Melville is also an important predecessor of Jung. "It is astonishing," he writes, "that two generations before Jung, Melville, unaided by the findings of depth psychology, should have described with such fidelity, subtlety, and beauty all the significant features of the first phase of anima experience."

Although he digresses frequently into the philosophical aspects of the novel - particularly in respect to Plinlimmon's treatise "Chronometricals and Horologicals" - Murray's interpretation continues on the same intricate psychological level. He returns again and again to both Freudian and Jungian theory, touching upon the incest motif of the book,
Pierre's withdrawing of "libido" from Isabel, the homosexual implications in Pierre's "boy-love" for Glen Stanley, etc. In the chapter which deals with Pierre as author, Murray points out how Melville again "anticipates modern depth psychology," how he describes almost in detail the actual process of psychoanalysis.

In the opening paragraph to his concluding section Murray summarized:

Melville sustains his highest level of expression in describing Pierre's mental processes - the invasion of his mind by the personal unconscious, the operation of the anima image, his microscopic dissection of his mother's character, his descent into himself. In these passages he stands out from the bulk of his contemporaries as a seer among children, a forerunner of Henry James, Proust, and the whole modern school of psychological novelists.

Despite his acute psychological analysis of the text and the resultant picture of Melville which emerges, Murray does not indulge in any aesthetic evaluations. He discusses quite thoroughly Melville's ability as a psychologist, but he refrains from discussing adequately Melville's ability as an artist. There is, for example, little attempt to analyze the structure of the novel, little attempt to describe its style or language; in short, little to make us aware of Pierre as a qualitative work of art. One must conclude, therefore, that although Murray's work shows brilliant insight into the novel in all its psychological and biographical implications, it does not fulfill that obligation of the literary critic which demands aesthetic judgment.

As we have noted, the most recent schools of psychology, "group dynamics," "revisionists," have not as yet had a profound impact on literary criticism. Two recent books, however, indicate the direction, not only of literary criticism, but also of the integration of social psychology with literary criticism. Newton Arvin's biography for the
American Men of Letters series, Herman Melville (New York, 1950) and Richard Chase's Herman Melville both illustrate to what extent recent trends in social psychology have affected literary criticism: Arvin's in its extensive use of Freudian techniques, Chase's in its application of Jungian concepts of myth. We shall discuss these volumes separately in a later chapter.

The study of Melville criticism for the last thirty years reveals not only to what extent Melville has been interpreted from a psychological and psychoanalytic point of view, but also to what extent the psychological method as an approach to literature has been developed. There is evidence of this development in the fact that the gradual impact of Freud and Jung has assumed more importance for contemporary critics. The progress of the method from such early, almost inarticulate efforts of D. H. Lawrence to such skillful use of it by Henry A. Murray and such integration of it as shall be apparent in Arvin's and Chase's books, attest to the respectability and significance it has achieved.

Melville's works have proved rich for the approach. The attempts to use it biographically have only occasionally been rewarding, but the attempts to impose it on the works have given them an added lustre.

The value of psychological interpretation has been best summed up by Trilling. "Psychoanalysis," he writes, "does not have a satisfactory conception of what an artistic meaning is. There is, indeed, no single meaning to any work of art and this is true not merely because it is better that it should be true - because, that is, it makes art a richer thing - but because historical and personal experience show it to be
true; changes in historical context and in personal mood change the
meaning of a work and indicate to us that artistic understanding is not
a question of fact but of value...." And directly referring to the
method, Trilling adds, "for, of all mental systems, the Freudian psy-
chology is the one which makes poetry indigenous to the very consti-
tution of the mind; the mind, as Freud sees it, is in the greater part
of its tendency, a poetry-making organ.... It was left to Freud to dis-
cover how, in a scientific age, the life of the emotions is lived by
figurative formations, and to create what psychoanalysis is, a science
of tropes, of metaphor and its variants, synecdoche and metonomy." We
can see how, in Murray, this science has been applied in critical
practise; in both the work of Chase and Arvin we shall see how it be-
gins further to be realized.
CHAPTER VI

Melville and Philosophical Criticism

The problem of the relationship between literature and religion
and philosophy is an ancient one. Classic critics were concerned with
it, principally in their effort to decide whether the function of liter­
ature is to delight or to teach, or, as Horace attempted to put it, a
combination of both. The problem recurs and we find traces of it in
Renaissance criticism, in Sidney, in seventeenth and eighteenth century
criticism, and in nineteenth century criticism, particularly in Arnold,
who re-interpreted the problem so as to formulate almost a tradition
that has persisted into the present day.

Instead of considering the problem in its ancient light, that of
the conflict between aesthetic pleasure and moral didacticism, Arnold
shifted emphasis from the work of art to the writer himself, attributing
to the writer the qualities of the seer and the prophet. More simply,
Arnold tried to resolve the problem by giving the writer divine powers;
the religious element in literature thus becomes self-explanatory.

Literature, Arnold tells us, is available to all; it is, by implication,
a kind of religion. In his Literature and Dogma, for example, Arnold
points out that because of the general disintegration of organized re­
ligion, the Bible must undergo revaluation, and in such revaluation, we
can understand the interrelationship between a religious document and
literature. For the Bible, a religious work is also a literary work,
and must be so considered.

It is with Eliot, perhaps, that the dissent from the Arnoldian
tradition of viewing the artist as prophet and literature as religion begins. Eliot ascribes no such prophetical quality to the artist; nor does he consider literature as religion in the Arnoldian sense. Eliot does, however, assert a relationship between religion and literature, insisting that no work of literature is without some reflection of the religious and moral temper of the time in which it was produced. His essay "Poetry and Religion," for example, after discussing the various types of "religious" literature, comes to precisely such a conclusion. Nor does Eliot ignore the propagandistic element in the ideas of poetry. His essay, "Poetry and Propaganda," takes up the subject not only of the influential religious ideas in poetry but also of philosophical ideas in general. Eliot, in disagreeing with the Arnoldian tradition of philosophical criticism, returns the emphasis once more to the text itself. Thus, in the twentieth century we have a reorientation of philosophical criticism, in which the writer is no longer considered prophet, but in which the text may be considered in the light of the religious and philosophical ideas it contains.

Although the study of the history of philosophy and the great philosophical systems has always been proper to the student of philosophy, the literary scholar who finds that his scholarly pursuits lead him into such study has not been completely at ease with it. Certainly the Arnoldian tradition was an effort to combine literature and philosophy. It has not been until comparatively recent years, however, that a more stable marriage between literature and philosophy has been arranged, one
in which the literary scholar could find more connubial comfort than in the rather strained Arnoldian tradition. This marriage has been rather ambiguously entitled "History of Ideas." For the "History of Ideas" includes in its study the creative writers - the poets, the novelists, the dramatists, the "small thinkers" in which the literary scholar is primarily interested.

Through his method of tracing the history of ideas as they are expressed in literature, the literary scholar has begun to make his position equally tenable with respect to philosophy and to literature. He has begun to relate literature and philosophy as parallel modes for the expression of beliefs and ideas, and so avoided the easy temptation to reduce literature to philosophy. But there are few literary scholar-critics who practise as historians of ideas. The fact remains that most who concern themselves with ideas in literature still attempt to deal with philosophical ideas per se, and still frankly treat the creative writer as a philosopher or prophet manqué. Thus, on the one hand, ideas, like historical and biographical data, are simply presented as additional literary facts; and they are often studied in the light of influence and sources with all the paraphernalia of parallel passages and listings of books which the author read or may have been familiar with. The philosophical critic, in the end, deserves the name not so much for his method as for the use to which he puts literature.

Since Melville himself was intensely interested in philosophical ideas and both expressed them explicitly and used dramatic conventions
to express them implicitly, the literary scholar and critic with philosophical propensities has found him extremely rewarding. Not only has the literary historian unearthed much data on the philosophical influences on Melville - there have been innumerable source studies of his ideas - but the historian of ideas has found him useful, e.g. Gabriel, and Matthiessen in his American Renaissance, which, in many respects, might be considered a history of ideas. Most significant, however, is the number of students of literature - both literary historians and literary critics - who have become absorbed in Melville's ideas in themselves, and who treat Melville as a sort of unsystematic religious and moral philosopher. Since Melville's philosophic ideas permeated almost everything he wrote, no one who is interested in him or his work as a subject can ignore them; and almost every important work which is discussed in this dissertation has dwelt, more or less, on the religious and moral problems with which Melville dealt. Some scholars and critics, however, have concentrated their attention principally on these ideas, have set out to be philosophical critics, and it is their work that we deal with now.

William Ellery Sedgwick's Herman Melville: The Tragedy of Mind,¹ is an attempt to deal with Melville's philosophic ideas as they are illustrative of his profound effort to plumb the mysteries of Truth and Life. It is Sedgwick's thesis that Melville was driven by the conflict of heart and mind.

¹ William E. Sedgwick, Herman Melville: The Tragedy of Mind, New York, 1944.
In Melville's view of life, a great man combines a great heart with a great mind. Both are integral parts of his greatness. The trouble begins, as Melville also perceived, in that their respective exigencies lead them in opposite directions. The human heart has its roots in the earth... The heart, as Melville thought of it, is a great democrat. It embraces its kind.... The mind is no democrat to embrace the commonplaces of the actual and the possible. It is a fiery autocrat and spurns these commonplaces. It insists on striving for ultimate truth, which is to say that it proposes a noble, impossible ideal for the nature in which it shares.... But the dualism of human nature is such that where it would glorify it brings ruin. At the centre of the destruction which it wreaks is the death of the heart, which, like Antaeus, is shorn of strength and life when lifted above its mother earth. Herein lies the mainspring and conclusion of the tragedy of mind. The great man, the fairest possible semblance of humanity, is impelled to achieve a noble and impossible ideal, and in the very effort to achieve this ideal destroys the fairest semblance of humanity. He brings death within and without.²

This, according to Sedgwick, is Melville's tragedy; and he tries to show how it is borne out in the struggle between Melville's religious faith and his intellectual skepticism, and how it is finally resolved by Melville's transcendence of the struggle in Billy Budd. This, too, is "the tragedy of Hamlet and the tragedy of Lear. It is crucial in the tragedy of Captain Ahab... And we can assume it was the tragic drama of Shakespeare himself..."

Sedgwick is admittedly not interested in biography, in "Melville's private or domestic life." Nor is he interested in sociological interpretation - although he frequently indulges in sociological generalization, e.g., he writes that Melville and many of his contemporaries

² Ibid., p. 58. This conflict of the heart and the mind has been also treated by Nathalia Wright, "The Head and the Heart in Melville's Mardi," PMLA, LXVI (June, 1951); also, "Melville's Journey: The Conflict of Heart and Mind," Times Literary Supplement, Jan, 12, 1945, p. 18. Other discussions may be found in Braswell, Chase, Matthiessen, and Thorp.
"were at odds with their nineteenth century America of the industrial revolution which was spreading its rigor mortis of standardization and gentility over the face of the land." The tragedy in which Sedgwick is interested is "of the universal nature of human life," and this tragedy he feels is unfolded principally in the works of Melville, just as it is unfolded in Shakespeare's individual tragedies and in Shakespeare's work as a whole. Thus, Sedgwick's book is devoted almost entirely to consideration of Melville's work - "I shall consider Melville's books as the record," he writes, "in their innermost recesses, of that unfolding. It is, as I must see it, an unfolding of inward vision, a vision not so much of life as of what it is to be alive..." This, one must notice, is at least analogous to the method of New Criticism, explication of text. Sedgwick, however, instead of concentrating on the aesthetic qualities of the text, its form and language, concentrates on content, and the content with which he is primarily concerned is philosophic ideas.

The books are examined individually, and each one, according to Sedgwick's interpretation, is found to unfold yet another portion of Melville's tragic vision. Typee, for example, "retained its place in Melville's personal spiritual drama as representing his vital need, in the teeth of opposite needs almost as vital, to hold on to and to find his way back to those resources of life which he included under the significance of Typee." Mardi is "the world of mind"; it shows "the

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tragic necessity mind is under to reach for the infinite," and it ig­nores the realities of the heart's attachments. But the two books which receive most attention are **Moby Dick** and **Pierre**.

It is in **Moby Dick** that Melville's inward vision "comes full circle or full globe." Sedgwick's interpretation of the novel is that it is allegory with three principal symbols - Ahab, the White Whale, and the sea. Ahab is man; Moby Dick stands for "the mystery of creation which confronts and challenges the mind of man at the same time that it lies ambushed in the processes of his own consciousness"; the sea is "the element of truth as also of man's greatness and infinite aspirations."

There is some similarity here with the allegorical interpretation which Winters imposes on the tale, for whereas Winters' interpretation is clearly wrought, Sedgwick's suffers from diffusion. Although Sedgwick thus defines his symbols, he does not manage to show how they operate with unity and coherence; his dichotomy, for example, of the "White Ahab" and the "Dark Ahab" is never made quite clear in terms of the other two symbols. In addition to making Ahab the symbol of man, Sedgwick makes him the symbol of Melville's tragedy, for, he tells us, Ahab drew his being from Melville's knowledge of human nature, the best part of which was his knowledge of himself. This congruity is in accord with Sedgwick's thesis, but is also adds confusion to his understanding of the symbolic character of Ahab. One must conclude, therefore, that this chapter on **Moby Dick** does not succeed in fully, or even clearly, exploring the allegorical possibilities of the novel, although it does succeed in

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4. *Cf.* Chapter VII.
shaping the book to Sedgwick's ultimate thesis.\textsuperscript{5}

Pierre, for Sedgwick, is Melville's attempt to repeat the tragedy of youthful idealism he saw in Hamlet. Sedgwick, one might add, reiterates throughout the book the similarities and contrasts between Melville and Shakespeare. "The influence of Shakespeare on Melville," he writes, "was fundamentally a profound and pervasive act of fertilization."\textsuperscript{6} This "fertilization," one must conclude, achieved its greatest blossoming in Pierre; for Melville, according to Sedgwick, identified himself with his hero, adding to another aspect or dimension "the tragedy of mind. This that I call the tragedy of Hamlet is the tragedy of Idealism."

In Sedgwick's concluding chapter, the parallel between Melville and Shakespeare is again pointed out. "For Billy Budd stands in the same light to \textit{Moby Dick} and \textit{Pierre} that Shakespeare's last plays - \textit{Pericles, The Winter's Tale, Cymbeline, and The Tempest} - stand to the great tragedies.... The final and ever so poignant flowering of Herman Melville, which is the element of present lyrical experience in \textit{Billy Budd}, is the same essentially as Shakespeare's in his last play." The contention here is that, in this last work, Melville achieved a final insight that transcended the limitations which the struggle in his previous works had imposed upon him, and that he found within himself, at his own mysterious centre, a calm not to be found elsewhere.

The fact that this book was discovered and published after Sedgwick's

\textsuperscript{5} Sedgwick, \textit{op. cit.}, Chapter V presents the interpretation of \textit{Moby Dick}.

\textsuperscript{6} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 85.
death might account for the erratic quality of its style. Although
edited, it was not edited well enough to eliminate awkwardness in
sentence structure, ineptness in phrasing, etc. Since Sedgwick un-
doubtedly would have polished and revised his manuscript, it is somewhat
unfair to criticize this work from the point of view of the writing -
the repetitious abstractions, the occasional flatulence. One can, how-
ever, justifiably criticize the main theme of the book, and the chief
striction one can voice against this is that it is, perhaps, too simple.
Certainly Melville illustrates "the tragedy of mind"; one cannot dis-
agree with Sedgwick in that quarter. And certainly Melville's works
can be adduced to substantiate the tragedy. But certainly there is more
to Melville's tragedy than simply a conflict between heart and mind, be-
tween feeling and intellect. Sedgwick, in his analysis never ventures
far enough, never tackles the real complexities of his problem nor
Melville's. Even within the limitations of his method, there seems to
be too much constraint; and one feels that Sedgwick, not unaware of the
complexities, almost consciously rejected them to fit Melville to his
own preconceptions.

This criticism that Sedgwick has, perhaps, oversimplified would be
objected to by the British critic Montgomery Belgion. Belgion, in an
article in the Sewanee Review,\textsuperscript{7} claims that Sedgwick's interpretation
of Moby Dick is "not convincing," that Sedgwick does not have sufficient
evidence for his symbolical paradigm. For Belgion, Moby Dick is simply

\textsuperscript{7} Montgomery Belgion, "Heterodoxy in Moby Dick," Sewanee Review,
LV (Jan. - March, 1947). This piece also served as an introduction to
"a tale of pursuit." "It is a matter of fact." And to dress up the story with symbols and allegorical implications diminishes its narrative power, and "the experience of reading the book will have been impoverished."

One can better understand the full impact of the book, Belgion claims, not by assessing it as allegory, but by recognizing its "affinities and derivations." The affinities, he goes on to tell us are American, and he calls up the "philosophizing" in the book to corroborate his point. For Melville enjoys indulging in the many philosophical digressions in the book - "every native American is, not a philosopher, but a philosophizer... This is in the tradition of all-known American writers." The derivations of the book, however, are European, the chief derivations being the Bible, Sir Thomas Browne, and Shakespeare. Belgion concurs with Sedgwick that Shakespeare was important to the composition of Moby Dick, although he would not limit its Shakespearean derivation only to Lear. Hamlet, Othello, and Timon of Athens, he asserts, also contributed to the novel with E. Grant-Watson's, written some twenty-six years earlier. Grant-Watson, also an Englishman, was one of the first critics of the revival to discern in Moby Dick the allegorical design. For him, the novel possesses almost explicit symbolism, is "the history of a soul's adventure."

William Braswell, who has published numerous articles on Melville

8. Cf. Chapter II.
in the scholarly journals,\(^9\) is a literary historian who has tackled Melville's philosophical ideas, particularly his religious thought, in a published dissertation. Carefully documented, this work presents much that Melville wrote about religion and philosophy, gathering its material from Melville's works and exploring the sources, primarily literary, often biographical, from which this material is derived.

The questions with which Melville dealt are examined in the first two chapters, and the remaining chapters show how these questions pervaded his most significant works. These questions, roughly characterized are: problems of reason, and the conciliation of the heart and mind; problems concerning the nature of God; the problem of man's divinity and immortality; the problems of man's moral nature, particularly that of the nature of good and evil; and finally, the problems of the relationship of man to man and of man to God. Although Braswell's method is that of the literary historian, his material is of such nature that he can indulge in discussion which would lead him into many areas of learning. He can, for example, discuss Melville's ideas with respect to their philosophical validity; or he can sociologically connect these ideas with the religious trends of the time—Transcendentalism, the Oxford Movement, etc.; or he can examine the aesthetic presentation of these ideas with respect to their symbolic and allegorical implications, their language— as Nathalia Wright has attempted to do.\(^{10}\)

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9. Some of Braswell's articles are: "The Satirical Temper of Melville's Pierre," American Literature, VII (Jan., 1936); "Melville as a Critic of Emerson," American Literature, IX (Nov., 1937); "Melville's Use of Seneca," American Literature, XII (March, 1940).

10. Cf. Chapter III.
The choice he makes, however, might be considered the typical choice expressing the attitude of the literary historian toward literature. He concentrates principally on sources, and when he deviates from history into interpretation, his deviation is into the territory of history's nearest neighbor, biography. With respect to biography, he does not hesitate to indulge in the psychological speculation of how much of Melville is projected into the attitude of characters. His conclusion is that Melville's works show Melville's spiritual development from various stages of disbelief, rebellion and iconoclasm, to a final peace and resignation. The philosophical ideas involved in this development are not analyzed; they are presented simply as literary facts.

A book similar in approach to Sedgwick's is Percival's *A Reading of Moby Dick*, a strictly exegetical interpretation of the novel that rests almost entirely on religious assumptions. Percival, in this slim but beautifully composed volume, adheres closely to the text, and in this sense his method is that of The New Criticism. But Percival is not interested in any aspects of the novel other than the religious and allegorical. What Sedgwick attempts on a large scale, Percival attempts only with *Moby Dick*. Sedgwick's attempt is certainly more ambitious; he tries to show how Melville's works are compounded in a "tragedy of mind." Percival's effort is more modest; his aim is to analyze Ahab's tragedy.

In this analysis Percival's interpretation presents still another disagreement with Sedgwick. Whereas Sedgwick sees the White Whale as

symbolic of the mystery of creation, and Ahab as the symbol of man bent on penetrating and conquering this mystery in the sea which is in turn symbolic of the vast ocean of truth in which the mystery has to be sought and met, Percival takes a more orthodox view. For him, the whale is the symbol of the dualistic forces of good and evil, "the symbol of the evil that frets and baffles men in their pursuit of good. For Ishmael, as for Ahab, the pursuit of the whale is a study in good and evil." Thus, Percival's emphasis is on the character of Ahab, and his interpretation becomes a detailed analysis of this complex personage in relation to the moral problem of good and evil; Ahab is the focal point of attention.

