

## UNIT 4

### HERMAN MELVILLE (1819-1891)

#### *BARTLEBY, THE SCRIVENER & THE BELL-TOWER*

### I. INTRODUCTION: BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES.

Herman Melville began his life with everything in his favor: two Revolutionary heroes for grandfathers. The Melvill family (e added in 1830s) was solidly established in Boston and the Gansevoorts were linked to the greatest Dutch patroon families of New York. As the third oldest of eight children born between 1815 and 1830, Herman Melville spent his early childhood in luxury. But in 1832 Allan Melville suddenly fell ill and died in a delirium that some in the family thought of as madness. He was many thousands of dollars in debt, and his family became dependent on the conscientious(concienzudo) but finely calculated care of the Gansevoorts, especially Melville's uncle Peter.

Melville clerked for two years at a bank. Then he worked some years at his brother Gansevoort's fur-cap store in Albany. In 1837, he spent some months in Pittsfield, Mass., running his uncle Thomas Melvill's farm after his uncle left for Illinois. Then he taught in a country school near Pittsfield, took some courses in surveying(agrimensura, topografía) and engineering but in the aftermath of the Panic of 1837 found no work. He signed on a voyage to and from Liverpool in 1839, and the next year he took the desperate measure on a whaler for the South Seas.

In the summer of 1842 Melville and a shipmate, Toby Greene, jumped ship(desertó) at Nukahiva, in the Marquesas: and for a few weeks Melville

lived with a tribe quite untainted (no corrompida) by Western civilization; late in life he felt he had lived in the world's last Eden. Picked up by an Australian whaler less than a month after he deserted, he took part in a comic opera (opereta) mutiny and was imprisoned by the British consul in Tahiti, along with a learned (erudito) friend. Shipping on a Nantucket whaler at Eimeo, Melville was discharged in Lahaina, then knocked about Honolulu for a few months before signing on the frigate *United States* as an ordinary seaman. He later said that from that year, beginning August 1, 1844, he dated his life. He apparently did not look for a job after his discharge from the navy in Boston on October 14.

*Typee* was published early in 1846. As the earliest personal account of the South Seas to have the readability and suspense of adventure fiction, it made a great sensation, capturing the imagination of both the literary reviewers and the reading public with the surefire (de éxito seguro) combination of anthropological novelty and what reviewers regularly tagged (remembering *Othello*) as "hair-breadth 'scapes" (por los pelos). In the middle of the publicity over *Typee*, Gansevoort [his brother] died suddenly at the age of thirty.

Melville immediately turned to the composition of a sequel, *Omoo*, the account of his beachcombing (vagabundear) in Tahiti and Eimeo. *Omoo* lacked the suspense of *Typee*, but it was a more polished performance of a writer far surer of himself. In the flush of his success with *Omoo*, Melville married Elizabeth Knapp Shaw on August 4, 1847, three days after his twenty-eight birthday. After the marriage, his father-in-law, Lemuel Shaw provided several advances against his daughter's inheritance, allowing Melville to establish himself in Manhattan with his bride, his younger brother Allan, Allan's own bride, his mother, four sisters, and his new manuscript. Melville was well on

his way to becoming a literary figure of New York City, a resident authority and reviewer of books on nautical matters and inland exploration, and a reliable dispenser of vigorous, humorous, authentic tales of exotic adventure.

Instead, the Polynesian adventurer discovered the world of the mind and the aesthetic range of the English language as he worked his way into his third book, *Mardi*, which was published in April 1849. Early in 1849, during the interval between completing *Mardi* and its publication, Melville's first son, Malcolm, was born. Accepting the responsibilities of a new father, he wrote *Redburn* (1849) and *White-Jacket* (1850) as acts of contrition (penitence), both ground out (provocados) during one four-month period in the 1849 summer swelter (sofocante) of a cholera-ridden New York City. *Redburn*, written in the first person by the middle-aged, sentimental Wellingborough Redburn, is the story of the narrator's first voyage to and from Liverpool, though *Redburn* is hardly more than a boy while Melville was twenty.

