

## PREFACE

This book examines Herman Melville's Typee, White Jacket, Moby-Dick, and Pierre in order to determine their author's developing sense of the possible relations between the self and its surrounding world. By self I mean everything that an individual understands to be his alone. The self is the Ego, that particular combination of body and mind which distinguishes him from the rest of life. By world I mean that otherness which, in its obdurate existence, resists the impositions of his identity. For Melville--as for every other American and English Romantic--the problem of subjectivity is the central issue upon whose resolution the fate of Man depends. An active self can take its rightful place in the world, can assert its desires, and can control its destiny. A passive self risks becoming the victim of its neighbors, being frustrated in its affective life, and falling defenseless against its doom. Holding with Blake and Emerson that Man is a god in ruins, Melville tests out the possibilities for His reconstruction.

The critical term in Melville's equation between the self and the world is located at their common boundary. The human body is the boundary between the I and the other. Identified with the Me and yet belonging to the Not Me as well, the body is for Melville the disputed ground upon which the question of human subjectivity must be decided. The degree to which the self can achieve its incarnation in the body will determine its position in and relation to the world. This hoped-for mending of the human integral is no easy matter. Thoreau, facing the inhumanities of Mount Ktaadn as Melville was to face Mount Greylock's central majesty, tells us why:

What is it to be admitted to a museum, to see a myriad of particular things, compared with being shown some star's surface, some hard matter in its home! I stand in awe of my body, this matter to which I am bound has become so strange to me. I fear not spirits, ghosts, of which I am one,--

that my body might,--but I fear bodies, I tremble to meet them. What is this Titan that has possession of me? Talk of mysteries!--Think of our life in nature,--daily to be shown matter, to come into contact with it,--rocks, trees, wind on our cheeks! the solid earth! the actual world! the common sense! Contact! Contact! Who are we? where are we?<sup>1</sup>

In Typee, White Jacket, Moby-Dick, and Pierre, Melville tries to master Thoreau's problem. In each of them he records a failure. It is this failure I want to understand. The humanistic aspiration embodied in the image of a new Adam envisions a free and creative life in a world unencumbered by false contraries -- whether of Mind and Matter, God and Man, Justice and Power, or Art and Life. Its disappointment returns men to the bondage of a life not their own--a life whose principle is Mystery and whose agent is Force.

In order to understand Melville's desire for and eventual despair of human coherence, we must consider the way his characters experience their world. It is my belief that this experience is structured through the author's use of a set of symbols, symbols which are finally located in the sensory life of the human body. These symbols form an analogical system of paired opposites that comprise all possible states of the body and which, when understood, reveal an individual's mode of being in his world. Of particular importance to my reading of this system are Melville's concepts of motion and stasis, his images of the upright and the prostrate figure, his delineation of the body's internal and external space, and his intuition of the dual function of the senses.

My treatment of the issues involved in Melville's definition of the self, the body, and the world is informed by several lines of inquiry. For my understanding of the development and significance of perception in the early child I am particularly indebted to the work of Ernest Schachtel, Rene Spitz and Ashley Montagu. My psychological perspective derives from

the studies that R. D. Laing, Erwin Straus, Ludwig Binswanger, J. H. Van den Berg, Wilhelm Reich, and Alexander Lowen have made on the causes and consequences of psychosomatic disturbance within the self. In order to relate these issues in Melville's work to the general concerns of his literary and philosophical tradition, I have relied upon critiques of the Romantics and Romanticism provided by Harold Bloom, F. O. Matthiessen, Geoffrey Hartman, Lionel Trilling, Northrop Frye, and Quentin Anderson. And finally, I would hope that my own work will be a contribution to the body of Melville criticism that is defined by the work of M. O. Percival, David Brion Davis, Merlin Bowen, Henry Murray, Charles Olson, R. W. B. Lewis, Paul Brodtkorb, Jr., and Milton Stern.

The style of my essay represents an effort to combine two kinds of discourse in the exploration of a single subject. The first is dramatic, the second discursive. Both begin from an idea of criticism that J. Hillis Miller offers in his preface to The Disappearance of God:

The comprehension of literature is a process of what Gabriel Marcel calls 'intersubjectivity.' Criticism demands above all that gift of participation, that power to put oneself within the life of another person, which Keats called negative capability. If literature is a form of consciousness the task of the critic is to identify himself with the subjectivity expressed in the words, to relive that life from the inside, and to constitute it anew in his criticism.<sup>2</sup>

The critic must both observe and also participate in the action he wishes to understand. In order to do justice to both of these necessities, I have adopted a mode of imaginative re-presentation by which I make my discursive argument in dramatic terms. Once having cleared the center of my stage for a reading of Melville's story, I then use my notes as its system of illumination.

In closing, I would like to acknowledge some longstanding debts. First, I thank Harold Bloom for his great enthusiasm and even greater patience as my advisor in this project. I studied Blake with Bloom, and it was the most memorable experience in my education as a reader. Then there is Lawrence W. Chisolm who, both as a teacher and a colleague, opened up worlds to me. Finally there are my father and mother, Herbert Blau and Beatrice Manley, whose work in the theater forms something of a subtext for this book.

In addition, I would like to thank Kathleen Woodward and Leon Schor for the many valuable stylistic suggestions they offered. Georgeann Ray prepared the manuscript with wonderful goodhearted diligence. And, speaking of goodheartedness, Heide Blau put up with me all the while I struggled with it.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this book to the memory of my friend Michel Benamou (1929-1978). Here was the true sailor-scholar at last. I hope he would have liked this work.

A Note on the Editions of Melville's Works Used in This Study

The Works of Herman Melville, Standard Edition, 16 vols. (New York: Russell & Russell, 1963) has been used for citations from Typee, Mardi, Moby-Dick, and The Confidence Man. References to Redburn, White Jacket, Pierre, and The Piazza Tales have been drawn from the original Standard Edition (London: Constable and Company, 1922-24). Since the text and pagination of these two editions are identical, the reader can refer to either one. For citations from Melville's poetry, I have used Howard P. Vincent's edition of The Collected Poems (Chicago: Hendricks House, 1947). My reading of Billy Budd is based on the Harrison Harford-Merton Sealts, Jr. edition of that story (Phoenix Books. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966).