In Ahab, Percival sees the conflict between spiritual man and natural man, with the former upholding a religious and Christian faith and the latter upholding a demonic and pagan reason. Involved in this struggle is Fate, which, according to Percival, is another theme of the novel. At first, Percival tells us, man in sensing the inevitability of his fate, is confronted with despair, and Percival uses the insights of Kierkegaard to resolve the problem of despair. For after the initial despair, there are "two eventualities: he man will become demonic or essentially religious." The religious answer is in resignation, whether it be Stoic or Christian, although the latter kind is "the only way... whereby a morbid nature, passionate and self-willed, can encounter despair and conquer it." The alternative to resignation is defiance. "Since the sufferer cannot lose himself, his one recourse is to affirm

12. Ibid., p. 16 ff.
himself.... the despair increases, while the increasing despair increases the consciousness of self. The cycle thus set in motion has an inevitable outcome: the sufferer becomes demonic."¹³

Ahab, according to Percival, takes the latter course. In him "there was no love, no awe, no trembling, no desire to be submitted unto God." For him there was only Fate, or Necessity. "The antinomy has vexed the world. On the human level it has been expressed by the dualism of natural man, in a state of bondage to the natural world, and the spiritual man, who may transcend it. Is this transcendence a free and open choice? Ahab thinks not. Faith thinks that it is...." Thus, although Percival has keen insight into Ahab's tragedy and a profound understanding of its ramifications, his sympathies, because of his implicit religious bias, are not entirely with Melville's protagonist.¹⁴

It is for Ishmael, the sole survivor, whom Percival has praise. It is Ishmael, according to Percival, who "grows lyrical...over the dignity of man," the source of which "is in God himself." It is Ishmael whose "wayward moods give way to faith and fellowship," in whose character the essential thing is apparently "limitless understanding and compassion." And Percival cites Jung to show that Ishmael's provisional acceptance of all men is a kind of religious faith.¹⁵

The chief criticism that can be voiced against Percival's book is that, like Sedgwick's, it shapes the material to suit its thesis. The

¹³. Ibid.
¹⁴. Gabriel's interpretation of Ahab's defiance is quite the opposite of Percival's. Cf. Chapter IV.
¹⁵. Percival, op. cit., p. 127.
evidence which Percival presents is valid and convincing; but to accept this evidence demands that one must accept Percival's major premise, which is that one needs a religious faith of some kind or other to sustain oneself against the assaults which living inflicts upon us.

W. H. Auden also considers the religious implications of *Moby Dick*. In a brilliant piece published in the *New York Times Book Review*, entitled "The Christian Tragic Hero," Auden presents an acute analysis of Captain Ahab as the religious hero of Christian tragedy. In a brief introduction Auden establishes the differences between Greek and Christian tragedy. "Greek tragedy," he tells us, "is the tragedy of necessity....Christian tragedy is the tragedy of possibility." The difference between the Greek tragic hero and the Christian tragic hero, according to Auden, is that "the hubris which is the flaw in the Greek hero's character is the illusion of a man who knows himself strong and believes that nothing can shake that strength, while the corresponding Christian sin of Pride is the illusion of a man who knows himself weak but believes he can by his own efforts transcend that weakness and become strong."

Auden proceeds to show how Ahab compares with the latter type of tragic hero. Before the tale begins, Ahab is already the victim of tragedy; the whale has bitten off his leg. What to the Greeks would be punishment for sin, is here temptation to sin, an opportunity to choose;


17. For analysis of Ahab as The Shakespearean tragic hero modeled after Coleridge's conception, see Leo Howard, "Melville's Struggle with the Angel," *Modern Language Quarterly*, I (June, 1940) 195-206.
by making wrong choice, and continuing to make it, Ahab punishes himself. Thus he is confronted by eternal possibilities of choice. "The past is irrecoverable but always redeemable now."

There is in this dilemma of Ahab, as Auden depicts it, a striking resemblance to the problem Percival presents. The Kierkegaardian despair and the inevitability of Fate are implicit, and Ahab is confronted with the same choice of either religion and salvation or demonism and damnation. Before the story opens, Auden however tells us, Ahab had suffered and made the wrong choice. "He was not wrong to make Moby Dick into a symbol of all the inexplicable suffering in the world - he was wrong to insist that the motive behind the whale's act and behind all suffering is personal malevolence." Ahab can still achieve salvation through forgiveness of the whale.

Throughout the story, this possibility of becoming both "exceptional and good," of becoming a Christian "saint," remains for Ahab. And Auden's religious assumption here is that of free will; for the saint, according to him is "the individual who of his own free will surrenders his will to the will of God." Although, he adds, the saint never ceases to be tempted by his own desires. Again the similarity with Percival is apparent.

Ahab, thus, is called, but he rejects the call. The others in the tale also have this possibility of salvation, but less is required of them; of Starbuck, for example, that he face evil instead of superstitiously avoiding it, of Stubb that he face his fears. But of Ahab alone, the most is required, for he alone has the necessary heroic
passion to become "a real and not a merely respectable Quaker."

Ahab, then, according to Auden, is somewhat like a saint. He wills only one thing - to kill Moby Dick; he renounces all attachments to the secular world, leaving his wife and child, throwing away his pipe, destroying the quadrant. And like the saint, he indulges in ritual acts to express his resolve - e.g. the swearing scene of the crew, the baptismal of the harpoon. But like the saint, he is never free from the possibility of renouncing his refusal of salvation. Divine grace is constantly offered.

Auden concludes:

So Ahab, refusing life, goes unrepentent, like all of Shakespearean tragic heroes, to the unnecessary death he has chosen, dragging with him his companions, and the only survivor is, as in Greek tragedy, the Chorus, the spectator Ishmael. But Ishmael is not, like the Greek chorus, the eternal average man, for he isn't a character at all. To be a character one must will and act, and Ishmael has no will, only consciousness; he does not act, he only knows, and what he knows is good and evil, i.e. possibility. He cannot die because he has not yet begun to live, and he ends the book as a baby reborn from the sea in Queequeg's coffin, thrust back into life as an orphan with his first choice still to make. 19

Auden touches upon this general interpretation in his volume The Enchafed Flood, subtitled The Romantic Iconography of the Sea, but in this book, in accord with its theme, he goes into a more detailed

18. Ibid., pp. 61-66.
exposition of the allegory and the symbols in Moby Dick. The purpose
of his book, as Auden states it, is "to understand the nature of Ro-
manticism through an examination of its treatment of a single theme,
the sea." Melville, naturally, provides him with excellent material for
this examination, and there is an abundance of quotation, mostly from
Moby Dick, to exemplify his insights.

His first extended use of Moby Dick is in a section entitled "The
Romantic Use of Symbols," which he introduces by saying that "to under-
stand the romantic conception of the relation between objective and sub-
jective experience, Moby Dick is perhaps the best work to study...."

The whole book, he tells us, is "an elaborate synecdoche, i.e., it
takes a particular way of life, that of whale-fishing ... and makes it
a case of any man's life in general." It is also full of "parable and
typology." And finally, the characters and names of the nine ships
which the Pequod encounters are, in their relation to Moby Dick, "types
of the relation of human individuals and societies in the tragic mystery
of existence." The Goney, for example, represents the aged who may have
experienced the mystery but cannot tell others, (The Captain's trumpet
falls into the sea.); the Town-Ho represents those who have knowledge
of the mystery but keep it secret; the Jerebaum, those who make a super-
stitious idolatry of the mystery or whom the mystery has driven crazy.
The analogy continues.20

Then Auden discusses the White Whale, in his treatment of which
"Melville uses symbols in the real sense." The symbol, according to

20. Ibid., pp. 61-66.
Auden, is felt to be such before any possible meaning is consciously recognized, and the symbolic correspondence is never one to one but always multiple, and different persons perceive different meanings in it. Thus, the White Whale in the novel becomes laden with a variety of symbolical meanings; to each character it takes on a different significance. And Auden here quotes Ahab's speech: "All visible objects, man, are but pasteboard masks. To me the white whale is that wall shoved near to me. Sometimes I think there's naught beyond. I see in him outrageous strength with an insatiable malice sinewing it. That inscrutable thing is chiefly what I hate."

In a subsequent section of the book, in which he analyzes the concept of the hero, Auden returns to Moby Dick and gives it even more detailed attention. Initial discussion in this section dwells on Auden's concept of the hero, whom, he describes as "the exceptional individual," the one "who possesses authority over the average." Exposition on the three types of authority - aesthetic, ethical, and religious - follows. Each type of authority produces a corresponding type of hero. Then Auden discusses the most complex type of hero - the Romantic hero, and he uses Wordsworth's dream in the beginning of the fifth book of The Prelude to describe this type of hero as "a combination of a Bedouin desert dweller and Don Quixote." The Biblical Ishmael becomes, for Auden, the Bedouin, and the ensuing paragraphs compare him with Don Quixote; the crucial difference between them is "that Ishmael is self-conscious

and Don Quixote is completely self-forgetful." Don Quixote alone, however, is the Religious Hero.

Auden finally launches into his analysis of *Moby Dick*. The position of Ishmael in the tale is carefully discussed, and Auden implies that the reader is, more or less, identified with him. "The voyage of the *Pequod* is one voyage for Ishmael and with him us, and another for the rest of the crew." Father Mapple's sermon, which Auden considers "an essential clue to the meaning of the whole book," had expressed the moral presuppositions of the book by which we are to judge the speeches and actions of Ahab and the rest. In the remainder of this section, Auden gives brief but cogent dissections of all the characters in the novel in terms of the Christian doctrine expounded in Mapple's sermon.

The treatment of Ahab, which one anticipates, turns out to be a revision of Auden's article, "The Christian Tragic Hero." We have remarked the similarity between Auden's interpretation of Ahab in this article and Percival's interpretation in his *A Reading of Moby Dick*. This similarity is once again surprisingly called to one's attention, for in Auden's revised discussion the source to which he turns for his definition of despair is Kierkegaard, the source which Percival uses. "Of this despair," Auden writes, "Ahab is a representation, perhaps the greatest in literature." Ahab, thus, is for Auden the Religious Hero. "...we watch him enact every ritual of the dedicated Don Quixote life of the Religious Hero, only for negative reasons."

The concluding sections of the book deal with *Billy Budd*, in which

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we see "Melville's treatment of the Religious Hero, and the Devil or the negative Religious Hero in their absolute form." The hero to which Auden refers here is Claggart, whom Auden makes out as the Devil, distinguishing him from Ahab as the Religious Hero through means of sexual symbolism.

Auden's little book shows excellent insights - religious and psychological. Unfortunately, it is erratic. The first two sections show organization, but in the last section, which contains the analysis of Moby Dick, the organization seems to disintegrate. The original purpose of the book - the understanding the nature of romanticism through its treatment of the sea - is completely lost sight of. In addition, Auden's method of presentation - haphazard division of topics, lavish quotation - becomes confusing; and this, even in the first two sections of the book which are more tightly knit together.

As for Auden's interpretation of Moby Dick and, incidentally, Billy Budd, it is essentially religious. It does not, however, demand the religious point of view on the part of the reader for agreement; Auden's attitude itself could not be called religious. He simply presents a religious interpretation, making no invocations for faith, making no judgments as to the morality of the characters he analyzes - Ishmael, Ahab, Billy Budd, or Claggart. It is in this respect that he differs from Percival. Whereas Auden is not committed to the religious implications he gives to the book, Percival, one feels, definitely is.

23. For another interesting interpretation of Billy Budd, with emphasis on the moral problems of the tale, see Lionel Trilling, The Middle of the Journey, New York, 1947, p. 153 ff.
In addition to the fact that almost all material published on Mel­ville which professes to be comprehensive deals, in some fashion or other, with his philosophical and religious ideas, many articles have been published, particularly in the scholarly journals, which deal with specific ideas as they are expounded in specific works. *Moby Dick*, *Mardi*, and *Pierre* are naturally the most fertile books for the philosophical interpreter; free will and the problem of good and evil appear to be the most popular subjects of discussion.

Probably the most prolific writer of such articles is Tyrus Hill­way, whose unpublished dissertation, *Melville and Nineteenth Century Science*, was produced at Yale. Almost all of his articles deal with philosophic aspects of particular works. Hillway's article on *Mardi*,24 for example, discusses Taji's suicide, considering it his "quest into eternity," and concluding that to enter into this quest, Taji is willing to renounce all ties with life. In an article on *Billy Budd*,25 Hillway tells us that it is the suffering of "Starry" Vere, far greater than that of the Handsome Sailor, which makes the book a great work of art. In an article on *Pierre*,26 we are urged to reject the notion that Mel­ville propogated any philosophical system, that, on the contrary, his thinking was too diffuse, too ambiguous, to be systematized adequately.

Two articles,²⁷ originating, no doubt, in Hillway's dissertation, deal with Melville and science. Hillway has been principally trained in the method of literary history, and although he makes excursions into interpretation which are valid, they are limited by his training. His tendency is to extract philosophical ideas and discuss them as literary fact.

Other articles which discuss the religious or philosophical aspects of Melville and his work are: Sophie Hollis' "Moby Dick: A Religious Interpretation,"²⁸ in which Miss Hollis tries to show that the novel is a religious allegory of fate and free will, that it reveals the "tragedy of man who is neither believer nor infidel"; Henry A. Myers' discussion of the tragic meaning of Moby Dick²⁹ - "...The main point of Moby Dick is that any great human action will show that the heavens and the deeps, eternal symbols of man's triumphs and disasters, are merely the limits of his experience related to each other through that experience and dependent upon each other and upon him for their meaning." Henry F. Pommer, whose dissertation, Melville and Milton, has recently been published, in an article "Melville as a Critic of Christianity," tries to show that Melville never dictates to the reader's mind, that he encourages an open independence of intellect, and that he reminds us that "the great despisers" are "the great adorers."³⁰

In an effort to investigate the philosophical relationship of *White Jacket* with the later books, Howard Vincent concludes that it offers the first sight of "the waste" which the other books explore - "it tells of the coming of the knowledge of good and evil and of the fall from innocence and the unconscious grace of childhood. It is a study of disenchantment." Two articles by R. E. Watters go into the subject of Melville's sociality, and another discusses the use of "magic" in *Moby Dick*.

One should not overlook the two foreign books on Melville, one by a Frenchman, the other by a German, both of which discuss Melville's philosophical ideas. The book by the Frenchman, who worked in the United States, is a thesis for the Sorbonne, and is considered especially valuable for its bibliography, which lists translations and foreign criticisms.

The most outstanding characteristic of philosophic criticism of Melville in the twentieth century is that it follows somewhat the general...
trend of the intellectual's return to religion. 35 From a sociological point of view, we have noted that the revival, as Gabriel describes it, had its roots in the disillusionment following the first World War, that the post-war generation found in Melville a philosophy of individualism which could assuage that disillusionment. 36 Melville, however, seems to have done much more than that. Philosophically, out of despair a new kind of faith seems to grow; and many intellectuals, in recent years, seem to have acquired a new kind of faith, either in a reinvigorated Christianity or in some kind of individual mysticism. Melville, apparently, has aided in the establishment of such faith.

Certainly the complexity of Melville's religious and philosophical ideas have done much to keep modern American criticism interested in him. For modern criticism, which on a broad philosophic level has become embroiled with questions of morality and religion, as well as psychology and sociology, finds in Melville a mind which seems to wrestle with the same religious and philosophic problems confronting it - the problems of good and evil, original sin, and the fall of man, problems of a profoundly metaphysical nature. Certainly the interpretations of Moby Dick by both Percival and Auden are testimony to this fact.

It has been pointed out that Melville, in spiritual temper, was not unlike the contemporary group in England of doubtful intellectuals who were struggling to reconcile questions of faith with the encroachments

35. For a recent discussion of religion and the intellectuals, see the symposium conducted by the Partisan Review in its four issues of 1950. This symposium has been printed in book form by the magazine, entitled Religion and the Intellectuals, New York, 1950.
36. Cf. Chapter IV.
of nineteenth century science and naturalism. A comparative study in the philosophical and religious ideas of Melville with such eminent British literary figures as Arnold and Clough should prove exceedingly illuminating. No such comprehensive study has been done. It was Melville, perhaps more than any other nineteenth century writer in America, who both expressed and exemplified the antipathy of his age to his art - that antipathy of which Arnold was so conscious. It was Melville, also, who struggled, in the same fashion as his British contemporaries, to find a metaphysical foundation for the multitudinous conflicts and contradictions which man encounters in this life, or as Gabriel has put it, who tried to plumb the "mystery."

Such a study would have to point out the differences as well as the similarities, and one of the more obvious differences would be the fact that Melville was not a Christian in the sense that his British contemporaries were. It is, perhaps, this fact which gives Melville more appeal to modern philosophical criticism than any of the British figures. For Clough and Arnold attempted to find answers in institutionalized Christianity for their dilemmas of faith; Melville was a vehement critic of institutionalized Christianity. He had read enough about and was familiar with other religions than Christianity to give him a perspective by which to discern both its deficiencies and merits.

38. Melville was interested in and familiar with Arnold, many of whose books he owned and heavily annotated. For discussion of these annotations, see Matthiessen, op. cit.
39. Pommer, "Melville as a Critic of Christianity."
40. For discussion of Melville's readings, see Braswell, Melville's Religious Thought, pp. 9-18.
This philosophical and religious pre-occupation of Melville's gives him a strong kinship with the modern critic and intellectual. It is interesting to note, for example, that both Percival and Auden see in Melville a description of Kierkegaardian despair. For Kierkegaard, as a philosopher has only recently come into his own. In him, modern existentialism has found a source.

Philosophical criticism of Melville points out another elementary but often ignored fact - that Melville is a writer with ideas. In recent years, when the tendency of criticism, particularly the New Criticism, has been to emphasize form to the detriment of content, Melville has lent himself both to that emphasis and to that which that emphasis tends to ignore. He illustrates well the conclusion of Trilling concerning the dialectic of form and content - "The form of the drama is its idea, and its idea is its form."41

41. Lionel Trilling, "The Meaning of a Literary Idea," The Liberal Imagination, New York, 1950. This essay is an excellent refutation of the Wellek and Warren contention that ideas are extrinsic to a work of literature, pp. 281-303.
CHAPTER VII

Melville and the New Criticism

In its brief history, the New Criticism has already ramified into many New Criticisms and has developed a sizeable bibliographical scholarship of its own. The principles of the New Critics have never been too clearly defined, although a number of men who consider themselves New Critics, or who have been so considered by others — with both opprobrium and praise — have frequently endeavored at least to delimit and classify their aims. Most of them, however, would seem to agree that the chief aims of the New Criticism are (1) to center attention via what amounts to intense explication on the literary work itself, (2) to evolve criteria that make possible aesthetic judgments about the literary work considered in and of — purely — as art. The movement, if such general aims, variously achieved as these, can make it such, includes such eminent critics as John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, Robert Penn Warren, Cleanth Brooks, and R. P. Blackmur, who, at least, are in comparative accord concerning critical principles. Others, however, who share their views but differ somewhat in interpretation and method are Kenneth Burke,

Yvor Winters, Richard Chase, and Philip Rahv.

Although the term "New Criticism" is generally attributed to Ransom, it was used as early as 1910 by Professor J. E. Spingarn in a paper delivered as a lecture at Columbia University. Spingarn was widely recognized as a scholar of the seventeenth century and comparative literature, but this essay of his has been much neglected, almost forgotten. In it, he called for much that has since become endemic to the New Criticism. There is a great deal, of course, which is antithetical to the New Criticism; for example, Spingarn would do away with, among other things, "the theory of style, with metaphor, simile, and all the paraphernalia of Graeco-Roman rhetoric." But, nevertheless, like the New Critics, he would focus interest in the work of art of and in itself. In Spingarn himself, however, the specific method of treating the work of art is not clear. His chief weakness is his lack of definition. He is general and vague in explaining how to achieve the aims he advocates; and this, perhaps, is due to the fact that he was himself still primarily influenced by European critics of the impressionist school. It was this influence, indeed, and particularly its manifestation in the aesthetic doctrines of Croce, which made it possible for Spingarn to stress the importance of focussing on the work of art itself. The New


3. This paper, according to Spingarn, was first delivered as a public lecture at Columbia University in March, 1910, and was published as a separate pamphlet in 1911 in the Columbia University Lectures on Literature. It was then included in Spingarn's Creative Criticism, New York, 1917, new and enlarged edition, 1931.
Criticism - we should anticipate this point - has managed to avoid this type of impressionism by introducing highly formalistic techniques into its critical method.