Long before *Redburn* was published, Melville had completed *White-Jacket*, which was based on his experiences on the man-of-war (buque de guerra) *United States* in 1843 and 1844, supplemented by lavish (profusos, abundantes) borrowings from earlier nautical literature. In 1850 the reviews were good which came from England and in March the American edition was published to similar acclaim. In a buoyant (optimista) mood, sure of his powers and sure of his ability to keep an audience, Melville began his whaling book. By mid-1851 its working title was *The Whale*, which remained for the English edition: *Moby-Dick* was a last-minute substitute for the American edition.

Like *Mardi*, *Moby-Dick* was luxury for Melville, an enormous, slowly written book. He was in an exalted mood when he met Nathaniel Hawthorne. In praising Hawthorne's achievements, he was honoring what he knew lay in his own manuscript. In *Moby-Dick*, Melville gave dark, "Shakespearean"

truths about human nature and the universe that "in this world of lies" can be told only "covertly, and by snatches(arrebatos)". Out of his failures with *Mardi* and the slave labor of the next two books, Melville had built a literary theory in which a writer worked simultaneously for two audiences, one composed of the mob, the other of "eagle-eyed" readers who perceive the true meaning of those passages that the author has "directly calculated to deceive – egregiously(atrozmente, notoriamente) deceive- the superficial skimmer of pages".

Still exultantly feeling his new powers, Melville moved his family to a farm near Pittsfield late in 1850. As he finished *Moby-Dick*, Melville was a family man whose household included his mother and sisters as well as a small child and a pregnant wife:

What I feel most moved to write, that is banned(desaparecido).--it will not pay. Yet, all together, write the other way I cannot. So the product is a final hash(confusion), and all my books are botches(malos). (A letter to Hawthorne)

Melville began working into *Pierre* (1851-2?) a sometimes wry(irónico, pervertido), sometimes recklessly(temeraria-, imprudentemente) bitter account of his own literary career, enlarging the work and wrecking whatever chance he had of making the work what he had hoped -as much more profound than *Moby-Dick* as the legendary Krakens are larger than whales. In 1853, Melville began writing short stories for two American monthlies, *Putnam's* and *Harper's*. By the spring of 1856 Melville had recovered from most of his mental, spiritual and physical agonies, but his economic distress was greater than ever. He underwent then a trip to Europe and the Levant from October 1856 to May 1857. In this decade Melville's adventuring had been inward - philosophical, metaphysical, psychological, and artistic.

Melville lectured in the East and Midwest for three seasons (1857-1860). He prepared a volume of poems and sailed on a voyage to San Francisco on a ship captained by his younger brother, Thomas. In 1861, his economic pressures began to ease and he moved with his family to Arrowhead, and then to Pittsfield and New York in 1863. *Battle Pieces*, a collection of War poems was casually reviewed and quickly forgotten. Melville took out(descargó) his frustrations on his family so much that for years his wife's half-brothers considered him insane as well as financially incompetent, and by early 1867 Melville's wife was also convinced of his insanity. In 1867 he obtained a political job in New York as deputy inspector of customs. After Malcolm killed himself late in 1867 at the age of eighteen the Melvilles closed ranks(cerrar filas). The poem *Clarel*, appeared in 1876 is America's most thoughtful contribution to the conflict of religious faith and Darwinian skepticism. Stanwix, the second Melville's son, drifted away without a career, beachcombing for a time in Central America, finally dying in San Francisco in 1886. The first daughter, called Bessie, developed severe arthritis, never married, and died in 1908. Only Frances married, and she lived until 1934, unable to recognize her father in the words of twentieth-century admirers and flatly refusing to talk about him. But through the 1880s Melville and his wife drew closer together.

He could relax with the intelligent good fellows of his imagination as he could never relax among the popular literary men of the 1870s and 1880s who now and then tried to patronize(provide aid to) him. In the mid-1880s one poem remained unfinished as well as *Billy Budd, Sailor*, his final study of the ambiguous claim of authority and individuality.

Before Melville's death in 1891, something like a revival of his fame was in progress, especially in England. American newspapers became

accustomed to reprinting and briefly commenting on extraordinary items in British periodicals. Melville's centennial in 1919 marked his revival, one of the most curious phenomena of American literary history, swept Melville from the ranks of the lesser American writers -lesser than James Fennimore Cooper and William Gilmore Simms- into the rarefied company of Shakespeare and a few fellow immortals of world literature so that only Whitman, James, and Faulkner are seen as his American equals. Visiting his grave in the Bronx, faithful to the Melville who speaks to them without the aid of an interpreter, this may be the true sign of the rarest literary immortality.

## II. MELVILLE'S STORIES: CONSTRUCTION & STYLE

More than one construction can be put on his stories. His characters signify something larger than more or less familiarly named individuals caught up in particular, if exceptional, circumstances. Melville deals in universals. His stories contain elements applicable to the situations of all men; his stories are poignant(*conmoveras*) to us all because each of us in some way finds them relevant. Life is not easy, nor is Melville, and the longer one peers into either, the more one sees. We can only wonder at the mysterious process, the end-products of which are works of art, and be grateful for it. He does not stoop to the posturing(*afectación*) and extravagance of Poe; he quietly sets a mood and then subtly compels(*obliga*) the reader to experience terrors that mount in intensity to an astonishing climax.

The focus on a single incident, superposition of narrative perspectives, characterization, use of historical sources and indirect allusions are manipulated as the obverse and reverse of the same narrative texture, which

tends to identify with the restrained vision, the bi-partite organization of the short stories, of the pairing of episodes, of the juxtaposition of narrative parts and, perhaps, of the global conception of the stories. Not only does Melville divide the stories into two parts, called “dyptics” by Jay Layda, but also many stories were composed two by two. ("Benito Cereno"- "The Bell-Tower") This pairing is, no doubt, due to the insistence of tackling the same existential problem from different angles and emphases set against each other, as if the art of narrative consisted of looking for complementary cognitive and imaginative clues, which lead to the same lasting and unquestionable truth. The symbolic idealization or the stereotyping common to the story characters (as in Irving or Hawthorne), as well as his compelling didacticism, are quite different from the psychological depths exhibited by Melville’s characters. We are closer to the 1880s realist humor in America than to the first-half-of-the-19th-century idealistic romanticism and of its sentimental heritage.

Melville’s current importance obviously depends on the irrefutable fact that he intentionally left his stories open ended and in some cases formally incongruous, for they introduce in their apparent simplicity questions susceptible to being redefined with more sense in some eras than in others. Perhaps, the historical distance gives us an excellent position to perceive the causes of his masking and his aesthetic distance between the formal structure and his intentions.

Some of the ingredients of Melville’s fascination stem from the formal suspension of critical moments, the peculiar interference of the omniscient narrator, the ironic and drastic changes, sudden and unexpected in the course of action, the unexplained breaks in the narrative structure and the symbolic representation of moral concepts.

His works are parables about the annihilation of man, explored via contrasts and inversions of the relation master-slave or law-individual. Manipulation of narrative perspectives, contraposition of various parts of the story and maintenance of suspense all respond to this same intention. It is necessary to take a look at the symbolic clues, the hidden allusions or the contrasts between different narrative perspectives, in order to discern how his mental play comes into action and how this is followed and pursued by the author's (and later the reader's) imaginative adventure. The development of the action is not able, nor intended, to guide us too far.

Formally, the stories are neither didactic nor do they attempt to illustrate moral truths. At least, in none of them the moral lesson is explicit, nor are the characters or the actions at the mercy of parallel allegorical schemes. Characters are humanly convincing and as such they were recognized by Melville's contemporaries. Their actions, eccentricities and impulses stay psychologically plausible. We arrive at moral conclusions by dramatic representation, not by allegorical illustration or by stereotyping. More important than the psychological portrait of the characters is the thought process they help to create in the narrative construction.