To illustrate Spingarn's vagueness, here are some of the questions which he demands that the critic answer - without, it must be noticed, any specific explanation of how they are to be answered:

What has the poet tried to do, and how has he fulfilled his intention? What is he striving to express and how has he expressed it? What vital and essential spirit animates his work, what central impression does it leave on the receptive mind, and how can I best express this impression? Is his work true to the laws of its own being rather than to laws formulated by others?..... Only one caveat must be borne in mind when attempting to answer them: the poet's aim must be judged at the moment of the creative act, that is to say, by the art of the poem itself, and not by the vague ambitions which he imagines to be his real intentions before or after the creative act is achieved... all questions in regard to his achievement are merely different ways of asking, different ways of helping to answer, the one supreme question: Has he or has he not created a work of art?4

Spingarn's implicit injunction that attention be given to the intrinsic merits of a work of literature was not exactly new; indeed, he himself must have derived it from his study of comparative literature. It had been expressed quite explicitly by earlier critics, particularly in France,5 and had had an effect on English criticism. In America,

5. In France, followers of the principles of pure aesthetics have always contended that the proper object of the study of literature is the actual works, not things that lie outside or behind them. "C'est pour elle-meme que vaut une oeuvre litteraire, non par la realite dont elle est signicative," Rene Doumic, Hommes et Idees du XIXe Siecle (Paris, 1903) p. 153. "Onne voit pas tres bien comment la connaissance de l'homme est necessaire pour juger l'oeuvre, pour en appreder le merite intrinsèque," G. Pellissier, Le XIXe Siecle par les Textes (Paris, n.d. p. 395).
however, the approach to literature has primarily been that of the literary historian, and a close study of the artistic qualities of the work itself has been neglected, or taken as something which is too obvious to require study; in the universities, for example, the literary historian has been entrenched and paramount. Those literary critics who were not concerned with literary history, did not bother to define or limit their aims and practices, and the result was that in the nineteenth century and the early part of this century, they gave more attention to their own impressions and idiosyncrasies of taste than to the work which called them forth. Even the successful development of psychological and sociological interpretations of literature tended to deflect attention from the work itself to author-audience associations. Although their divergences are numerous, Spingarn and the New Critics have in common this principle of devotion to the work of art itself.

The direct origins of the New Criticism are to be found outside the universities in which it has now become almost institutionalized. It has some French origins: La Forgue and Corbiere, the critical doctrines of Mallarme and the Symbolist movement. It has English origins in Coleridge, in T. E. Hulme, T. S. Eliot, I. A. Richards, and F. R. Leavis. And it has some American origins: in the Imagist movement,

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6. Cf. Chapter III, for a discussion of this subject.
7. Edmund Wilson's *Axel's Castle* (New York, 1931) is generally considered the best treatment of the Symbolist movement. See also, however, William Van O'Connor, *Sense and Sensibility in Modern Poetry*, Chicago, 1948, Chap. V.
8. See, for example, the Johns Hopkins University Lectures in Criticism ("Bollingen Series," No. XVI, Pantheon, 1949).
itself derived in essence from a fusion of French and English influences, and in the Southern Agrarian movement, many of the participants of which are New Critics. One might mention, also, that in America the New Criticism has been closely allied with the practice of poetry, for many of the New Critics are themselves poets—i.e., Ransom, Tate, Warren, Winters—so that in America there is this close relationship between the roles of poet and critic. This duality of practice has enabled the New Critics in America all the more firmly to embody in poetry and simultaneously to entrench in criticism their respective theories.

Much of this development occurred outside the university, and the New Criticism has been, in a confused fashion, anti-academic. In recent years, however, many academicians have espoused the principles of New Criticism, frequently in rebellion against the general conservatism which still exists in the universities, and the universities themselves have become thus divided in their attitudes toward literature. It is a rare university today which does not have in its Department of English some men who are immutably committed to the traditional values of literary history, and others who consider themselves exponents of the New Criticism.

The New Criticism, however, despite the fact that it is officially opposed to the academic and that it maintains the prejudiced view that

the academic interest in literature is solely historical or biographical, has its own academic aspects and has made its own attempts to see itself as a system. Such an attempt is there from the beginning, in, for example, the work of T. E. Hulme, who has been called "a seminal figure in the new criticism." The basis of Hulme's critical ideas is the ancient conflict between classicism and romanticism, and as early as 1913, he ventured the prediction that literature was due for a revival of classicism, presenting with his reasons socio-political corollaries.  

Hulme, a critic of insight, understood quite clearly the aesthetic and political relationships of the terms he used, classicism and romanticism. "Romanticism," he claimed, "has its roots in the idea that man, the individual, is an infinite reservoir of possibilities; and if you can so rearrange society by the destruction of oppressive order then these possibilities will have a chance and you will get Progress." The classic view is quite opposite. Man, according to the classicist, "is an extraordinarily fixed and limited animal whose nature is absolutely constant. It is only by tradition and organization that anything decent can be got out of him." Hulme also pointed out how these views are equally in opposition to religion, for the church, he said, has always taken the classical view.  

His primary purpose, however, is to show how these conflicting views operate with respect to poetry. In a general sense, they are

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12. Ibid., p. 5.
demonstrated in the poet's attitude "towards the cosmos, towards man, in so far as it gets reflected in verse." For the classical poet, "even in the most imaginative flights there is always a holding back, a reservation. The classical poet never forgets this finiteness, this limit of man." The romantic poet, however, "seems to crystallize in verse round metaphors of flight... The word infinite in every other line."
This distinction is even clearer with respect to language, for the romantic poet tends to use the abstract word.

Hulme realizes that he must embody his ideas in an aesthetic. "I must avoid," he says, "two pitfalls in discussing the idea of beauty. On the one hand, there is the old classical view which is supposed to define it as lying in conformity to certain standard fixed forms; and on the other hand there is the romantic view which drags in the infinite. I have got to find a metaphysic between these two which will enable me to hold consistently that a neo-classic verse of the type I have indicated involves no contradiction in terms. It is essential to prove that beauty may be in small, dry things." \(^{13}\)

In his effort to arrive at such a metaphysic, he establishes the aesthetic basis on which much modern poetry rests and on which much of the New Criticism relies. "The great aim," he concludes, "is accurate, precise and definite description..."

It is this emphasis on the particularity of language that has brought forth, in the new criticism, a renewed concentration on explication de texte. The influence of Hulme on the new criticism has indeed been

\(^{13}\) Ibid., p. 12.
profound; through Eliot, and through Pound, this influence has spread both in poetry and criticism so that one might say that the classical revival which he predicted has veritably been established.

Although the chief concern of the New Criticism has been with "pure" critical analysis of "pure" art, another concern has been the relationship between literature, conceived in all its "purity," and politics. The New Critics have been subject to severe attack by their more political-minded confreres on the ground that their aesthetic theories lead them ultimately into political reaction. Hulme, as we have noted, was certainly aware of the political implications of the terms classicism and romanticism. He cites the example of France, where the terms are so closely related on political and aesthetic levels that, "If you asked a man of a certain set whether he preferred the classics or romantics, you could deduce from that what his politics were."14

It is quite evident, then, that Hulme in arriving at a metaphysic which would enable him to cling to his preference for a neo-classic verse must have been confronted with the political aspect of his dilemma. In Hulme, the political resolution is never quite attained, but both Eliot and Pound seem to have arrived at political positions which have called forth the abuse of critics who uphold more liberal political views; Eliot by his admitted inclinations toward royalism and Anglo-Catholicism, and Pound by his Fascistic activities during the recent war.

Indeed, Pound was the chief figure in a controversy which clearly illustrates the conflict between the liberal critic and the aesthetic

14. Ibid., p. 3.
critic. This controversy ensued when Pound was recipient of the Bollingen Prize for poetry in 1948.\textsuperscript{15} The issue revolved around the ancient question of how much the poet or artist is socially and politically responsible in the work he produces; or to what extent the social, political, and moral ideas of a work of art can be ignored in considering its aesthetic qualities. Ultimately, this question has its roots in the still more ancient one concerning the problem of the relationship between form and content in a work of art. Ezra Pound provided an excellent example of this increasingly common, yet exceedingly difficult problem; for, although he is generally considered to be an influential and important poet, his work and his activities during the late war have been diametrically opposed to the basic concepts of social and political liberalism as they have developed in this country. The \textit{Saturday Review of Literature}, in two articles by Robert Hillyer and a subsequent editorial,\textsuperscript{16} representing the latter point of view, vehemently attacked the presentation of the award to Pound. \textit{Poetry}, in a brochure which attempted to clarify the issue, attacked the attacker. The furor in literary circles, which was provoked by the award, the articles, and other publicity, has subsided, but the problem still remains. And it is a


problem, one might add, which is well nigh insoluble, for its roots, in the form and content dialectic, sink deep in metaphysics.

In these times, when political issues especially have become vitally significant, it is not a problem that could remain dormant for long, and the most recent attack on the New Criticism from a political point of view was launched by Robert Gorham Davis in an article in *The American Scholar*. Davis, focusing his attention almost exclusively on the political aspects of the New Criticism, traces the reactionary qualities ascribed to it to the doctrines of Du Maistre; his ultimate conclusion is, that on a level of political ideology, the New Criticism is antithetical in principle to the tradition of democratic liberalism in America. He excoriates the New Critics for the socio-political conclusions to which, he alleges, their aesthetic affirmations lead.

At a subsequent forum, at which the discussion was stenographically recorded, Davis is taken to account for his attack by Allen Tate, Malcolm Cowley, William Barrett, and Kenneth Burke. The discussion of the participants in this forum, published in *The American Scholar*, is illuminating in what it has to say about aesthetics as well as politics. The participants attempt once more to achieve a definition of the term "New Criticism." Mr. Cowley points out that even the *explication de texte* which is the basis of the New Critical methodology is not exactly new, explaining that he had experienced its use as early as 1923 at the University of Montpelier. Mr. Tate expresses the idea that

perhaps *explication de texte* is the only common characteristic of the New Critics, for, with respect to much other aesthetic doctrine, they are in wide disagreement; he concludes that there is, perhaps, no such delineative approach to literature as "New Criticism," but that there are merely "new critics."

The fact is that Mr. Tate's conclusion is quite true - that there is no "New Criticism" per se, but that there are simply "new critics." Eliot (in his earlier work), Empson, Blackmur, Warren, Brooks, and Ransom may be in agreement about some of their critical standards; but Ransom's theory, for example, of the ontological nature of poetry\(^\text{19}\) is not shared or evident in the work of these other critics. And in *The Anatomy of Nonsense*, Yvor Winters takes exception not only to Ransom's theory, but also to much of the theory and practice of their contemporaries.\(^\text{20}\) Blackmur, in turn, attempts to analyze the root of what he takes to be Winters' critical failures.\(^\text{21}\) It becomes evident, therefore, in reading the New Critics, that each is attempting, within the limitations of the work of art itself, the text, to establish a body of criteria of his own, to develop techniques which will enable the reader to explore the complexity of a work of art and to attempt valuations of its worth. It is from this endeavor that many of them have originated.

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the terms with which they are respectively associated: Brooks and his "language of paradox," Tate and "tension," Empson and "ambiguity," Ransom and "texture and structure," Burke and "symbolic action."

In addition to the efforts to define the "new criticism," attempts have been made to collect material which the New Critics have published and to discuss the movement in the light of its cultural and historical background. Two important anthologies of criticism have been published, Stallman's *Critiques and Essays in Criticism, 1920-1948*, and Zabel's *Literary Opinion in America*, both of which contain illuminating articles on the New Criticism by their editors. William Van O'Connor's *Sense and Sensibility in Modern Poetry*, in its discussion of modern poetry, becomes indirectly a discussion of modern criticism. Walter J. Ong, in an article in *Twentieth Century English*, tackles the New Criticism from a metaphysical and semantic point of view. A less recent and more cursory analysis of modern criticism is contained in Fred Millett's *Contemporary American Authors*. Already, perhaps too soon, the New Criticism is being analyzed from various points of view.

The two anthologies present an interesting contrast. Stallman's work, beginning as it does with 1920, deals almost exclusively with the New Criticism. So narrowly does it present the principal practitioners of the movement that it cannot be said to be truly representative of modern criticism as a whole; it omits, for example, such eminent critics as Lionel Trilling, F. O. Matthiessen, Alfred Kazin and other important

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but less significant men. In its selections and emphases, it suspiciously does much to foster the idea that the New Criticism is a cult or "literary guild," and that the New Criticism is the exclusive agent of important literary opinion in America in the twentieth century. Zabel's collection is certainly wider and more liberal in scope. Zabel's introduction, for example, tries to trace the roots of modern criticism in the last century; it has a historical perspective which Stallman's volume seriously lacks. Nor are there serious omissions; indeed, Zabel tries to be so encompassing that one might question some of his inclusions - the critical essays, for example, of those people who have gained their reputations in other quarters, Katherine Anne Porter, Louise Bogan, and Horace Gregory, to mention three. Zabel's introduction, however, is exceedingly valuable; not only does it attempt to analyze the scope of modern criticism, but it discusses, fairly and cogently, the merits and deficiencies of almost all the important twentieth century critics, and it suggests, much more than Stallman's work, that modern criticism is a complex of many conflicting elements and influences.

Whereas Zabel's discussion is historical and evaluative, Stallman's endeavors to use a socio-philosophic frame of reference for his analysis. He resembles O'Connor in this propensity, and both are explicitly indebted to Eliot. They both accept Eliot's description of the metaphysical poets, "dissociation of sensibility," as a basis for their respective discussions; O'Connor in his analysis of modern poetry, and Stallman in his article on the New Criticism. O'Connor only briefly touches upon the problem of the poet-critic, for his volume centers primarily on the body of modern poetry. His thesis is, however, that "the
poet cannot function as a poet until he sees with some clarity his role in a society that has lost its supernatural sanctions for values and has tended to exclude the artist." Stallman, sharing the thesis, gives more elaboration to it, showing the variations of the theme: "the loss of tradition," "the loss of a fixed convention...or conventional structure of language," "the loss of belief" and "the loss of a world order." Perhaps the most valid variation in Stallman's analysis is that which deals with the "loss of a fixed convention" in language; for it is most relevant to literature and criticism. His other variations are too broad and general in tenor to achieve relevance. The loss of belief in religion and myth, and the loss of a world order are socio-philosophic phenomena and cannot be attributed exclusively to either the New Criticism or literature.

Ong attempts "to answer some of the questions concerning the new criticism which the metaphysician might raise." He begins by maintaining that the all-pervading general influence of Descartes has prevailed to such an extent in criticism and poetry that the "ultimate referent of meaning is the idea, not being." This assumption anticipates one of his conclusions - that the new criticism rejects idea in poetry to explore the "total meaning" of a poem, not its logical increment, but the matter of its artistic imagination in terms of metaphor and ambiguity. It is the precept expressed in MacLeish's statement that:

A poem should not mean
But be.

Before Ong tries to show that the New Criticism originates out of such an aesthetic assumption, he analyzes the semantic relation between words and matter. In a section of his article entitled "The Role of Matter in the Concept," he points out, for example, that abstractions of language "cannot be preserved and packaged, but are known and used only as they are being drawn in some way or other out of matter." He tries to show that the Cartesian-Kantian dualism of mind and matter has "obscured the fact that concepts and judgments cannot be prepared in one mind and handed like tokens to another," that in their movement from intellect to intellect they must pass through matter en route. In this respect, he cites the importance of context, the complexity which context bestows on the meanings of words, and the process of abstracting meaning from them. The sounds themselves of words, he argues, enter into the determinant of meaning, and the "very abstract meanings of words have their own way of entering into relationships with material existents through their connection with the person uttering them." This semantic analysis is evidence for his conclusion that the Cartesian logic does not suffice for poetry, that poetry has a logic of its own because "concepts exhibit these various connections with matter in intimate and complex ways."

One attributes much of the heuristic development of the new criticism to I. A. Richards and his disciple, William Empson. For, according to Ong, it was Richards who moved from an early interest in the connection between neurology and its allied psychological sciences to a metaphysical appeal for "a closer contact with reality, either directly, through
experience of actual things, or mediately through other minds which are in closer contact." 24

The logical progression from this assumption is to the emphasis which the New Criticism places on metaphor, ambiguity, and "total meaning"; or that which involves the whole complex texture by which, together with conventional abstractions and other abstractions as well as the various sense knowledges, a poem may be analyzed. "In terms of total meaning, imagery, dramatic situations, and meter become mechanisms of organization, not ornaments but a part of the complexity out of which knowledge of a poem grows and in which its simple sense exists." 25 It is because of such poetic principles as these that the New Criticism has become interested in and gives so much importance to metaphysical poetry. For metaphysical poetry boasts of its non-logical nature and makes all the more demands on "texture" for its unity, its far-fetched metaphors and its ambiguities being, outside the poem, absurd and meaningless. 26 This rescue of metaphysical poetry, Ong attributes to Eliot, and he also holds that Eliot both in his own poetry, with its imagery, its calculated metaphors and ambiguity, its "classicism set deep within the economy of the English language," and in his criticism foreshadows

24. One might point out that this appeal parallels Hulme's contention that "beauty may be found in small, dry things."
26. Ong here expresses a common misconception of modern critics concerning metaphysical poetry. For an excellent scholarly and critical treatment of the whole subject of metaphysical poetry, including the poetic behind it, the differences in viewing it between the modern critic and the Renaissance man himself, see Rosamund Tuve's Elizabethan and Metaphysical Imagery, Chicago, 1947; also pertinent is Leonard Unger's recent Donne's Poetry and Modern Criticism, Chicago, 1950.
the doctrine of total meaning with which the New Criticism is so much concerned today.

In his summing up, Ong declares that the New Criticism has set itself the task of investigating only poetic procedures.

He concludes:

...If it the new criticism has been grossly empirical at times, we must remember that poetry's concern with the material side of being, justifies some laboratory methods, and we should recall that service has been done in equipping the critic with pieces of vocabulary which encourage him to elucidate a poem rather than to try his hand at kicking up in his readers only emotional effects of dubious relevance. Those who are familiar with that criticism which preceded in this latter fashion should welcome something new.

The new criticism deserves considerable attention and respect in philosophical circles...It is a child of its age in rebelling against the world of Descartes and to a lesser extent against the world of Kant....Moreover, the leaders of the new criticism have not only moved toward positions where real philosophy becomes possible; they have done service in helping to correct a literary tradition which in its assumptions perpetuated an impossible substitute for philosophy. ....And perhaps, then, we will not be considered devotees of - the ephemeral progress ourselves if we see in the study of the mingling of material with the abstract in poetry a way which some will follow to rescue human knowledge from the waste land of the Cartesian dichotomy and the Kantian aesthetic.27

The New Criticism is, therefore, at the midpoint of the twentieth century, only one of several fairly distinct lines of critical activity. Its chief distinction and the principal contribution it has made to the other lines of critical inquiry is its continuous emphasis on the importance of concentration on and explication of text. This emphasis has, for example, shaped and strengthened the direction of critical investigation which seeks to examine the social and cultural bases of literature, that direction which is the continuum of the critical realism

27. Ong, op. cit., p. 368 ff.
which began in the early part of the century and developed through the
economic and political controversies of the thirties. Such critics as
Trilling, Matthiessen, Edmund Wilson in his later work, Rahv, and Kazin
have undoubtedly felt the influence of the New Criticism in their ex-
ploration of this line of critical activity; for, in addition to the
fact that these critics have taken up the New Critical principle of
exegesis, they have also been forced, in the light of the social and
political implications of the New Criticism, to re-examine their own
social and political beliefs and reformulate them into more liberal
molds.

Those critics who are attempting to make viable in literary study
the discoveries in related fields of inquiry - psychology, semantics,
anthropology - with their disclosure of the ethnic, mythic, and ritual-
istic elements that operate in art have also felt the impact of the New
Criticism. Among such critics are Burke, Auden, Hyman, Wilson, and
Chase. In addition, the New Criticism has led certain critics to re-
cover from classical doctrine, from Aristotle in particular, and from
formal philosophically aesthetic basis; R. S. Crane and his Chicago
colleagues are representative of this aspect of recent criticism.
Finally, one cannot omit the significant influence of the New Criticism
on the universities and the practical business of the teaching of liter-
ature; the close textual analyses of styles and poetic forms, the text-
books of Brooks and Warren, the programs of Ransom and his disciples,
of Crane and his group, all of the activities which have brought criti-
cism more actively into the American colleges.