If these narrative perspectives lead to the reading and comprehension of the stories, then their narrative structures, apparently simple yet incoherent, are part of a cognitive exercise and an imaginative process which Melville considers inseparable from the metaphysical search. The stories are apparently difficult to comprehend but easy to read. Perhaps this contradiction (ought to) suppose that we should let ourselves be driven by the descriptive spell and the imaginative force, without our stopping to look for interpretive clues. Allusion and irony constantly threaten and force us to be aware of our situation as readers. If suspense and intrigue impel us forward,

once the story ends, various questions remain in our memory and mind, and we do not know how they emerged, or how they could come from stories apparently so simple. Such is the art of fiction and this is the aim of Melville's stories.

### III. MELVILLE'S WORLD VISION: PAGAN OR CHRISTIAN?

It might just be that Melville, of whom we actually know so little, especially of his latter days, had the desire and art to exploit the possibilities of situations, invented or acquired second-hand, that seemed to him most promising.

Whatever ultimate meaning Christian symbols held for Melville, this much is plain: the Trumpet call of faith -the paeon and laudamus(himnos de alegría y alabanza) 'Glory be to God in the highest!' which alone makes life worth living -is a subjective, not objective truth. 'By our own spirits are we deified', in Wordsworth's phrase, and this was applied by Melville equally to religion as to art.

Most of Melville's fiction is in Hemingway's phrase, of 'Men without Women'. Fatherless outcasts(proscritos) (from the runaway in *Typee*, to Ishmael in *Moby-Dick*, to 'the unblest(diabólico) foundling(inclusero)' Bannadonna, John Marr and Billy Budd) abound in Melville's fiction. The problem is ultimately not that of evil. It is that of innocence: how is the world to deal with these simpletons(inocentones) -Bartleby, Delano, the Chola Widow, Budd?

Like the last of his hard, moody(inestables), solitary heroes, died -he too 'a sort of man forbid(maldito)', part Christian, part pagan slipped into obscure

moorings(anclajes) ashore, alone even in death among 'an obsolete battery of rusty guns' (his work long out of print or unpublished). Through myth, despite allegory, past reefs(rizos, arrecifes) of symbolism, he had kept true to the dreams of his youth. In prose nouveau riche(advenediza) in its verbal splendor, antiquarian in its delight(alegría), bible-echoed, allusive, elaborate, he had kept faith to the end -exactly, lyrically intent as a ship's prow cutting the waves, or a sea-gull dipping(bajándose, bañándose) and diving in the wake(despertar) of his questing(curioso) and restless intellect.

Melville was rediscovered about 1920, after sixty years of neglect. His main reputation lies in *Moby-Dick* and a few of short works, especially "Bartleby, The Scrivener", "Benito Cereno" and "Billy Budd, Foretopman".

#### **IV. BARTLEBY, THE SCRIVENER (1853)**

Melville published anonymously "Bartleby, The Scrivener" in *Harper's Monthly Magazine* in the November/December issues of 1853. It was the first magazine short story which he published. On publication of *The Piazza Tales* (1856), a collection of essays and short stories, Curtis wrote prophetically: "He has lost his prestige, and I don't believe the Putnam stories will bring it up". Melville was attempting a new kind of writing in the magazines, dull business but (possibly) profitable. He is of three minds about it. Like Turkey(pavo, sin pelos en la lengua), he can keep at it until noon. Like Nippers(chiquillo) he can be steady enough until his ambition gets the upper hand(empieza a dominar). In the character of Bartleby, Melville prefigures what his new life may ultimately come to. Will its trivialities, the conventional nature of his task, impel him to follow the lonely scrivener's decision to 'copy' no more? He did

this after 1853 and until the publication of *The Confidence Man*, four years later.

"Bartleby" lets us see several movements in consonance with the mental reactions of the lawyer, of his office, and of his copyists and also the methodically cautious approach to Bartleby. The second involves the series of refusals and reactions caused by the conflict between the lawyer and Bartleby until this provokes his move on to another office. The third introduces the total abandonment of the scrivener, his taking by society, his imprisonment in the Tombs(halls of justice; prison) and his death. The development of the events let us observe a spectrum of moral dilemmas, reopened later when the gossip arrives that Bartleby had passed his professional life in a Washington office classifying and getting rid of the letters from deceased people.