Since the New Criticism is still very much with us, any conclusions
concerning it must, of necessity, be tentative. A few generalizations, however, might be made. Certainly its origin and development have sociological roots, and one might say that as a literary movement, the New Criticism is symptomatic of certain tendencies in our world today. Its tendency, for example, toward political and religious conservatism parallels certain general tendencies toward the same conservatism in our times - the political trends toward the right, and the religious inclinations toward Catholicism. It is also indicative, as a movement, of the tendency on the part of intellectuals and scholars to break away from the traditional impositions of the method of literary history.

These tendencies, however, cannot be attributed solely to the New Criticism; they are simply tributaries in the mainstream of American criticism as it has developed in this century. And since the New Criticism has not yet been accurately defined, and it has ramified into many lines of inquiry, perhaps the only valid conclusion one can make at this time is Tate's that there is no such literary guild as the New Criticism, that there are simply "new critics." And this conclusion makes us realize to what extent the business of criticism has been revitalized in our time, to what extent it has assumed responsibilities, not only to morality, to science, to philosophy, to society, but to its first and primary duty, its contact with a living and active literature and with the forces in experience and the human personality which make such a literature possible. 28

R. P. Blackmur is one of the few New Critics to devote attention to Melville. In a comparatively lengthy article, entitled "The Craft of Herman Melville," he presents a close and cogent analysis of Melville's style, weighing not only its assets but also its deficiencies. Beginning with the acknowledgment of Melville's "assured position - whatever that is - in American literature - whatever that may be," he goes on to point out the curious fact that "Melville never influenced the art of fiction ... and it is astonishing, when you consider the magnitude of his sensibility, that he never affected the modes of apprehension, the sensibilities of even the ablest of his admirers. He added nothing to the novel as a form, and his work nowhere showed the conspicuous mastery of the formal devices of fiction which he used."

Blackmur attributes Melville's lack of influence at least partly to a series of technical defects in craft - "from an inefficient relation between the writer and the formal elements of his medium." It becomes his purpose in the article "to adumbrate" this criticism.

It is Blackmur's contention that Melville's work was not meant to be fiction, that "Melville was only a story teller betimes, for illustrative or apologetic or evangelical purposes, and when the writing of Pierre proved that the material of illustration had been exhausted in Moby Dick,... there was no longer any need to tell a story." It is this misdirection of talent, Blackmur implies, which accounts for Melville's forty years of silence as a writer, for both Moby Dick and Pierre, "if

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they were not written out of the means of the novelist, were written out of great means of some other mode or modes of the imagination."

There is an operative connection, he claims, between Melville's lack of influence upon the writers following him and his forty years of comparative silence, a connection, "as moral as may be, that can best be seen as a technical consideration."

Blackmur's effort here is illustrative of the effort of the new criticism, to concentrate on a text, and to locate literary success or failure in form and technique. Blackmur analyzes in broad fashion Melville's refusal or inability "to resort to the available conventions of his time as if they were real; he either preferred or was compelled to resort to most of the conventions he used for dramatic purposes, not only as if they were unreal, but also as if they were artificial."31 Blackmur simply means that Melville sacrificed the dramatic conventions of the novelist for the expository conventions of the essayist. He refused to work on the dramatic level. "What he did was to work on the putative level. His work constantly said what it was doing or going to do, and then, as a rule, stopped short." The reservation to this criticism, however, is that "Melville's is not a putative smallness, but a putative immensity, and he puts it with such eloquence that the mere statement produces a lasting tone in the atmosphere."32

Blackmur endeavors to explain further:

31. Ibid., p. 144.
32. Ibid., p. 146.
Melville, as we have said, preferred the non-dramatic role. To put it sharply, he did not write of characters in action; he employed the shells of stock characters, heightened or resounding only by the eloquence of the author's voice, to witness, illustrate, decorate, and often as it happened to impede and stultify an idea in motion. This is, if you like, the mode of allegory - the highest form of the putative imagination, in which things are said but need not be shown to be other than they seem, and thus hardly require to be much of anything. But successful allegory ... requires the preliminary possession of a complete and stable body of belief appropriate to the theme in hand. Melville was not so equipped...That is why Melville's allegorical devices and patterns had to act as if they were agents in a novel; and that is why we are compelled to judge Melville at his most allegorical yet formally as a novelist.\(^33\)

Blackmur then dwells on the allegorical aspects of Moby Dick. Melville, he writes concerning this book, "certainly had allegorical intentions. My argument - again it is technical - is that the elaboration of these intentions was among the causes that prevented him from the achievement of enacting composition and the creation of viable characters. He mistook allegory in Moby Dick as a sufficient enlivening agent for the form of the novel."

Melville's allegory in Moby Dick broke down again and again and with each resumption got more and more verbal, and more and more at the mercy of the encroaching event it was meant to transcend. It was an element in the putative mode in which, lofty as it was, Melville himself could not long deeply believe.\(^34\)

Next, Blackmur examines Melville's practice in dramatic form and his treatment of language itself as a medium. There is a brief explanation of dramatic form of a novel, "what holds it together, makes it move, gives it centre and establishes a direction"; and this form, Blackmur tells us, cannot be isolated from other elements - language,

\(^33\) Ibid., p. 143.
\(^34\) Ibid., p. 149.
the medium itself, and control. Then comes the question—quite crucial to this essay: How did Melville go about controlling his two novels *Pierre* and *Moby Dick*?

Blackmur's examination of the two novels in the light of this question does not present a complimentary picture of Melville as a craftsman. For Melville's control, Blackmur writes, was haphazard; "his rule was vagary, where consequential necessities did not determine otherwise." He elaborates:

...he did not always see that if you took one series of steps your choice of further directions was narrowed, and that you could not step in two directions at once without the risk of crippling yourself. It was perhaps his intellectual consistency, which he felt putatively omniform, that made him incorrigibly inconsistent in the technical quarter. For example, in *Moby Dick*, after setting up a single consciousness to get inside of, he shifted from that very consciousness at will without sense of inconsistency, and therefore, which is the important thing, without making any effort to warrant the shifts and make them credible. Ignorance could not have excused him .... Not ignorance, but ineptitude and failure to discriminate.35

Melville was right, Blackmur feels, in choosing Ishmael to narrate the story, for Ishmael tells us not what he is, but what he sees and what he sees other people see. The interposition of such a character—the I-as-witness—is a prime device of composition, limiting, making more compact, and controlling what can logically be told and how. But even this device, Melville handled awkwardly, for, according to Blackmur, he failed to distinguish what Ishmael saw and what he the author saw on his own account. There is in the use of Ishmael—Melville's alter-ego—too much illegitimate digression, which is Melville's rather

35. Ibid., p. 150.
than the character's; Ishmael has too much intelligence for the story's good.  

In Pierre, without the device of narrator, there is no center of compositional gravity; whereas in Moby Dick Ishmael looks on and is able to see, in Pierre the protagonist is "in the center of his predicament and lost in the action.... Ishmael represents speech; Pierre represents rhetoric." To this difference in technique, Blackmur ascribes the differences in characterization between Ahab and Pierre. The great figure of Ahab emerges because of Melville's eloquence in the putative conception of him and in Ishmael's feeling for him. Pierre, however, never emerges with reality, except through direct intervention of the author. In addition, Melville has, in Moby Dick, the exigencies of life on a whaling ship to help him with dramatic action; whereas in Pierre there is no white whale to help carry the weight of the book.  

Blackmur explores further the significant idea of the whale as it relates to technique; and he concludes that, "All the reader has to do is to feel whaling as an interest and he will recognize it as a compositional device mounting to the force of drama." It was fortunate that Melville had the whaling material in perfect factual control, for it was material of a special and vanishing experience, dramatic enough in its own right to require very little fictionizing to exert the invaluable hold of natural interest on the average reader. It is this interest, plus Melville's eloquence, which makes Moby Dick the great novel it is. Pierre, on the other hand, lacks such special material to give

36. Ibid., p. 152.
37. Ibid., p. 154.
it compositional strength, and Melville had to depend on the actual
technique of craft to make the book hang together.

Blackmur then summarizes his comparison of the two novels:

The efforts at plot in the two books are as lame; narrative
runs as often offside. Dramatic motive on the subordinate
level is as weakly put; Starbuck's tentative rebellion
against Ahab and the threatened revenge of Glendenning Stanley
and Frederick Tartan upon Pierre are equally unconvincing.
The dialogue is as by turns limp and stiff and flowery in one
book as the other. The delineations of character are almost
interchangeable examples of wooden caricature. And so on.
More important, the force and nobility of conception, the
profundity of theme, were as great in either book - not from
the dramatic execution but in spite of it, in the simple
strength of the putative statement, and in the digressions
Melville made from the drama in front of him, which he could
not manage, into apalogues or sermons, which he superbly
could.38

Next, Blackmur discusses the language of the novels. And for
Blackmur, language is a vital element. "Words, and their intimate ar-
rangements," he writes, "must be the ultimate as well as the immediate
source of every effect in the written or spoken arts." "Words bring
meaning to birth and themselves contained the meaning as an immanent
possibility before the pangs of junction." Words, then, according to
Blackmur, are a unique means of expressing reality, and the reality
which the artist labors desperately or luckily to put into words, he
has actually found there, deeply ready and immately formed to give ob-
jective being and specific idiom to what he knew and what he did not
know that he knew. "Yet the adventure into the reality of words," he
adds, "has a technique after the fact in the sense that we can dis-
tinguish its successful versions from those that failed, can measure

38. Ibid., p. 157.
provisionally the kinds and intensities of reality secured and attempted, and can even roughly guess at the conditions of convention and belief necessary for its emergence."

Melville, Blackmur tells us, used words greatly. But there are marked differences in his use of them in the two novels, *Pierre* and *Moby Dick*. In *Moby Dick* Melville gives evidence of "great style," he uses words with an exactitude that lacks neither imagination nor emotion, but restrains them through close description. In *Pierre*, on the other hand, there is an assertion of an emotional relation to the objects and scenes described which loses itself in words rather than discovers its meaning in them. In this "flatulence of words" in *Pierre*, Melville, according to Blackmur, was adopting the gothic conventions of language, "with all its archaisms and rhetorical inflations." 39

This analysis of Melville's language is inevitable for one so insistently a New Critic as Blackmur. He must come finally to consider the words whose nature it is to make literature. Blackmur's evaluation of the two novels, his preference for the language of *Moby Dick* over that of *Pierre*, is based on the criterion, paramount in the New Criticism, that words must be disciplined and exact. In his preference, we see that Blackmur is adhering to Hulme's dictum that "there is beauty in hard, dry things," and that the language of the good poem is a language of definite description. The passages which Blackmur praises in *Moby Dick* fulfill this requirement; they contain, one might say, the language of classicism. Of course, as Blackmur points out, it is

Ishmael who helps Melville control that novel, for it is Ishmael who is, in a sense, Melville's putative agent. The passages in *Pierre* which Blackmur deplores and which he traces to the gothic conventions are, because of their emotional effluvia, romantic in effect. In this novel, Melville has no putative agent. For it is Pierre's story about himself, he is in the center of his predicament, "lost in the action." Thus, the two novels differ exceedingly in their respective use of language.

In his summarizing paragraphs, Blackmur tries to arrive at the essence of Melville's genius.

"...Besides, what is most and finally illuminating, when Melville really had something to say, and was not making a novel, he resorted to another mode, which was perhaps the major expressive mode of his day, the mode of the liberal Emersonian sermon, the moral apologue on the broad Christian basis. There Melville's natural aptitude lay; when he preaches he is released, and only then, of all weak specifications. That the sermon was to say the best of it an artificial mode in fiction mattered nothing, and emphasizes the fact that Melville was only a novelist betimes.

He made only the loosest efforts to tie his sermons into his novels, and was quite content if he could see that his novels illustrated his sermons and was reasonably content if they did not; or so the books would show. He preached without scruple, and with full authority, because he felt in full command of the mode he used: he believed in its convention of structure and its deeper convention of its relation to society with all his heart. Father Mapple's sermon on Jonah and Plotinus Plinlimmon's lecture — it is really a sermon — on Chronometricals and Horologicals are the two sustained examples of the self-complete form in his work. The doctrine might not have appealed to Channing or Parker, but the form, the execution, the litheness and vigour and verve, the homely aptness, the startling comparisons, the lucidity of presentation of hard insights, the dramatic and pictorial quality of the illustrations, and
above all the richness of impact and the weighted speed of words, would have appealed as near perfection.\textsuperscript{40}

There had been previous discussions of Melville's style, but Blackmur's article is the first major effort to analyze it closely. Completely minimizing the biographical, the psychological, the sociological, the philosophical implications of Melville's work, Blackmur brilliantly tackles the structure on which all these effects are bound - Melville's craftsmanship. It must be said that the method of the New Criticism is certainly more applicable to poetry than to fiction. Blackmur is attempting to apply the method to the novel - two novels which are certainly neither brief nor limited.\textsuperscript{41} Considering the task he has set himself and the fact that it necessitates a high level of generalization, one must concede that he is eminently successful. This piece alone would be solid justification for Blackmur's reputation as one of the best of the New Critics. Although one might add that there are aspects of Melville which Blackmur, perhaps, cannot comprehend - Melville's ability, for example, to transform his sources, which is also an essential part of his art; or Melville's conscious use of

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., p. 164. E. M. Forster also describes Melville as a preacher. "It is no wonder," he writes, that D. H. Lawrence should have written two penetrating studies on Melville, for Lawrence himself is, as far as I know, the only prophetic novelist writing today...He invites criticism because he is a preacher also - it is this minor aspect of him which makes him so difficult and misleading - an excessively clever preacher who knows how to play on the nerves of his congregation." Aspects of the Novel, New York, 1927, p. 203.

\textsuperscript{41} Blackmur has suggested that the New Critics take a second look at the novel, which needs the same kind of attention as (in the past twenty years) has been given to poetry "for it is only of the mechanical technique at one end and of the 'moralistic' technique at the other end that we have any mastery available for use." "For a Second Look," Kenyon Review, XI (Winter, 1949).
symbolism - Blackmur's content is provocative, illustrating a keen and perceptive insight.

Like his co-critic Blackmur, Yvor Winters also is chiefly concerned with the intrinsic, objective elements of a work of art, and although in many other respects he is in sharp disagreement with Blackmur and fellow New Critics, in this respect there is accord. One might, therefore, include him in the catalogue of New Critics. Another point in common between him and the others is that he, too, is a practicing poet and has published numerous volumes of verse.

Winters' chief deviation from the rest of the New Critics is that for him the end of language and art is morality. "According to my view," he writes in *The Anatomy of Nonsense*, "the artistic process is one of moral evaluation of human experience, by means of a technique which renders possible an evaluation more precise than any other." The difficulty with this exalted concept of the artist is that criticism, for Winters, becomes then the complicated double judgment of evaluating the poet's evaluation of his experience and evaluating the critic's (or his own) experience of the poem. Since Winters' moral criteria are never made quite clear and he persists in his propensity for evaluation, the tone of his writing is, to say the least, pontifical and frequently dogmatic. In addition, some of his judgments have made him the butt of scorn and ridicule by his fellow critics.42

Winters' analysis of Melville and his work, entitled "Herman

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42. For example Winters' opinions on Edith Wharton, Adelaide Crapsey, etc.
Melville and the Problems of Moral Navigation," is a part of his volume of critical studies of American literature, Maule's Curse.43 The "curse" of the title is the prophecy in Hawthorne's The House of Seven Gables: "God will give him blood to drink!" predicted for Colonel Pyncheon by the man he had wronged. It is Winters' thesis that the great American writers, from Cooper to James, suffered figuratively from this curse, that, in a sense, they were cut off from their true literary heritage and thus drank blood - their own. Actually the book is a series of critical essays on nineteenth century American writers, or, as it is subtitled, Seven Studies in the History of American Obscurantism. Each study, devoted to a different writer, discusses his abilities, analyzes examples of his work with specific evaluations and extensive quotation, and finally, summarizes the value of his work and ideas.

Although in his study of Melville, Winters touches upon all the important prose works, he devotes most of his attention to Moby Dick, which he considers Melville's "greatest work...the most complete statement of his subject." Without preliminary, he plunges into a discussion of the symbolism of the novel. "The symbolism of Moby Dick," he begins, "is based on the antithesis of the sea and the land: the land represents the known, the mastered, in human experience; the sea, the half-known, the obscure region of instinct, uncritical feeling, danger, and terror."44

43. Yvor Winters, Maule's Curse: Seven Studies in the History of American Obscurantism, Norfolk, Conn., 1938. This has also been included in the collection of Winter's major works, In Defense of Reason.
Winters proceeds to show how this basic symbolism pervades the book and how the various other elements in the book are drawn into a harmonious relationship with it. For him, the book elucidates the position of man between the sea and the land, between the known and the half-known. Man, in a sense, is a creature who moves between these polarities, confronted eternally in his movement with the problem of judgment. "He cannot merely stay on land, or he will perish of imperception, but must venture on the sea, without losing his relationship to the land; we have, in brief, the relationship of principle to perception, or, in other words, the problem of judgment." It is Bulkington, the helmsman, who takes on symbolic significance in this relationship, for he is the one who guides the ship in reference to the land, and Bulkington's responsibility represents the process of living by judgment; "that is by the perception of individual, shifting, and chaotic phenomena, but by perception trained in principle, in abstraction, to the point where it is able to find its way amid the chaos of the particular."

With this basic symbolism established and his interpretation of it presented in philosophical terms, Winters fits in the details of the book accordingly. The whale, for example, contains two major symbolisms: death and evil, two of the major elements of the sea, the unknown. The savage harpooners, Queequeg, Daggoo, and Tashtego, represent the pagan virtues of strength and accuracy, both muscular and instinctive, and of absolute fidelity, but below the level of reason, so that they are

governed unquestioningly by the damned Ahab to do his bidding. The mates represent various levels of normal human attitudes toward physical and spiritual danger, Starbuck, the first mate, representing the highest, that of critical intelligence. Ahab's ivory leg represents "the death that has become part of the living man as a result of his struggle with evil"; and Fedallah, the Parsee, "may be some kind of emanation from Ahab himself, is perhaps the sinning mind as it shows itself distinct from the whole man."

The plot of the book, according to Winters, is chiefly concerned with Ahab, whose sin is in a minor sense monomaniac vengeance, in a major sense the will to destroy the spirit of evil itself, a blasphemous intention because it is beyond human powers, infringing on the powers of God. The spirit of evil, of course, is the whale, developed as a careful and elaborate symbol. Ahab's intense desire for revenge, Winters tells us, is a sin, and he adds that "in Ahab's case the sin is heightened by the conviction that a power greater and more malignant than any proper to mere animal nature is acting in or through the whale; he is convinced of the true existence of the 'demonism of the world.' He thus endeavors to step outside the limitations of man and revenge himself upon the permanent order of the universe." Winters cites the chapter on the whiteness of the whale, "one of the most appalling specimens of metaphysical argument in all literature," as the elucidation and defense of the demonism of the whale as well as the demonism of the world.

Winters sums up his interpretation as follows:
Through elaborate and magnificent physical description we are made to realize the tremendousness of the whale and of his medium; through exposition of this nature, we are shown his spiritual significance. It is not that one object stands for another, as a bare allegorical formula; the relationship is more fully and subtly developed in the book than one can develop it in summary. The possibility that the physical and the spiritual are one and the same, according to the terms employed, is established; and one is convinced, with Ahab, for the time being, of the probability in this instance. Or if one is not, one is brought to an understanding of Ahab's conviction; so that his entire course of action becomes in its spiritual effect, what it was for him in literal fact, a defiance of divine order.46

Finally, Winters classifies Moby Dick as less a novel than an epic poem. His remark, "The plot is too immediately interpenetrated with idea to lend itself easily to the manner of novelists," indicates an implicit agreement with Blackmur's contention that the novel was not Melville's real forte. Whereas Blackmur sees the influence of gothic conventions upon Melville's language, Winters claims that it "is closer to the poetry of Paradise Lost or of Hamlet. "On the whole," he writes, "we may fairly regard the work as essentially a poetic performance." He qualifies his classification, however, in that if we consider Moby Dick as an epic, we must realize that Melville was writing a tragic instead of a traditionally heroic epic. "The book, then," he concludes, "partakes in some measure of the qualities of a novel and of a tragic drama; but essentially it is an epic poem. Form and subject are mastered with a success equal to that observable in Milton, Vergil, or Shakespeare."

In an excursive venture into a sociological relationship, Winters

46. Ibid., p. 216.
sees the book as "profoundly an American epic." "It is easy," he adds, "to exaggerate the importance of nationalism in literature, but in this particular case, the nationalism is the historical element, and not to perceive it is to fail to understand the very subject of the book. In its physical events, Moby Dick is a narration of exploration and heroic adventure; it is thus typical of the United States of the nineteenth century, by land as well as by sea." Winters closes his discussion on Moby Dick with this digression.

The remainder of Winters' essay very briefly discusses the remainder of Melville's work, his other novels and short stories. These are presented with Winters' customary propensity for evaluation. The greatest works, aside from Moby Dick, are Benito Cereno, The Encantadas, and Billy Budd; Pierre and The Confidence Man are unsuccessful, although they "do more to clarify Melville's total work than any book save Moby Dick." The other works are treated in a paragraph or two, some merely in a sentence. Typee and Omoo are "anecdotal narratives of personal adventure in the south seas." Mardi is "a long allegorical narrative." White Jacket is another "anecdotal journal," and Redburn has "similar virtues and limitations." Israel Potter "is one of the few great novels of pure adventure in English."

In the remainder of his piece, Winters devotes most of his attention to Pierre and The Confidence Man. Whereas in Moby Dick, he tells us, Melville assumed that moral judgment, though difficult, was possible, in these books Melville concludes that such judgment is impossible. Pierre has as its theme that the final truth is absolute ambiguity, and that nothing can be judged. Although the details of action in The
Confidence Man are very much different from Pierre, the theme is identical, judgment is necessary for action and man should have confidence in his judgment; since no man save a hypocrite can have such confidence, man the "doer" is simply an "actor."

In Billy Budd, Winters feels, Melville has resolved this dilemma in the character of Captain Vere. It is "to act according to established principle, which supports public order, and for the margin of difference between established principle and the facts of the particular situation, to accept it as private tragedy." Winters finds the same solution to the problem in Mrs. Wharton, as it was later posed by Henry James.

The solution, in terms as bald and absolute as the terms of Melville, was likewise the solution of Socrates. It is not every situation, of course, which admits of a solution by virtue of so certain a reference to the 'known': there may be cases, as Henry James was later to demonstrate almost to his own undoing, and as Melville asserted in Moby Dick, in which the problem of moral navigation, though not insoluble, is a subtler one, in which the exact relevance of any single principle is harder to establish, and in which there may appear to be claims of conflicting principles. The solution, however, in the case of this story, and as a matter of general principle, is at once unanswerable, dignified, and profound....

We can discern in the respective treatments of Melville by Winters and Blackmur their differences as New Critics. Blackmur's analysis is evidence for the fact that the New Criticism has frequently been called formalistic criticism. His focus is primarily on craft, on technique and language; he enters into a discussion of character only when his primary purpose leads him into it; he does not dwell in the least on Melville's philosophical ideas or on the thematic conflicts in Melville's

47. Ibid., p. 231.
work. Although Winters must be considered a New Critic because he be­
gins always with explication, he marches into the extrinsic elements of
Melville's work. Even in the matter of explication, however, Winters
parts company with the New Critics, for to him, explication is an act
of moral judgment. This treatment of Melville is representative of
Winters' method. He begins with Melville's use of symbolism and scruti-
nizes this carefully, but his scrutiny leads him into the realm of ideas,
into a discussion of moral issues. He does not dwell on or analyze
Melville's artistic treatment of his symbols, nor does he touch upon,
except cursorily, Melville's use of language. Elsewhere, with this
critic he does discuss language and relate it to symbolism.

If one were to measure Blackmur and Winters by the New Critical
method of close adherence to text, one would conclude that Blackmur, so
far as Melville is concerned, is the superior critic. He is closer in
practise to such colleagues as Ransom, Tate, Brooks and Warren. Al-
though Winters, also, in practise insists on close textual reading, his
fundamental critical position which demands a morality in poetry leads
him, of necessity, into the realm of ideas which are not to be located
in the text itself. As we have noted, Winters' concept of the poet is
that he is "actually striving to perfect a moral attitude toward that
range of experience of which he is aware." Winters admittedly defends
an absolutist theory of literature, accepting the theistic position such
a defense implies. He asserts quite frankly that his "critical and
moral notions are derived from the observation of literature and life,"
and that his theism is derived from his critical and moral notions. It is in this concept of poetic morality that Winters differs essentially from the other New Critics and for which he has been criticized by Ransom. He, in turn, endeavors to answer Ransom's criticism, pointing out that Ransom's interpretation of morality is merely that it is "an act of simple classification," or didactic. In his essay on Melville, we see that Winters is carrying out his critical dicta, and the fact that he subtitles his piece "A Problem in Moral Navigation" prepares us for his analysis.

It is, of course, this divergence, this critical insistence on the moral increment in poetry which alienates Winters from the main group of New Critics. There is for example, no mention of Winters in The Theory of Literature, which has become almost the Bible of the New Criticism, and in which almost every other prominent New Critic is mentioned. It is also this insistence which places Winters as the legitimate heir of New Humanism, for in his concept of morality in poetry, he is a descendant of Babbitt and an inheritor of Babbitt's dogmatic criteria of moral values. Unlike Babbitt, however, Winters has, in the final analysis, tried to reach art, tried to avoid apriorism; he gives every

51. Although Winters attacked the Neo-Humanist movement in his contribution to The Critique of Humanism, a symposium edited by C. Hartley Grattan, New York, 1930, his consideration of the morality of poetry places him closer to the neo-humanist position than any of the other New Critics. Blackmur's contribution to the symposium, "The Discipline of Humanism," was also a sharp attack on Babbitt and the movement.
indication, in addition to his moral sense, of a strong aesthetic sense.

Despite this important deviation in interpretation, Winters, like
Blackmur, has been considered a New Critic. He has been closely asso-
ciated with the others, with Ransom, Tate, Brooks, et al., and at one
time both he and Blackmur were assisting editors of The Hound and Horn,
one of the earlier new critical quarterlies. His heresy - if one can
call it such - is illustrative of the fact that the New Criticism will
not be able to maintain an approach to literature that is strictly aes-
thetic. Just as the aesthetic approach finds itself embroiled in socio-
political controversy, so it will find itself embroiled with philosophi-
cal - moral and ethical - ideas. Winters' defection is evidence of
this condition and this tendency.

One might add that Blackmur, also, within recent years has shifted
somewhat his critical position. In 1935, for example, in a piece in
which he discussed the job of the critic, he wrote, "Any rational ap-
proach is valid to literature and may properly be called critical which
fastens at any point upon the work itself." In discussing this idea,
he lays out quite specifically the task of the critic. "The critic, if
that is his bent, may concern himself with those purposes or with some
one among them which obsess him; but he must be certain to distinguish
between what is genuinely ulterior to the works he examines and what is
merely irrelevant; and he must further not assume except within the
realm of his special argument that other purposes either do not exist

52. For a discussion of this magazine, see Hoffman, Ulrich, and
York, 1935; also reprinted in the Zabel anthology.
or are negligible or that the works may not be profitably discussed apart from ulterior purposes and as examples of dramatic possibility alone." It is in this essay, also, that he makes the statement concerning the value of "separable content" with which his name has been associated. "The sense of continuous relationship, of sustained contact, with the work nominally in hand is rare and when found uncommonly exhilarating; it is the fine object of criticism; as it seems to put us in direct possession of the principles whereby the works move without injuring or disintegrating the body of the works themselves. This sense of intimacy by inner contact cannot arise from methods of approach which hinge on seized separable content." It is undoubtedly with these principles still in mind that Blackmur composed his essay on Melville. In one of his most recent articles, however, we may discern in a definition of New Criticism, to what extent Blackmur has modified this initial stand and to what extent he is willing to admit "separable content" into the work of criticism. He writes, "What is called the 'new criticism,' now well enough established to have a public odor of disrepute about it — is, I should expect, a set of emphases in criticism and scholarship which have been objectively determined, like other sets of emphases in other times, by the literature, by the presumed reader, by the general state of culture and knowledge, and by the immediate history and tradition of critical ideas and practise; all working unequally and more or less incongruously together." This statement may be interpreted

as Blackmur's acceptance of what we shall discuss in our next chapter as "pluralistic criticism."

One of the few recognitions of Melville's poetry by the New Critics is a review-article by Robert Penn Warren of Selected Poems of Herman Melville (New Directions, 1946), edited by F. O. Matthiessen. Warren's purpose in discussing this volume is simply "to offer a few remarks supplementary to the preface and to put out other poems and passages in Melville's work .... which could have no place in his Matthiessen's arbitrarily limited collection." In the article, therefore, Warren discusses poems which Matthiessen had omitted and which he (Warren) considers worthy of analysis.

The criticism is almost entirely focussed on Melville as a poet. Warren is inclined to believe that Melville did not fully master his craft. "I do feel," he adds, "that it needs some interpretation," and he goes on to explain that Melville, in his poetic apprenticeship, was capable of writing verse which is respectable by the conventional standards of his time. He substantiates this opinion by a close analysis of "In A Bye-Canal" from "Fruits of Travel Long Ago" in Timoleon.

"Perhaps," he writes, "the violences, the distortions, the wrenchings in versification ... are to be interpreted not so much as a result of mere ineptitude as the result of a conscious effort to develop a

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nervous, dramatic, masculine style." He appears to be pressing the point, for he continues in his apology for Melville's awkwardness by imputing to him high poetic motives, the aim "to create a poetry of some vibrancy, range of reference, and richness of tone." The poem "Jack Roy", he feels, illustrates this effort more successfully realized; and there is the "same fusion of disparate elements in 'The March into Virginia,'" which he considers one of Melville's best poems.

Warren's next criticism implies that Melville was too much concerned in his poetry with ideas, and that these ideas "relate to Melville's concern with the fundamental ironical dualities of existence." The effort to resolve these dualities, according to Warren, manifests itself in three different terms: nature, history, and religion. Three poems are chosen to illustrate this thesis: "Shiloh," "Malvern Hill," and "A Requiem for Soldiers Lost in Ocean Transport."

In additional support for these three terms, Warren refers to and quotes from Sedgwick, who discusses the form of Clarel as a basis for Melville's arrival into a state of consciousness in which his ego or self-consciousness no longer played an all-commanding role. Warren seems to agree with Sedgwick that Clarel indicates Melville's "religious conversion to life," that behind this poem lies Melville's awareness that for ripeness, there must be receptivity; that from the point of view of the total consciousness, it is not more blessed to give than to receive. Clarel, the poem which climaxes Melville's poetic career, is Melville's act toward humanity, not away from it.

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Warren wishes to emphasize that, in the realm of the development of ideas, there is an astonishing continuity between Melville's early poems, particularly those in *Battle Pieces,* and the profound resolution of *Clarel.* Under the terms of nature and history, the religious attitude of *Clarel* is already being defined in the early poems. Warren closes his article with the poem "Crossing the Tropics," which he feels is "interesting," but which is not included among Matthiessen's selections. He makes no critical analysis of this poem; he simply presents it *in toto* for the reader's own close reading and interpretation.

One must conclude that this piece, as an example of the New Criticism, is evasive. Warren touches only superficially on Melville's talent for poetry. One suspects that in his scrutiny of a few poems by closer reading, he holds back, that he does not honestly feel that Melville was a good poet but hesitates to make an indictment. The fact that he apologizes for Melville's poetic ineptitude, that he tries to place the poetry in a historical context and excuse it as making good use of its contemporary conventions manifests Warren's reluctance. Also, his discussion of Melville's poetic development with respect to his hypothetical three terms indicates that he finds Melville's ideas more attractive than Melville's craft. As a New Critic, however, Warren cannot discuss these ideas for they are, what Blackmur has termed, "ulterior," perhaps "irrelevant," or even "separable content." He is confronted, therefore, with a dilemma, the dilemma which is, undoubtedly, encountered by almost every critic who wishes to focus principally on form when, in truth, there is not very much to be said about form or what can be said about it may be damaging to the poem or poet whose
ideas he finds particularly interesting. This, then, is one of the disadvantages and certainly one of the limitations of the New Criticism; it also explains, somewhat, why the New Critics have favored only certain poets and certain types of poetry. In the attempt to evaluate by formalistic techniques, the New Critic must, of necessity, neglect the importance of content, particularly ideological content. In this brief discussion of Melville's poetry, Warren is apparently hamstrung by the critical method he espouses.

The New Critical principle of explication de texte has had profound effects, however, and a number of articles on Melville's works have been published which try to carry out this idea of close reading. Many of them, it is true, do not adhere to strict analysis of form and technique, making excursions into what Hellek and Warren would call extrinsic material, but they all, more or less, begin with the text, and their excursions, philosophical, psychological, sociological, originate in the work itself. To put it negatively, these articles are neither historical nor biographical; they are primarily critical and interpretive.

Two such articles deal with "Benito Cereno." Stanley T. Williams' discussion of this story\(^\text{57}\) tries to show that its leading characters, in following the inner impulses of their natures, become symbols of the attitude of men toward evil. Captain Delano, for example, is complacent towards good and evil; Don Benito is overwhelmed by evil; and Babo is a

\(^{57}\) Stanley T. Williams, "Follow Your Leader: Melville's 'Benito Cereno'," Virginia Quarterly Review, XXIII (Winter, 1947).
symbol of evil itself. This plan shows, according to Williams, that
Melville is not "a formless, prolix author incapable of sharp patterns."
Rosalie Feltenstein's analysis of the story\textsuperscript{53} treats more the subject
of its form, for she tries "to show, through an examination of the way
in which Melville treats his sources, and an examination of the factual
level and the level of symbolic significance, that it demonstrates his
mastery of form." Several other articles, using the same critical tech­
nique touch upon various other works of Melville, treating such aspects
as symbolism, imagery, and language.\textsuperscript{59} R. W. Short, for example,
delves on Melville's ability as a symbolist, showing that his method
"allows his symbols to accumulate meanings in the course of their use," so that "a single meaning attached to them often has at least a partial
validity."\textsuperscript{60}

A semantic interpretation of \textit{Moby Dick} which centers almost exclu­
sively on the form and language of that book has been written by William

\textsuperscript{53} Rosalie Feltenstein, "Melville's 'Benito Cereno'," American
Literature, IX (Nov., 1947).

\textsuperscript{59} See also: S. F. Damon, "Pierre the Ambiguous," Hound and Horn,
II (Jan.-March, 1929), an interpretation of Pierre by a well-known critic
in a quarterly with which some of the New Critics were associated;
Brainard Duffield, "Moby Dick: A Modern Adaptation," Line, I (April-
May, 1948); Alexander Eliot, "Melville and Bartleby," Furtoso, III (Fall,
1947); N. B. Fagin, "Herman Melville and the Interior Monologue,"
American Literature, VI (Jan., 1935); Lorena Gary, "Rich Colors and
Ominous Shadows," South Atlantic Quarterly, XXXVII (Jan., 1938); Roger
B. McCutcheon, "The Techniques of Melville's Israel Potter," South At­
lantic Quarterly, XXVIII (April, 1928); A. W. Parks, "Leviathan: an

\textsuperscript{60} R. W. Short, "Melville as Symbolist," University of Kansas City
Review, XV (Autumn, 1948). Short discusses Blackmur's article, objecting
to Blackmur's conception of Melville as an allegorist. He does, however,
describe Blackmur's article as "the most penetrating essay on Melville
I have read."
Hull. This analysis turns out to be a rather good example of the method of New Criticism despite its semantic bias. For Hull, in his contention that the novel is neither formless nor digressive writes:

A general semanticist would grasp at once the structural principle. In literary phrase it is 'organic'; i.e. to use an example from Korzybski, such a work is a self-reflexive map. The structural relations between series of objective un-speakable events and the creator's functioning nervous system, between that nervous system and its experience of those events, between the experiencing evaluation (i.e. the translation from dynamic terms of the lower 'affective' centers to the static terms of the higher 'associative' centers and the translation back into the terms of the lower centers) and its transference into written events, these structural relations are maintained in ordering of the product in dynamic correspondence. The product exists then as a system-function given content on indefinite levels by the reactions in the individual reader. Thus, an indefinite number of meanings is possible; but the structure of the book is an established function, possessing, whatever the reader-choice of content, its own fixed and in that sense inevitable relational value.

Hull also discusses Melville's symbolism. If, he tells us, we can strip the book of "all accidental values privately ascribed to variables," we find the major variables, i.e. symbols, are man, sea, and whale. He tries to show how these symbols "from the level of objective 'physical' values move far up the ladder of abstraction."

Essentially, this article uses Moby Dick to illustrate the semanticist's contention that man's relations between himself and between nature depend upon his understanding of language, and that he can

experience the "un-speakable objective level only through abstracting.\textsuperscript{62}

One must note that it is Hull's New Critical emphasis on explication and formal analysis which makes possible his semantic conclusions.

Although the writers of these articles are not what one would call New Critics, the method they use, with its concentration on textual analysis, is, to a great extent, the method of the New Criticism; and their use of this method indicates to what degree the New Criticism has generally influenced both the world of general literary criticism and the world of scholarship.

But it is Blackmur, Winters and Warren, whose articles we have just discussed, to whom we must return if we are to evaluate the work of the New Critics. Their work on Melville is not considered important, although Blackmur's piece warrants more attention, for it is the only analysis, except for Matthiessen's scholarly and detailed presentation in \textit{American Renaissance}, of Melville's craft. That two of them - Blackmur and Winters - have written on Melville indicates to what extent, in the late thirties and early forties, Melville had become accepted as a significant figure in American literature; Warren's review of Matthiessen's \textit{Selected Poems of Melville} is another such indication, for Matthiessen's

\textsuperscript{62} Ibid.; Blackmur presents an argument against the semantic point of view in a brief criticism of I. A. Richards' \textit{Mencius on the Mind}. "The real point of Mr. Richard's book," Blackmur writes, "is the impossibility of understanding, short of a lifetime's analysis and compensation, the mechanism of meaning in even a small body of work. There is no question of the exemplary value and stimulus of Mr. Richards' work; but there is no question either that few would care to emulate him for any purpose of literary criticism. In the first place it would take too long, and in the second he does not answer the questions literary criticism would put. The literal adoption of Mr. Richards' approach to literary criticism would stultify the very power it was aimed to enhance - the power of imaginative apprehension, of imaginative co-ordination of varied and separate elements." "A Critic's Job of Work," included in Zabel, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 783.
volume was the first effort in the century to present Melville as a poet. Although they are not important as Melville criticism, these pieces are important in that they reveal that Melville's reputation had become established in this century; he was esteemed enough to become the subject of analysis of two of the most important twentieth century American critics, he was esteemed enough to have a collection of his poetry edited by a third, and he was esteemed enough to have this collection given, not merely a review, but an article by a fourth. If these articles are not important as Melville criticism, they are, however, important in what they respectively reveal about twentieth century criticism, particularly what they reveal about the New Critics.

What these articles reveal about the New Criticism is that, as long as the problem of form and content exists, there can be no purely aesthetic, no purely formalistic approach to a work of literature. The dualistic indivisibility makes pure formalism an impossibility. The method of concentration on text is a valuable one and has done much to correct the tendency of criticism to dwell on extrinsic material. It has also acted as a challenge to the academic and historical critic. But explication de texte must, of necessity, force the inclusion of extrinsic material. For as long as language is a social instrument, as long as language is referent to things, and things embody ideas, just

63. With regard to the New Criticism as it concerns Melville, Chase has written: "Those critics of the last twenty years.....The Southern writers, the New Criticism - have made no sustained effort to understand Melville. Those concerned with precise textual and structural analysis, with order and concentration, have seen only Melville's sometimes unruly emotions - emotions in excess of their occasions - or his vagueness or his lack of system. If the New Criticism applies itself to the task, however, it may determine the future of 'Melville' studies." Herman Melville, p. XI.
so long will things and ideas be involved in any criticism of value. The exploration into the function and meaning of language, the ideals of complexity, of metaphor and ambiguity, which the New Criticism generally exalts must inevitably engage the critic into ulterior material. Words themselves are organic; they undergo constant change and development in meaning, and this change and development entail a history; this change and development also involve sociological and psychological phenomena. If Empson's careful work on ambiguity reveals anything, it reveals, for example, this significant fact - that language has, in addition to a metaphysical basis, a history, a sociology, and a psychology of its own. That the New Critics are becoming aware of this predicament is revealed by recent emphasis on myth in such young descendants as Chase, by the change in Blackmur's position which we have noted, by the more recent essays of Ransom.64 Other critics who have, in a way, disassociated themselves from the New Critics have given this predicament earlier attention in their work, such critics, for example, as Lionel Trilling, who has never been closely allied with the New Critics, and Kenneth Burke, who has always been looked upon with suspicion by the New Critics as being too concerned with psychology and rhetoric.65

No one can deny that, with respect to poetry, the New Criticism has succeeded admirably, and that aesthetic principles of poetic theory which the New Critics have presented, principles which are so carefully

64. See, for example, "Poetry: The Final Cause," Kenyon Review, 9 (Autumn, 1947).
analyzed in The Theory of Literature, have indeed proven practicable. Actually, the New Critics have concentrated almost exclusively on poetry. Using the fruits of their learning and scholarship — and, one might add, that most of the New Critics are capable scholars and learned men — they have, scrupulously limiting any extensions to the text itself, explored the complex elements of poetry and given it new dimensions. But what of the application, one might ask, of the New Critical method to other genres, to drama and fiction.

The articles we have discussed illustrate how restrictive the method is in the treatment of other genres. Even Blackmur, who employs the method skillfully and endeavors to concentrate primarily on Melville's craft, must draw into his discussion the historical conventions of the novel, the gothic conventions of language. The novel, infinitely more than poetry, must lead the critic into extrinsic matter; its very structure demands it. Winters, also, in his symbolic interpretation of Moby Dick, draws upon philosophical doctrine — good versus evil, moral judgment and perception — all ulterior to form, to elucidate Melville's symbols, although he is quite conscious now of this proclivity. In a critic like Chase, a descendant of the New Critics but explicitly divorced from them, we shall see how the emphasis on text is shaped by his obsession with myth and anthropology. Matthiessen, also, was acutely aware of the dilemma, and in his American Renaissance, he attempts to solve it by very consciously combining the method of New Criticism with that of the sociological critic. And that book is a magnificent example of a skillful critic working with and correlating two methods.
of interpretation, showing how the aesthetic development of a work of literature, organically growing, reflects the cultural and social conditions of the age in which it was produced.

As we shall see, Newton Arvin, too, shows a cogent realization of the problem, but he confronts it squarely. In his *Herman Melville* he comes forth with a solution that points out the path to which twentieth century criticism will eventually lead. His solution, termed "pluralistic criticism," acknowledges the relationship between intrinsic and extrinsic matter in a work of art; it is cognizant of the relativity of all branches of learning and is willing to focus all learning on a work of art, philosophy, history, biography, sociology, psychology and psychoanalysis, myth and anthropology, *et al.*, in analyzing the work on its various levels of meaning in an attempt to achieve its total meaning.

Nor, as we have noted, does the problem of literary criticism in this century restrict itself to literature. It has discovered a socio-political involvement which cannot be ignored, and this, in turn, has its roots in the philosophical dialectic of absolutism and relativism. The attacks on the new criticism by Robert Hillyer and Robert Gorham Davis, the fracas over the Bollingen award serve to illustrate to what extent this involvement exists. As we have noted, Hulme was aware of this crucial issue, although he failed to resolve it. Some of his followers, however, have resolved it. Certainly Eliot has, and Pound, and more recently Alan Tate has found his answer in the Catholic Church. Winters, too, has admitted his absolutism. Others, however, have either ignored the issue or have reaffirmed a belief in democratic
liberalism with its basis in philosophic relativism. We have had no
commitment on this matter from John Crowe Ransom; nor have Cleanth
Brooks and Robert Penn Warren committed themselves. Chase, on the other
hand, has so forcefully reasserted a belief in liberalism that he almost
distorts Melville's *The Confidence Man* to interpret it in accord with
his belief. \(^{66}\) Trilling, in *The Liberal Imagination*, avows his confidence
in the liberal condition; and Arvin, a liberal, illustrates, by his
pluralistic approach, a belief in a naturalistic philosophy, a critical
relativism.

Matthiessen stands as a symbol of this socio-political involvement
of the literary critic. His career almost traces, in microcosm, the
issue, and his life almost epitomizes the struggle of the modern intel­
lectual and literary critic to reconcile and harmonize the dualistic
forces of our chaotic world. His early works, particularly those which
deal with Sarah Orne Jewett and Eliot, show his devotion to aesthetic
interpretation; one might say that in these efforts he was quartered in
the absolutist fold. In his *American Renaissance*, the triumph of his
career, he manages to combine his aesthetic insight with an equally
cogent insight into the socio-political forces which are integral to the
figures he discusses; this book is not merely literary criticism of the
most admirable kind, but it is also a socio-political history of a

\(^{66}\) Richard Chase, "Dissent on Billy Budd," *Partisan Review*, 15
(Nov., 1948). "Claggart," Chase declares in this article,"is another
version of Melville's self-righteous liberal,"the Confidence Man." This idea of the "self-righteous liberal is further developed in Chase's
book on Melville. In a letter in a subsequent issue of the magazine,
written by Newton Arvin, Robert Gorham Davis, and Daniel Aaron, Chase is
taken to task for both this statement and the idea it implies.
particular American period. In it, one might say, Matthiessen achieves the difficult liberal balance. But it was a balance which Matthiessen could not maintain; he could not reconcile an aesthetic belief that led to absolutism with social and political beliefs which led to relativism. His awareness of social and political responsibility in this modern world became a source of acute despair for him. In his last years, the discomfort of a socio-political relativism led him to attempt a resolution by flirting with the only tangible answer to the dilemma which has thus far been presented - Marxism. And Marxism, as we know it in our world, has become a social and political absolute.

We shall devote more attention to both Matthiessen and Arvin in our next chapter. They are both what one might call pluralist critics. Arvin, in his work, acknowledges the necessity of relativism for criticism, and the result is the finest critical biography of Melville thus far presented. He is not limited strictly to aesthetic insights; he uses both Freud and Jung, he is aware of the importance of sociological implications, and he does not neglect the background of myth and symbolism. He presents us with the tragic vision which Melville illustrates rather than the tragic vision of modern man - which, in the end, turn out to be the same thing.

Matthiessen himself, however, is the essence of this tragic vision. We see, through his career, the manner in which man ultimately reaches an impasse in an attempt to triumph over the forces of a dialectical

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dualism, to find meaning and meaningfulness in life. Philosophic relativism and the pragmatic philosophy which is its offspring have failed, not because they are inherently impracticable or because they are difficult, but because they are antithetical to the emotional demand in human nature for something fixed, for anchorage in the flux, for the Final Answer. Man is reluctant to face the logical extension of his thinking because he is still too much obsessed with emotional and spiritual craving; logic and intellectualism are incapable of fulfilling this craving. Nor can one deny that this craving has a very real and significant function and meaning of its own.
CHAPTER VIII

Melville and the Development of Pluralistic Criticism

As we have seen, the principal issue in the development of twentieth-century criticism has been the struggle between literary history and literary criticism. In this struggle there have been various attempts to define and limit the areas of each. Scholars have attempted to defend the importance of literary history, which, as we have noted, has been the chief method of literary study in the universities; free-lance intellectuals and critics have tried to maintain the necessity and importance of literary criticism. Attempts, like R. S. Crane's, in 1935, to clarify and mediate the issue have been all too rare. Literary history, he defines as "a discipline which has as its ultimate purpose the discovery and verification of intelligible narrative propositions about the past"; criticism is "simply the disciplined consideration, at once analytical and evaluative, of literary works as works of art."

Crane, then entering his neo-Aristotelian, formalist phase, of course, plumps for the critics as against the historians. Indeed, he predicts a "renaissance" of criticism. If such a renaissance has occurred, it has not taken the direction he hoped (and hopes) it would. For the

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1. For a complete discussion of this controversy, see Literary Scholarship, Its Aims and Methods, Chapel Hill, 1941. This volume contains essays on the subject by Norman Foerster, John G. McGalliard, Rene Wellek, Austin Warren, and Wilbur L. Schramm. In addition, there is a valuable bibliography.

2. R. S. Crane, "History vs. Criticism in the University Study of Literature, English Journal (College English), XXIV, pp. 645-667.

3. For further discussion of Crane's article, see Norman Foerster, "The Study of Letters," Literary Scholarship, Its Aims and Methods, pp. 16-17.
critical renaissance, as we have seen, has moved in many directions - the most important of which is that of the New Criticism.

But the New Criticism, as we indicated in our last chapter, with its emphasis on textual exegesis, has itself been burdened with the load of its own "purity." From its very beginnings there has been an awareness that concentration on text alone is not only impossible but also insufficient in achieving full critical appreciation. Eliot, himself, a seminal figure in the New Criticism, has expressed this awareness. "You can never draw the line between aesthetic criticism and moral and social criticism," he writes. "You cannot draw a line between criticism and metaphysics; you start with literary criticism, and however rigorous an aesthete you may be, you are over the frontier into something else sooner or later. The best you can do is to accept these conditions and know what you are doing when you do it. And, on the other hand, you must know how and when to retrace your steps."

At first, and even until quite recently, the New Criticism seemed to ignore these conditions. Its emphasis on the aesthetic restrictions of form and language led to a critical impasse in which content and ideas were considered to be "extrinsic," even irrelevant. Among the first to recognize this limitation of the New Criticism was Crane, who had, in a sense, predicted its development. In an article analyzing the work of Cleanth Brooks, one of the most prominent of New Critics, Crane accused him of restricting poetic interpretation simply to "irony and paradox." Among other New Critics, Crane wrote, "there is the same

tendency toward a monistic reduction of critical concepts," and he cites, as examples, Tate's "tension," Ransom's "texture," Robert Penn Warren's obsession with symbols, and I. A. Richards' "Pavlovian mythology concerning the 'behavior' of words."

Crane, in this article, also suggests the direction which criticism might take. It may take such direction, however, "if only it freed itself from the despotism of language and the unique cause, and aimed at a multidimensional theory of poetry that would be, like Mr. Brooks', literal rather than Platonic in method, but much more adequate than his to the discrimination of peculiarly poetic values and to the development of narrative judgments relative to all the complex problems - of medium, object, manner, and effect - that enter into the various poetic arts."

Crane concludes:

To reconstruct criticism in this way would obviously be to revise the whole tendency of critical reasoning as practised by the 'new critics.' It would be to substitute the matter of fact and concrete for the abstract; the a posteriori for the a priori; the argument from immediately sensible poetic effects to their proximate poetic causes for the argument from remote and non-poetic causes to only general and common poetic effects. It would be, in a word, to study poems as complete wholes possessed of distinctive emotional powers rather than merely the materials and devices of poems in a context of extra-poetic considerations. And that would be new indeed."

Crane, here, is perhaps making another prediction, and this prediction, one might say, is in the direction of what we have termed, "pluralistic criticism." Nor has he been alone in objecting to the "monistic" tendencies of the New Criticism. Other voices have joined

5. Ibid.
him in pointing out deficiencies; and they have also indicated the direction toward pluralism. William Barrett, for example, has urged that the term "New Criticism" be dropped. \(^6\) "When we examine the new critics," he writes, "we find such a variety of different things done that we are puzzled as to the unity that is supposed to connect them. The initial point of departure would be the close textual analysis of literary works, but the critics, each in his own direction, have moved beyond this task...." His conclusion is that "modern consciousness had at least become conscious of itself in literature, and this consciousness demanded that literary work be assimilated in relation to a great many different and complicated interests - anthropology, psychology, sociology, and various possibilities of religious belief."

Perhaps the most intelligent presentation of the case for pluralistic criticism has been published by David Daiches.\(^7\) Daiches view is in refutation to an article on the New Criticism published by William Van O'Connor. Daiches first objects to the method in which O'Connor has presented such alternatives as "scholarship vs. new criticism," "content vs. form." He then proceeds to define his own distinctions between the scholar and the critic. "Scholarship," he writes, "throws light on the social and biographical origins of a work, on the cultural environment out of which it sprang, on the transmission of text, and

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thus often enables the critic to understand in some degree how the work came to be written and to see more clearly the meanings of certain parts of the text; but his job as critic, whether his brand of criticism be old or new, remains the assessment of the literary worth of the work in question."

Daiches then attacks the New Criticism. Chiefly, he is resentful that the New Critics have assumed that they alone are really critics and all the rest who deal in literature are merely historians. They have, he admits, been led to such an attitude because they have taken criticism more seriously, grimly, and because they have seen the function of the critic as central to civilization. They have also taken the opportunity to differentiate between criticism and other kinds of literary investigation; "they have also refused to start by a consideration of the impact the work on the ordinary cultivated reader and then proceed to explain that impact in terms of the work's qualities, but instead, they have made critical analysis a tool for total reassessment of the impact." This method however, according to Daiches, has serious disadvantages. It leads to criticism of criticism, and it serves to widen the breach between the amateur and the professional critic. "Appreciation," Daiches tells us, "can be independent of critical theory....If we do not concede that it is possible to enjoy art without formal training in criticism and without possessing general ideas about aesthetics, we are flying in the face of experience, setting up a priestly critical profession to mediate between artists and their public, and encouraging the growth of the most barren kind of academicism in matters artistic and literary."
It is then that Daiches launches into a discussion of art which becomes an expository definition of pluralistic criticism.

.....A poem or play or novel can be very many things at the same time - a reflection of the cultural climate of its age, a document in the mental history of its author, a carefully patterned arrangement of words, ideas, images, situations, a fable, a piece of rhetoric, and the communication of a unique insight into an aspect of human experience through one or another (or several) of these means.

.....A work of literary art is necessarily a mixed form. It produces its effect by being several things at once - not by mere complexity but by operating simultaneously on several different levels not only of meaning but of existence.

Implicit in Daiche's exposition is the realization that he is describing the ideal. "Real criticism," he writes, "is impossible. We do, however, mean that no critical statement about a work of literary art - least of all about a poem - can be a complete statement of what it is and why it is good."

Thus, we are at what might be considered the first valid criticism of pluralism as a critical method, that it is impossible, that it can never completely fulfill the complex obligations of its task. The reply to this criticism, however, is not that one expects the impossible or that one expects complete critical fulfillment; what one does expect is an acceptance of the idea that each of the variety of critical methods which might be embodied in a pluralistic interpretation has a validity of its own. In this sense, we see how the term "pluralistic criticism"

8. Ibid.

9. It is obvious, of course, that pluralism as a critical method has as its basis philosophical relativism. The dialectic of absolutism and relativism, although we have touched upon it in our last chapter and tried to point out that it is a crucial issue of our times, is not exactly germane to our purpose here.
is derived from the study of philosophy; for it simply implies "the possibility of a plurality of truth and philosophic procedures - in short, a plurality of valid philosophies." With respect to criticism, which, as aesthetics, might even be considered a department of philosophy, it holds the possibility that all interpretations of a literary work embody some truth; that a literary work, involving as it does complex attributes may be viewed from multiple perspectives - historically, aesthetically, sociologically, psychologically, etc. Pluralism is, therefore, like all syntheses, ideal; it is the synthesis of the dualistic forces of literary history and literary criticism, both of which in this century have been viewed too much as antithetical.

Naturally, an approach which is ideal would necessitate an ideal critic. Perhaps this is so. But human beings have ever striven to incorporate the ideal into practise; indeed, some philosophers have considered this struggle to be the answer to the mystery of life. Criticism, then, becomes part of this struggle. Already, there are signs that critics are becoming more aware of this fact.

In his American Renaissance, F. O. Matthiessen quite clearly

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11. Many recent attempts have been made to describe the "ideal" critic. See, for example, Hyman, op. cit., pp. 398-407. This discussion has been reprinted as "Attempts at an Integration," in Zabel, op. cit., pp. 757-769. Also Zabel's discussion of the "ideal" critic in the introduction to his anthology. Another volume in which various critics attempt to resolve the issue is The Intent of the Critic, ed. by Donald Stauffer, Princeton, 1941, which contains essays by Stauffer, Foerster, Ransom, Wilson, and Auden.

12. Cf. Chapter VII.
illustrates how close analysis of literary works themselves can lead into broader avenues of exploration. Although Matthiessen makes full and careful use of the biographical and historical material that has preceded his study, his primary focus is on the great literary works produced during a period of American literary history. His aim, as stated, is "to follow these books through their implications, to observe them as the culmination of their authors' talents, to assess them in relation to one another and to the drift of our literature since, and, so far as possible, to evaluate them in accordance with the enduring requirements for great art."\textsuperscript{13} This is ostensibly a preoccupation with aesthetics.

But Matthiessen does not strictly adhere to aesthetic appraisal. His examination of language and form, his analyses of allegory and symbolism, and, of course, his use of the historical and biographical background which supplements these examinations and analyses - in short, his impeccable scholarship - gradually extend his work into what might be called cultural history. In this respect, his method becomes critical synthesis; for there is an amalgamation almost of the New Criticism and the method of the sociologist and cultural historian. This work, then, almost a classic in its way, is an early manifestation of the divergent path a New Critic has taken into a method of pluralism.

Nor was Matthiessen unaware of the complications of his method. In his introductory chapter, "Method and Scope," he explicitly discusses his intentions. He realizes, for example, the importance of intellectual

\textsuperscript{13} F. O. Matthiessen, \textit{American Renaissance}, New York, 1941, p. xi.
history to his plan and pays tribute to the work of Haroutunian and Perry Miller;\textsuperscript{14} he realizes, also, how much of the material he intends to treat was influenced by the economic and social forces of their time, and mentions the work of Granville Hicks and Newton Arvin's "detailed examination of Whitman's emergent socialism."\textsuperscript{15} In addition, he understands the significance of psychological criticism and limits himself as to the possibilities of that method — "My prime intention is not... to relate the authors' works to their lives. I have not drawn upon the circumstances of biography unless they seemed essential to place a given piece of writing; and whenever necessary, especially in the case of Melville, I have tried to expose the modern fallacy... the direct reading of an author's personal life into his works." Even in its intended preoccupation with aesthetics, with form, Matthiessen's plan encompasses much more than an orthodox one; for "an artist's use of language," he says, "is the most sensitive index to cultural history, since a man can articulate only what he is, and what he has been made by the society of which he is a willing or an unwilling part." And it is his hope "to pass beyond" the interrelations to basic formulations about the nature of literature; to delve into the varied responses of the figures whom he treats to "the myth of the common man," and to discuss aspects of tragedy as it is reflected in their work. The structure of the work, he tells us, is to be based on recurrent themes, and "the avenue of

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\item \textsuperscript{15} Granville Hicks, \textit{op. cit.}; Newton Arvin, \textit{Whitman}, New York, 1938.
\end{itemize}
approach to all these themes is the same, through attention to the writers' use of their own tools, their diction and rhetoric, and to what they could make with them."

There are four books to this huge volume, one of which is completely devoted to Melville. The tracing of "recurrent themes," however, necessitates that aspects of Melville's work be discussed in each of the other three. The first lengthy discussion of Melville, for example, is included in the book which primarily treats Emerson and Thoreau. It is entitled "Ishmael's Loom of Time," and it tries to show how Melville fits into the pattern which Matthiessen describes as "the metaphysical strain" in nineteenth century American writing. Here we see Matthiessen's combination of literary history and critical insight, his synthesis of New Criticism and scholarship. For the discussion centers on Melville's mastery of the metaphysical style\(^{16}\) with emphasis on the influence of Sir Thomas Browne; it becomes, thus, an influence study and a close examination of Melville's language, his "ability to unite the abstract and concrete in a single image," his skillful use of metaphor.

The same method of combining interpretations is continued throughout the volume. The second lengthy treatment of Melville, for example, is included in the volume which deals with Hawthorne, and in this discussion the recurrent theme which is introduced is "the vision of evil."

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\(^{16}\) Matthiessen's interest in the "metaphysical style" places him among the New Critics. One of the initial aspects of the New Criticism, as we have pointed out (Chapter VII) was its interest in the Metaphysical poets. One of the recurrent themes in Matthiessen's book is to trace the influence and the continuation of this style on nineteenth century American literature. He follows the various mutations in this style from Hawthorne and Melville, through James, to Eliot.
Here we have, first, an analysis of Melville's attitude toward Emerson as it is expressed in his annotations of Emerson's essays; and this leads to a discussion of his attitude, in contrast to that toward Emerson, toward Hawthorne. Biographical data and generous quotation from Melville's work embellish both discussions. Also included in the book which deals with Hawthorne is a long chapter on allegory and symbolism, in which the whole attitude of the nineteenth century toward these literary devices is analyzed, and both Hawthorne's and Melville's use of them almost minutely examined and contrasted. This, in a sense, is a continuation of the theme which treats the metaphysical style.

The book which is devoted to Melville alone is a great contribution not only to Melville criticism but also to pluralistic criticism. Many of the interpretive methods we have described in this dissertation are utilized — with skill, facility, and sensitivity. Much of the historical scholarship on Melville has been consulted, and there is evidence that painstaking research has been done to add more. As for the sociological insights, these are numerous. The treatment of *Mardi*, for example — "*Mardi: A Source-Book for Plenitude*" — tries to show how that book reconstructed "the conflicting faiths and doubts that were sweeping this country at the end of the eighteen-forties," and how it reflected, particularly in the references to Vivenza, Melville's attitude toward democratic America. The philosophical implications of the book are also touched upon; but again, the analysis of style predominates, and again the subject of metaphysical style comes up. "In *Mardi,*" Matthiessen writes, "he Melville had reached levels where he had no first-hand
experience to support him, and he had not yet gained much notion of how to blend his abstractions into symbols by his own equivalent of the metaphysical style."

The short section which follows the discussion of Mardi, "Autobiography and Art," should be enlightening to those critics who, obsessed with source hunting, see Melville as a kind of skillful plagiarist. For this section, through the use of parallel passage, shows how Melville transformed the material from which he may have derived his factual information into art, how he demonstrated once again "that there should be no artificial separation between the life of mind and of the body, that reading, to a quickened imagination, could be as much a part of assimilated experience as adventures."

Matthewiessen introduces his detailed discussion of Moby-Dick by first taking up Redburn and White Jacket, both of which he views from a sociological point of view. Redburn is the subject of the short chapter, "The Economic Factor," but the book is used to present Melville's attitude rather than that of the period in which it was produced; Matthewiessen diverges from text to investigate the sociology of the author. "The latent economic factor in tragedy," he writes, "remained part of Melville's vision at every subsequent stage of his writing." White Jacket ("The World's a Ship on its Passage Out") is treated in a similar fashion, but the emphasis shifts to Melville's religious ideas and we find this statement concerning Melville's comment to Duyckinck on Shakespeare, that he Shakespeare was "full of sermons-on-the-mount,

and gentle, aye, almost as Jesus": "Such a remark helps to explain why Melville's tragedies are more concerned with spiritual and metaphysical issues even than with the economic and social."

Matthiessen's treatment of Moby-Dick is based on his belief that Melville was profoundly influenced by Shakespeare in his composition of the book, that the structure of the book patterned on Shakespearean tragedy must be analyzed in dramatic terms. "...So far as we can trace the genesis of any creative process, we have an example here of how Melville's own sense of life had been so profoundly stirred by Shakespeare's that he was subconsciously impelled to emulate it." What ensues is an analysis of the novel showing how this emulation was carried out; the dramatic structure of the book is convincingly presented. Next comes an equally detailed analysis of the language of the book, and in this, too, the impact of Shakespeare is reiterated. Browne, Carlyle, both taught Melville much, but "his possession by Shakespeare went far beyond all other influences...a man of thirty awakening to his own full strength through the challenge of the most abundant imagination in history." But, Matthiessen says later in his discussion, "His practise of tragedy, though it gained force from Shakespeare, had real freedom; it did not base itself upon Shakespeare, but upon man and nature as Melville knew them." More simply, it is Matthiessen's contention that Shakespeare's conception of tragedy "had so grown into the fibre of Melville's thought that much of his mature work became a re-creation of its themes in modern terms." And we are launched into a discussion of Melville's treatment of good and evil, a theme which had been introduced
Moby-Dick, then, becomes for Matthiessen a tragedy of revenge, and Ahab's career, like that of the protagonists of many of the Elizabethan tragedies of revenge, reveals him as both hero and villain. Involved in this tragedy is Ahab's conception of the rigid Fate to which he is bound. And the Fate, to which Matthiessen refers, is the same kind of Fate which both Percival and Auden described. Both Auden and Percival, however, gave Ahab, in their interpretation, an opportunity to transcend this Fate through Christian resignation. Matthiessen makes no such alternative for Ahab. "The result of Ahab's Fatalism," he writes, "is that his tragedy admits no moral recognition."

In his treatment of Pierre ("An American Hamlet"), Matthiessen takes the orthodox line that the book is much autobiography. The book, he writes, is about "the most desperate in our literature, since Pierre's sufferings were very much his author's own." But Matthiessen does not approve of a Freudian interpretation of the book, and indeed, criticizes previous attempts to impose Freudianism on Melville: "These have tended so far to deflect from any comprehensive study of the works, and to compensate with no reliable biography, owing to the loose liberties that have been taken with the known facts." He does not, however, disclaim merit for Freudian theory. "What a critic can gain from Freudian theory is a very comprehensive kind of description of human norms and processes, an incalculably great asset in interpreting patterns of character and meaning. What can be learned directly from Pierre is that much material had surged up into Melville's mind, of the sort that remains unconscious
for most authors, and was not allowed to ripple the surface of Victorian literature." With *Pierre*, as with the other books, there is analysis of form, rhetoric, and imagery.

The final chapter of the work is devoted to the remainder of Melville's literary productions - *Israel Potter*, *The Confidence Man*, and *Billy Budd*. The poetry is only touched upon briefly. 18 In *Israel Potter* and *The Confidence Man* the structure "shows them to have been produced by a man not at all able to write the kind of books he wanted to, but under a miserable compunction." The former shows failure, the structure of the latter "is no more than a manipulated pattern of abstractions." *Billy Budd*, however, gave testimony that Melville had once more grown into possession of himself as an artist. Matthiessen ends his treatment of Melville on an almost optimistic note.

After all he had suffered Melville could endure to the end in the belief that though good goes down to defeat and death, its radiance can redeem life. His career did not fall into what has been too often assumed to be the pattern for the lives of our artists: brilliant beginnings without staying power, truncated and broken by our hostile environment. Melville's endurance is a challenge for a later America.

One cannot add much to the encomiums which have been bestowed upon this book. It has, as we have said, already taken on the character of a classic work in American literature, and in the light of its overwhelming excellences, the few adverse criticisms one might venture seem presumptuous. With this risk in mind, however, one is nevertheless impelled to say that, with respect to Melville, Matthiessen has overstated

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the Shakespearean influence. He acknowledges his indebtedness to Olson for the material that inspired the realization of this influence, but he goes even much farther than Olson in emphasizing and reiterating it. To interpret *Moby-Dick*, for example, predominantly as a Shakespearean tragedy, is to overlook much of its other values. Also, one might frequently carp at Matthiessen's own style. Close reading shows it to be occasionally verbose and repetitious. It is so packed with allusions and information, digressions and generalizations that original ideas are sometimes lost or forgotten in the journey. The book is undoubtedly a feast, and one ought not to cavil at a feast. The sorrow is that feasts often incur indigestion.

As a critic, Matthiessen in this book has achieved the crowning feat of his career. He has managed consummately to combine methods - to use in good balance literary history, and aesthetic and sociological insights. His book, therefore, becomes one of the early contributions to the development of pluralistic criticism. As an intellectual, however, Matthiessen must have found the critical relativism which he subscribed to in this work unsatisfying. For his subsequent career illustrates to what extent he found relativism irreconcilable with his political beliefs. He became "the most distinguished literary fellow-traveller in this country,"¹⁹ and his social and political preoccupations in the years before his tragic suicide, become symptomatic of the terrible tensions which the intellectual of our times is forced to endure, the tensions and the irreconcilabilities. As a literary critic, Matthiessen

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¹⁹. Howe, *op. cit.*
evidently could accept relativism; as a social and political man, however, he strove for absolutes. Thus, the liberal critic may become in his political thinking the dupe of his own liberalism.

Richard Chase first presented his views on myth before the English Institute in 1947 in a paper which was later published in *English Institute Essays, 1947*. His definition of myth in this paper seems rather simple: myth, he says is "literature." But it is, he adds, a special kind of literature; "myth is literature functioning in a special way, achieving special modes of expression." The special kind of literature that myth is, is "magic literature, literature which achieves the wonderful, uncanny, or brilliant reality of the magical vision of things." He endeavors to elaborate on his concept:

Myths may be regarded, on the one hand, as the aesthetic exercise which preserves and reaffirms the magic fusion; myths keep the magician's world — and the poet's world — from falling apart. On the other hand, myths are poetic dramatizations of the conflicts and interactions of powers operating within the qualities and objects with which these powers seem to be identical. If these observations are sound, any narrative or poem which reaffirms the dynamism and vibrancy of the world, which fortifies the ego with the impression that there is a magically potent brilliancy or dramatic force in the world, may be called a myth.

This definition, we are forced to notice, moves rapidly from the simple to the complex. Nor is the lost simplicity ever retrieved in Chase's longer investigation of myth, his *Quest for Myth*. A scholarly work of some pretensions, this volume tries to establish the background

21. Ibid., p. 11.
for Chase's concept - that "myth is something dynamic and operative and that it depends upon art rather than vice versa - that in fact it is art" - and his method. The purpose of the book, he tells us, "is to perform some of the spadework which the current interest in myth calls for - by bringing some of the older students of myth, mainly philosophers, historians, philologists, psychologists, and anthropologists, into the proper perspective. In pursuing this task, Chase takes us, in panoramic chapters, from the Greeks right up to Freud; nor does he overlook, en route such eminent figures as Vico, Hume, The English Rationalists, Malinowski, and Suzanne Langer. The final chapter is an attempt to illustrate the method on poetry, with brief analyses of poetic excerpts from Wordsworth, Yeats, and Auden.

In the sense that Chase's method demands close reading of the text, he might be considered a New Critic.\textsuperscript{23} He is also interested in language, particularly symbolism. But it becomes somewhat clear that he is striving for much more than merely formal analysis of poetry, that his concept of poetry embodies much more than any orthodox concept of poetry. It is his belief "that poetry is a primitive, a fundamental product of man's mind and that wherever it has appeared it has striven against human bias and exclusiveness to transfigure itself into myth."

Because his concept of poetry is so encompassing, and because it

\textsuperscript{23} Chase, however, does not consider himself a New Critic. In an article sharply critical of the New Criticism he writes that it is possible to make "a mobile middle ground" between the New Critics who "usually assume that art has nothing to do with morality," and the Ordealists who "speak of art as a cry of pain rather than a moral utterance." Thus, one might say that Chase finds himself sharing the same critical bed as Yvor Winters - rather strange bedfellows. "New vs. Ordealist," \textit{Kenyon Review}, XI (Winter, 1949).
ultimately leads him into almost all areas of learning - history, sociology, psychology, anthropology, and philosophy, we can consider Chase's method another advance in the direction of pluralistic criticism.

Chase's first treatment of Melville was in an article in the Partisan Review in which he presented a variety of perspectives from which Melville could be viewed, for Melville, he informs us, was a "multiple personality." Chase's critical volume, Herman Melville, is an elaboration of the fundamental ideas expressed in this article. This volume is almost exclusively critical, for it contains a minimum of history or biography; it also adheres closely to text. Indeed, the textual exegesis is extensive. Chase, however, unlike Matthiessen or other New Critics, is not interested in aesthetics; he is primarily interested in myth, and his exegesis concentrates on symbols and the relationship of symbols to cultural myths. Although there is no explicit acknowledgment of Jung, and very little of Freud, Chase's method is indebted to both. Chase, however, as his Quest for Myth attests, is much more partial to Freud than Jung.

Chase devotes roughly a chapter to each of Melville's major works, although he lumps discussion of Melville's first five books - Typee, Omoo, Mardi, Redburn, and White Jacket - in his first chapter, "Portraits of the Young Man." This chapter also presents the various themes which recur throughout the rest of the volume. First, Chase tells us that Melville created two basic kinds of hero - "as if consciously accepting

26. Chase gives very little attention to Jung; most of his interest is in Freud. For his brief estimate of Jung, f.n. 4, p. 145.
the double heritage of Western man - the Hebraic-Christian heritage and the Greek heritage" - the hero Ishmael and the hero Prometheus. "Ishmael, cast out and disinherited by Abraham his father, and Prometheus, the Titan who fled from heaven to bring light to man and to suffer on earth in his behalf, are both heroes in the universal myth of the Fall."

But, Chase continues, in Melville's books there are two kinds of Prometheus, the true and the false.

The false Prometheus betrays his humanity through some monstrous pride, some titanic quest for moral purity, some obsessed abdication from the natural ambiguities of life in quest of the absolute and the inviolable, or some moral treachery which involves his companions as well as himself in a final catastrophe. The true Prometheus is the hero whom Melville came to call 'the Handsome Sailor.' He is Prometheus, as we may say, in a state of becoming Oedipus. The ideal human hero must not be only the young Promethean revolutionary who battles against the old reactionary gods in order to liberate man and give him his creative intelligence. The ideal hero must also be Oedipus - the man who has accepted the full moral responsibility of his fallible humanity, the man who has suffered and grown wise in the leadership of his fellows, the man who has learned to embrace his father, his mother, and his children in the full knowledge of his human guilt and his human nobility and who, in doing so, makes himself the symbol of a culture formed in the rich magnitude of wisdom and love. The false Prometheus is he who rejects the psychological and cultural sustenance of life; the true Prometheus is he who accepts it.27

Another type of hero which, Chase tells us, reappears in various forms through Melville's work is "the hero suffering the fear of castration." Chase terms this hero "the Maimed Man in the Glen," and points out that his qualities are discovered in Ahab, in Pierre Glendening, in the "invalid Titan" of The Confidence Man, and in other Melville characters.

27. Chase, Herman Melville, p. 3.
Melville's myth, according to Chase, has two central themes: "the Fall and the Search, the Search for what was lost in the Fall or for the earthly and possible substitutes for what was lost. The idea of the Fall was Melville's instinctive image of his own fate and the fate of his family." These themes, however, are not only concerned with individual characters, but also with cultures and civilizations. For it is Chase's contention that America and the whole of Western civilization symbolize also the Fall and the Search. This historical-cultural myth offers three possibilities: "Typee, capitalist-military civilization (the man-of-war world), Serenia, and the culture symbolized by Marnoo and Jack Chase." The first type, the capitalist-military civilization, is self-explanatory; Serenia "does not know or will not admit that it is part of a fallen world...is the mythical prototype of that self-lacerating dream of the American liberal-progressive mind, the mild and infantile utopia of the 'common man,' whose dangers Melville was concerned to warn us against"; the culture of Marnoo and Jack Chase is, of course, the true one, "based on the ideals of brotherhood and fatherhood, the democratic virtues of freedom and humanitarianism and the aristocratic virtues of order, authority, art, and heroism," accepting the "full tragic implications of its humanity." The plot of this historical-cultural myth is "that experience continuously presents itself to the young man as partaking of an innocent and unfallen nature."

Ishmael, for example, is one of the true heroes, undergoing his test through experience, seeking to become the complete Promethean-Oedipean man, in whom father and son are reconciled, not being misled by the man-of-war, capitalist-military way of life, the primitive Typee way of
life, nor the unresolved liberal-progressive utopian way of life represented by Sernenia.28

Using Toynbee as a guide, Chase proceeds to adduce the symbols which are involved in Melville's myth. These symbols are representative of "withdrawal and return,"29 and they parallel quite closely the symbols of the Fall and the Search. Once more, Chase tries to show how Melville, in the use of these symbols, was judging our society. For "Melville's most decisive criticism of American society was that on the left and on the right, among the abolitionists and transcendentalists and among the capitalists, it was in danger of destroying itself by surrendering to bland and harmless-looking icons of 'withdrawal.' He feared that Americans were abandoning the Promethean spirit of adventure and creativity which would see it through the arduous transits between the extremities of human experience and were idolizing instead the spirit of 'confidence'."

With this analysis of the Melvillean myth established in the light of the first five books - whose general theme is "the education of the young man" - Chase proceeds to interpret Moby-Dick. With respect to this book, Chase deals only briefly with "the images of world-historical tragedy." His emphasis here is on the influences and contributions which the folk tales and legends of New England and the frontier gave

28. For a rather bizarre treatment of Ishmael and how his association with Queequeg contradicts "the national myth of masculine love," see Leslie Fiedler, "Come Back to the Raft Ag'in, Huck Honey," Partisan Review, XV (June, 1948).

29. The entire concept of "withdrawal and return," Chase tells us, is derived from Toynbee. See Herman Melville, n. p. 36.
to the book, and it is in this emphasis that Chase feels he is continuing the work of Constance Rourke. After sketching the background of the American folk hero of the 1830's and 1840's, Chase attributes two original folk figures to Melville: the Yankee hero and the Western hero. Frequently, there is a combination of both. Chase also dwells on the humor in Melville's use of American folklore, particularly the humor which is derived from "tall tales." These tales can be divided into four types: (1) simple exaggeration of size, strength, or ferocity; (2) supernatural or magical tales; (3) whimsy which brings out the sheer impracticalness and fancifulness of human activity; and (4) tales which suddenly upset the laws of nature. Chase traces these four types as they are evidenced in Moby-Dick. Other aspects of the humor are pointed out; the humorous characters, for example, of Flask and Stubb, and certain incidents in which these characters are involved. A short section is devoted to the ballyhoo influences of P. T. Barnum, and Chase claims that it does no disservice to admit that Moby-Dick "is a literary-scientific extravaganza with very clear affinities to Barnum's showmanship." Nor is Melville's style completely neglected. Many critics have pointed out the English models whom Melville frequently attempted to emulate; Chase, however, is probably the first critic to indicate the American influences on Melville's style, "the popular American rhetoric and oratory of his own time." Through citing and analyzing passages, Chase illustrates these influences, particularly the

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30. For discussion of Constance Rourke, cf. Chapter IV.
American tendency of the period to use "the style of oratorical cele-
bration of fact."

Chase concludes his treatment of *Moby-Dick* by saying that it "is
an American epic; so far it seems to be the American epic." And, he
adds, there is a received and implicit myth in *Moby-Dick*. "The high
perception makes it into the universal allegory; the low enjoying power
establishes it as the folk foundation. The myth is capitalism." And
Chase tries to show how the whaling voyage becomes "a saga of the ex-
plotiation of nature and man for profit or for righteousness (for our
American capitalism has had spiritual motives and spiritual weaknesses
and strengths never imagined by Marx)."

*Pierre*, according to Chase, is a novel of two main themes - incest
and parricide. In addition, the character of Pierre, like that of Ahab,
is a false Prometheus; but unlike Ahab, who dies "a sultanic Prometheus,"
Pierre dies "like a stricken hermaphrodite, chained to his Promethean
stone, writhing his soft limbs and screaming with childish rage at his
ambiguous father." It is Chase's contention that Melville, aware that
this novel, in its compositional stage, was failing, tried to rescue it
from failure by the use of complicated symbols. With much reliance on
both Freud and mythology, Chase endeavors to explain the multiplicity of
these symbols. The Apocalypse, he tells us, is especially important in
the symbolic interpretation, and he presents an ingenious paradigm of
the characters in *Pierre* and their biblical equivalents. On the note
that Melville had reached out in *Pierre* for two hierarchical images,
Christ and Prometheus, and that he had not quite achieved his reach in
this particular novel, Chase ends his discussion of *Pierre*. 
In the chapter which follows that on *Pierre*, Chase discusses both Melville's short stories and the short novel *Israel Potter*. The discussion is in the same vein as that in the previous chapters, with emphasis on myth and symbol, and the relationship between these and American folklore. It is in his chapter on *The Confidence Man* in which Chase attempts sociological insights. Much of this chapter, it must be noted, had previously appeared in an article in the *Kenyon Review*. Chase bases the general misunderstanding and underestimation of the novel on the fact that it had never before been considered as a book of folklore. Considering it as such, Chase launches into a most ingenious analysis. The peroration of the chapter, however, is Chase's description of *The Confidence Man* as an attack on liberalism; "worse yet, it is an attack by a liberal."

The confidence man, that beautifully conceived and executed phantasm, represents all that was wrong with the liberalism of Melville's day: its commercialism, its superficiality, its philistinism, its spurious optimism, its glad-handed self-congratulation, its wish-fulfilling vagueness, its fondness for uplifting rhetoric, its betrayal of all tragic or exalted human and natural values, its easy belief in automatic progress.32

Chase may have a point here, but, through Melville, he proceeds to attack what he describes as the contemporary false liberal. "Today," he writes, "the peddler of spiritualism, hybrid corn, persecuted Christliness, little people-ism, and short cuts to international felicity is fully as busy as was the peddler of bogus transcendentalism, the Omni-Balsamic Reinvigorator, hermaphrodite saintliness, and universal easy chairs." And he attempts to establish a sort of credo which the

32. Ibid., p. 206.
true liberal of today must follow. "The first condition of survival
for any body of thought is the lively faculty of self-criticism.... On
this score, The Confidence Man ought to be scripture."

Chase's interpretation of Billy Budd has also appeared in print
before his book was published. Chase dissents from the usual appraisal
of Billy Budd as Melville's definitive "moral statement." Such a state­
ment, he contends, had been made in Moby Dick, The Confidence Man, and
Clarel, whereas the moral situation in Billy Budd is deeply equivocal.
Billy Budd, he tells us, is pre-eminently the beautiful boy of the liber­
al-progressive myth, the figure who gets "pushed around", the figure "to
whom things happen." His suffering and death are without moral content.
And Claggart, in this tale, is, like the confidence man, another false
liberal, the liberal who is out to destroy moral distinctions.

Chase's book and his method have already been the butt of severe
criticism. Thorp, for example, described the book as an "energetic up­
hill and down-dale myth hunt," but pointed out that the sociological
criticism of The Confidence Man is excellent. Newton Arvin, David
Aaron, and Robert Gorham Davis in a joint letter to the Partisan Review
protested against Chase's interpretation of Claggart as the "false
liberal." Perhaps the most cogent criticism of Chase has been made by
Kazin, who believes that Chase errs in making Melville a scripture for
the New Liberalism. "The great weakness of the myth approach in criti­
cism," Kazin writes, "is that it freezes man to the universe, for by

33. Richard Chase, "Dissent on Billy Budd," Partisan Review, XV
(Nov., 1948).
34. Willard Thorp, "Review of Herman Melville," AL, XXII (Nov.,
1950) 357.
showing man everywhere to be the same, it reduces history to an illustration. The great weakness of the folklore approach is that it shows man only as a type or costume of his local culture. In the one history becomes a figure of speech; in the other man, himself. In addition, one might point out, both of these approaches fail in tackling aesthetic questions. It is Chase's conviction, of course, that myth is art. But on the complex question of how it is art, or what qualities serve to make it art, Chase is silent. Despite their failings, the New Critics have at least attempted to answer this question. It is unfortunate that Chase, who uses the method of exegesis, should have gone so far astray as to lose sight of the artistic and literary qualities of the work he deals with.

On the other hand, his method is in the direction of pluralism. His primary concentration is on myth, but it is not myth alone that interests him; he understands that myth has its basis in history, anthropology, and psychology. Nor is he averse to making sociological judgments - witness his analysis of The Confidence Man. He sees, also, the necessity of a moral element in literature. Thus, despite, his neglect of the aesthetic questions, Chase tries to combine interpretations. If the result is frequently confused, or certain of his interpretations are so extreme as to border on absurdity, the fault is that Chase himself has not as yet assimilated the complex implications of a pluralistic method.

The book which, thus far, shows the best command of the pluralistic method, and which critics have almost unanimously agreed is the

most intelligent and sensitive work to appear on Melville in recent
years is Newton Arvin's *Melville*. Presumably a critical biography,
this book illustrates what might be done in the skillful combining of
literary history and literary criticism. For, although the book is un-
documented, one might venture to say that, from the fund of relevant
information it contains and touches upon, the author must have read
every important work of Melville scholarship produced since the revival
began; in addition, there is evidence of close textual reading and a use
of psychological, sociological, and philosophical insights that show a
fine sensitivity and an excellent balance of judgment. Both literary
scholars and literary critics have accorded this book praise.

Three illuminating articles on Melville, written by Arvin, heralded
this work: one, an article on Melville's shorter poems; another on Mel­
ville and the Gothic novel; and another, included as a chapter in the
book, which is an exegesis of one of Melville's most troublesome works,
*Mardi*. The book itself is the culmination of Arvin's intensive work
on Melville, of which the articles are exciting precursors.

Although there are certain overlappings and cross references, the
structure of Arvin's book is, on the whole, simple and clear-cut. The
first two chapters, for example, are almost strictly biographical, cover­
ing Melville's ancestry, his early years, and his youth up to the time

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37. "Melville's Shorter Poems," *Partisan Review*, XVI (Oct., 1949);
"Melville and the Gothic Novel," *New England Quarterly*, XXII (March, 1949);
"Melville's Mardi," *American Quarterly*, II (Spring, 1950). For discussion
of Melville and the Gothic conventions of, passages on Blackmur, Chapter
VII. The article on Mardi is particularly interesting in that it also dis­
cusses Melville's flower symbols. For further discussion of this subject,
of his discharge from the Navy. The following chapter is critical, dealing with Melville's first five books. Chapter Three returns to biography, and Chapter Four is devoted entirely to Moby Dick. The fifth chapter is again biographical, the sixth contains criticism of the later prose works, including Pierre and The Confidence Man, and the final chapter is devoted to Melville's poetry, although the biographical threads are also somewhat tied together in this chapter. Arvin's prose style, in addition to his organization, demands commendation. Few critics of Melville, indeed few writers of modern criticism, are so endowed as Arvin is with a style so lucid and so fluent. His paragraphs and sentences, his scrupulous diction indicate a discipline in and respect for language that is seldom encountered among modern critics. Nor is his style journalistic or reportorial; it is fused with precise and carefully chosen metaphors and images, appropriate and relevant allusions. So facile is his writing that it tends to make his work read practically like fiction, although, naturally, his meticulous selection and placing of facts adds to this illusion. There is in this book that intense effort of an artist which creates the impression, almost, of artlessness.

The factual information included in the chapters which are biographical manifests Arvin's careful scholarship. There are no inaccuracies; all the important known facts of Melville's ancestry and his

38. In a conversation with Arvin, he told this writer that Jay Leyda, whose forthcoming Melville Log gives the details of Melville's day to day existence, had pointed out to him an erroneous date. Melville, Leyda informed Arvin, could not have sailed on the St. Lawrence in "the fall of 1844," as Arvin had written. Leyda had discovered that the St. Lawrence that year had sailed in the Winter of 1845.
life are included. Mixed in with biographical data are passages in
which Arvin sketches the historical background of the times, passages,
for example, in which he tells us of the kind of America in which Mel-
ville grew up, of the literary life of New York in which Melville could
have participated but did not. Arvin, however, is not writing literary
biography nor literary history. He is too acutely aware of the rele-
vance and importance of sociology and psychology to biography for that.
Thus, we have interpretations of the facts that are markedly Freudian,
for Arvin has both respect for and knowledge of the psychoanalytic
method; and we have sociological insights that reflect both the back-
ground of Melville and Melville's own sociological opinions.

This psychoanalytic and sociological interpretation is introduced
in the first chapters and further developed in the subsequent chapters
which are biographical. Although Arvin uses these methods to round out
his biographical figure of Melville, he also uses them as they are par-
ticularly conducive to an understanding of the works themselves, as
critical tools. With respect to psychoanalytic interpretation, however,
Arvin makes his deductions both from biographical fact and from a close
study of textual symbols and images. He seems to rely more and more
on texts for his Freudian insights.

The social and economic background of Melville's family is presented
in the first chapter. The family, Arvin tells us, belonged to the
merchant class, a class which, during Melville's early life, was already
passing from the economic scene. "The economic center of gravity was
shifting to the newer class of millowners, ironmasters, and transportation
magnates; and the Melvilles were unwittingly carried under by the de-
cline of at least a modest patriciate and the rise of a new and more
powerful plebes." Even the Gansevoorts, Melville's maternal family,
whose status was not that of seaport merchants but of the Hudson Valley
landlords and patroons, were affected by the "quiet, inconspicuous
ebbing of the social and economic tide." Thus, Arvin establishes ini-
tially the sociological pattern of Melville's life. "With Melville,"
he writes, "...one has to reckon with the psychology, the tormented
psychology, of the decayed patrician."

The problems of economic and social status are further touched up-
on in the subsequent biographical chapters. There is, for example,
constant allusion to the straitened circumstances of Melville's family,
and the effects of this upon his social and intellectual development.
His own economic trials are depicted, the fact that after a brief period
of financial success, he lived almost habitually on "intimate terms with
genteel indigence." His financial responsibilities were too great for
him to live on the scale his social status demanded. "It was simply
not possible," Arvin writes, "for an American writer at that time to
live on such a scale and to live without worry..." 39

It is probably the psychoanalytic method of which Arvin makes the
most use. This use also begins in the initial chapter, in which the re-
relationship between Melville and his mother is set forth. Melville's
strong attachment to his father, his father's death - "an emotional
crisis from whose effects he was never to be wholly free" - his rather

39. The whole problem of Melville's financial status is discussed in
the excellent article by William Charvat, "Melville's Income," AL, XV
(Nov., 1943).
cold rejection by his mother in favor of his older brother - these all become evidence for Arvin's theory that Melville suffered from an Oedipal abnormality which gradually developed into inactive sexual ambivalence. In all discussions of this subject, Arvin is most circumspect. But through strong suggestion, through constant interpretation of his evidence, he builds a persuasive case. Again and again we are made aware of the influence of Freud on Arvin's interpretation; Arvin's sources are not only factual but literary. There is, for example, the passage which treats Melville's adolescence in which Arvin quotes Melville's phrase "the preliminary love-friendship of boys"; there are the discussions of Melville's friendship with Jack Chase, with Hawthorne; there is the confused theme of incest in Pierre, the factual slip of Melville in signing his mother's name, instead of his wife's, on the birth certificate of his son Stanwix; there is, finally, the whole level of interpretation which Arvin gives to Moby-Dick in which Melville's psychological nature is analyzed. All of these attest to Arvin's involvement with psychoanalytic criticism.

Nor can one ignore Arvin's aesthetic appraisals. In this respect he follows closely the New Criticism. Indeed, very much like Matthiessen but not on so large a scale, he traces Melville's development as an artist. Even here his scholarship is apparent, for with almost every book he discusses, he includes the facts which literary historians have unearthed, the sources, the direct and indirect influences. Gradually, in his discussion of the first five novels especially, he shows how Melville matured as an artist in the learning of his craft, and in
Moby-Dick he shows us, through close reading, how Melville achieved his greatest power as a writer. As for the novels produced after Moby-Dick, he endeavors to analyze their aesthetic failure in the light of Melville's previous development. Nor is this accomplished through generalization. Arvin examines such New Critical elements as "structure and texture," he dwells at length on Melville's language, discussing not only the images, but also the nouns, adjectives, and verbs.

Finally, we must not omit Arvin's religious and philosophical criticism. Melville's religious background is discussed in the first chapter, and Melville's religious and philosophical ideas are integrated in the other levels of analysis. Moby-Dick, for example, is analyzed on one level from a moral point of view.

It is Moby-Dick, perhaps, which best illustrates Arvin's use of a pluralistic method. The chapter treating this novel is long, covering some fifty pages; it is, however, one of the most comprehensive pieces yet produced on the book. Arvin begins the chapter by discussing its literary sources, pointing out what Matthiessen had already treated - Melville's capacity to weld his own experiences and his reading into integrated art. Arvin also mentions the profound influence of Shakespeare, but adds also, that the Lusiads of Camoens had almost as important an influence on the tale. Next comes an analysis of the "structure and texture" of the book, with passages that touch upon the organizational problems which confronted Melville; included in this analysis is a discussion of both the tragic and epic qualities of the work, and Arvin seems to incline more to the opinion that the book is epic rather than tragedy.
For analogies as to form, he tells us, "it is not to tragedy that one should turn but to heroic poetry, to the epic."

Arvin's treatment of the style of the novel is also inclusive. He discusses in detail Melville's imagery, his use of nature - birds and beasts and fish - to enhance his similes and metaphors, the imagery of armies and warfare that is recurrent throughout the book. He discusses the metaphysical aspects of style, its resemblances to certain seventeenth century and twentieth century poetry. In treating the "variety and the idiosyncrasy with which it is animated," Arvin tackles the very parts of speech of the novel, pointing out the abundance of unfamiliar nouns, adjectives, and verbs which give the style "its particular unconformable character."

Next comes a discussion of whether the book is an allegory or whether it should be considered more simply in terms of its symbols. Arvin is disinclined to call it an allegory and describes it as a "symbolist prose romance." "Its leading images are symbols in the strict sense," he tells us, "not allegorical devices or emblems." He presents cogent reasons for his opinion:

...symbols in the sense that their primal origins are in the unconscious, however consciously they have been organized or controlled; that on this account they transcend the personal and local and become archetypal in their range and depth; that they are inexplicit, polysemantic, and never quite exhaustible in their meanings. 40

Finally, after this inclusive treatment of form, Arvin arrives at his analysis of content. For this he adopts Dante's "fourfold

40. Arvin, Melville, p. 167. For a similar conclusion, cf. discussion of Hull article, Chapter VII.
interpretation (which is of course inapplicable)" and suggests "that the intricacies of the book may be reduced to four planes of significance: that these may be called the literal, the oneiric or psychological, the moral, and the mythic."

The remainder of the chapter is devoted to the four levels of interpretation. The literal level is passed over rapidly. The second level, the oneiric or psychological, is given more detailed attention. On this level, Arvin writes, the novel "is an oneiric or dreamlike projection of Melville's unconscious wishes and obscure inward contests. On one plane the book is this, and on that plane only." (The italics are Arvin's.) On this level, he continues, the book shares with a dream "its sources in the unconscious, its dependence on irrational symbols, and its power to give expression to deep, instinctive, irrational fears and desires."

Arvin, in this interpretation, links the psychoanalytic qualities of the tale with Melville's own psyche. In addition, he contrasts the character of Ahab and Ishmael, showing how they are both extensions of psychoanalytic malady. We are presented at the very outset, he tells us, with one dominating oneiric image, the image of self-destruction. This is presented in Ishmael, but as Ahab advances to the foerscene, the book may be said to move back and forth between two poles, "the suicidal wish, the longing for self-extinction, and its necessary antithesis, so deeply dependent upon it emotionally, the desire to inflict death upon what is, or what one imagines to be, the source of one's suffering."

Other Freudian symbols are discussed, Ahab's injury, which becomes
symbolical of male impotence, the bisexuality of some of Melville's descriptively imagery, and Moby Dick, whom, Arvin tells us, is "the archetypal Parent." The entire interpretation is summed up thus:

In his role of archetypal parent, Moby Dick is the object of an excessive and an eventually crippling love, as Maria Melville was for her son; and the consequence is the vital injury symbolized by the loss of Ahab's leg, an injury to the capacity for heterosexual love. Both Ahab and Ishmael suffer in this way, but Ahab far more terribly of the two. Ishmael, by somehow preserving a complexity of feeling toward the White Whale, has preserved also his capacity for selfless love even though this is directed toward his own sex and even toward a member of his own sex, Queequeg, who embodies both the grandeur and the limitations of the primitive, the pre-rational, the instinctive.  

On the moral level, Arvin discusses the tragic implications of Ahab's plight. But this discussion is not without Freudian overtones. For, Arvin says, Ahab is not only the sick self; he is, for his time and place, the noblest and most complete embodiment of the tragic hero. "He is modern man, and particularly American man, in his role as 'free' and 'independent' Individual, as self-sustaining and self-assertive Ego, of forcible will and unbending purpose all compact, inflexible, unpitying, and fell, but enlarged by both his vices and his strength to dimensions of legendary grandeur." Like Percival and Auden, Arvin takes up the dilemma in Ahab's character of self-assertion and self-submission, but unlike them, he claims that this dilemma affords for the reader the sense of "tragic release." He sees the "Christian sin of pride" in Ahab, his lack of Christian humility; he also tells us that there are indications of Melville's belief in Original Sin, that behind Melville's

41. Ibid., p. 174.
expression of "human solidarity as a priceless good," is the gravity and tenderness of religious feeling, if not religious belief. But he never goes behind his statement concerning "tragic release" into any kind of resolution to the moral problems of the book. Like Percival and Auden, however, he sees Ishmael as the figure who at least points to the moral direction. For Ishmael feels how far he is from having a perfectly free will, how dependent he is on the mistakes and the misfortunes of other men. "Yet the two kinds of dependency are merged into one, and it is the creative dependency of fraternal emotion that prevails."

The most comprehensive quality of the book, in Arvin's opinion is that "quality that can only be called mythic." It is the whale, he believes, which embodies most fully Melville's effort to construct an American myth.

The White Whale is a grandiose mythic presentation of what is godlike in the cosmos as this could be intuited by a painfully meditative and passionately honest poetic mind in the heart of the American nineteenth century. Moby Dick is an Animal God such as only the imagination of that century in the Western world could have conceived and projected; a god in Nature, not beyond it; an immanent god in some sense, not a transcendent one; an emergent deity, not an Absolute; a deity that embodies the physical vastness of the cosmos in space and time as astronomy have exhibited it; a deity that represents not transcendent purpose and conscious design but mana; energy; power - the half-conscious, half-unconscious power of blind restless, perhaps purposeless, but always overbearing and unconquerable force.42

In this conception, Arvin tells us, "the mating of romantic idealism with the masculine sense of reality in Melville's mind has begotten

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42. Ibid., p. 189.
here a myth that approaches, if it does not quite overtake, a naturalistic theism." The answer to the problem of how man is to accept this "deific principle in nature" is presented to us, according to Arvin, in the symbol of the doubloon that Ahab nails to the mast. For this is the symbol of the Double Vision, the vision which gives man insight into the acceptance of both the good and the evil which must spring from this mythic concept. Here we have Arvin's ultimate resolution to the dilemma posed in his analysis of the moral level. And to corroborate it, he cites, as Auden cites, Father Happle's sermon, "all things that God would have us do are hard for us to do....And if we obey God, we must disobey ourselves, wherein the hardness of obeying God consists." The "will" of nature, Arvin concludes, even if there is something godlike in it, is hardly synonymous with God's will in the Christian sense. Yet Moby Dick seems to say that one might arrive at a kind of peace by obeying it.

In the light of Arvin's magnificent accomplishment in this book, the few criticisms one might venture are negligible. He has fused so well the various methods of interpretation that to criticize him on that account would be presumptuous. No volume on Melville, and few, if any, on other critical subjects has achieved such scope as his. The question arises, however, of whether, in attempting so much, the book is superficial. Superficiality is a term that should strictly be used by the specialist, and it must be the specialist, therefore, who can answer the question. Thus far, the literary historian has found no fault with it; the sociologist will not find enough in it to cavil about; Arvin's
philosophical interpretations are certainly as valid as Percival's or Auden's.

It is perhaps, the psychologist who might find points of disagreement. The conservative Freudian might find little objection. But psychology has developed since Freud, and there has been forming, within recent years, an entire new school of Freudian revisionists. The general effort in this development has been toward a closer integration of psychology and sociology, with an emphasis on cultural determinants rather than biological. Although still too recent to have had any profound effect on literary criticism, a knowledge and possible use of the theories and discoveries of the revisionists might have helped Arvin in his task. The few adverse criticisms which the book has received have been directed toward his psychoanalytic insights, his strong reliance on Freud. A more thorough knowledge of the work, methods, and aims of such social psychologists as Horney, Fromm, Alexander, Sullivan, might have enabled Arvin to circumvent such criticism. And certainly it would have enabled him to better integrate his psychological and sociological insights, to mitigate the Freudian influence so that there would be a broader realization on the part of his reader that Melville's psychological conditioning was part and parcel of his social and cultural conditioning.

Arvin's volume, however, is the prime example of the direction of twentieth century criticism. It attempts and, indeed, succeeds in drawing together various areas of knowledge, showing the complex relationships of such areas, and at the same time, indicating that each area is distinct in itself. This is essentially the job of pluralistic criticism.
Bibliography

The text used for this study is the Standard Edition, 16 vols. (London, 1922-24). The three published volumes of the collected edition, now in the course of publication, have also been used. They are: **Collected Poems**, edited by Howard P. Vincent; **The Piazza Tales**, edited by Egbert S. Oliver; and **Pierre**, edited by Henry A. Murray.

Selective Bibliography

I. Melville Bibliography:

As yet there is no complete Melville bibliography. The following works contain much of the material on Melville which has been used in this dissertation. Material which is not contained in these works has been added. Repetition of listings has been, as much as possible, avoided.

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II. Bibliography of Twentieth Century Criticism

The following is a list in alphabetical order of material used in this dissertation which pertains to twentieth century criticism. Included in this list are works on general literary history, literary criticism, literary histories of American literature, and such works which provide background material for psychological, sociological, philosophical, and New Critical interpretations of works of literature.


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I, Bernard Michael Wolpert, was born in New York, New York, October 28, 1915. I received my secondary school education at West Orange High School, West Orange, N. J. My undergraduate training was obtained at the State Teachers College, Mansfield, Pa., from which I received the degree Bachelor of Science in Education in 1937. From the University of Michigan, I received the degree Master of Arts in 1938. I remained at the University of Michigan until 1941, continuing my graduate studies for the Doctor of Philosophy degree and acting in the capacity of graduate assistant. After leaving the University of Michigan, I was employed in an editorial capacity on country weeklies in New Jersey until September, 1942, when I was inducted into the Armed Services. My academic training during my service in the Army included participation in the Armed Services Training Program at Stanford University, and a three month's course in French History and Civilization at the Sorbonne, Paris. I received an appointment as instructor in the Department of English at The Ohio State University in 1946. I hold this appointment until 1951, except for one year when I served as a graduate assistant in order to complete my course work for the Doctor of Philosophy degree.