"Bartleby" is a story of Wall Street, of a scrivener trapped between walls (one white, one black, 2331/2), long motionless in "dead wall reveries (ensueños)"(2348/2), till expiring behind "walls of amazing thickness"(2354/8) -"the dead- wall"(2354/1) of the Tombs. Was it himself Melville had in mind when ironically making the lawyer dismiss the scrivener as "the victim of innate and incurable disorder?"(2342/3) Was he parodying some member of his own family by letting the lawyer soliloquize: "It was his soul that suffered, and his soul I could not reach?"(2342/3) "Look, there is the sky, and here is the grass"(2353), they might say, "I know where I am"(2353), we hear the reply. "You will have to find another job"(?) or "You will have to write a more popular book"(?), his publishers might say. "I would prefer not to"(2338-9), we hear the reply. "At present I would prefer not to be a little reasonable"(2343). Is "Bartleby", then, a parable of Melville the writer, or perhaps all the writers? There are as many readings of "Bartleby" as keys to the Wall Street chambers: one kept by the cleaning-woman, another by

Turkey, a third by the elderly narrator, the fourth by "I knew not who"(2340). Yet Melville, it seems, intends some resolution.

Ill comprehended, perhaps, because "Bartleby", like so much of Melville's fiction, is deeply introspective. After his father's death young Herman had himself served as clerk, first in the New York State Bank in Albany, later assisting his elder brother Gansevoort's cap and fur store. For a while, it seems, he was even a lawyer's clerk -or was he merely job hunting? So the knowing comedy of office life was fed from his own early experience, though visiting his younger brother Allan, now a lawyer in Wall Street, must have helped prompt the story. As to the scrivener, the neat(esmerado), restrained(comedido), seemingly subservient(servil) Bartleby at first sight looks closely related to a near contemporary, his fellow clerk Akaky Akakievich of Gogol's *The Overcoat* (1835). But as his presence begins to weigh incubus-like(íncubo, diablo) on the narrator -as employer and employee, like public and private self, ego and superego are implacably entwined together- it is the world of Kafka's Joseph K. which most readily comes to mind. More than a self-portrait, then, "Bartleby" is already a clear-sighted projection of the future which threatened Melville: the literary conscience haunting and dominating the prospective. Deputy inspector of Customs, aloof(reservado, frío), disdainful(desdeñoso) prisoner in the walled city, the writer who preferred not to, ex-clerk of the Dead Letter Office of Literature.

But in a wide sense, it becomes a parable of all writers in a financial society who refuse to write on demand or to compromise, who say with Montaigne *Je m'abstiens* -Turkey and Nippers, on this analogy, being those middlebrow(mediocres) writers who have sold out to commerce 'and suffer from the occupational disease of the compromised artist in a commercial

society -neurosis, alcoholism, and ulcers': the lawyer himself is the writer as entrepreneur and business man, "drawer-up(redactor) of recondite documents of all sorts"(2330-1?), and the Dead Letter Office, all modern literature, including the works of Melville, the once popular adventure-story writer- his own work now, and for the future, predestined to obscurity.

Clearly, the narrator of "Bartleby" is one of "those yes-gentry"(burguesía, bien pensante) whereas Bartleby like Hawthorne, says "No!" -but not in thunder: his is the still, small voice of calm, 'but the Devil himself cannot make him say yes'. 'In Life he appears as a true Philosopher - as a wise man in the highest sense. He stands firm to his point; he goes on his way inflexibly...'. That philosopher was Christ. The narrator fulfills Christ's judgment on the righteous: "For I was hungered, and ye gave me meat..."(Bible-audience?).

The lawyer offers money for food and drink, offers Bartleby first his office, then his home, tries to minister to him in sickness and visits him in prison. Yet when he acts, he acts grudgingly(de mala gana) -both dismissing him and evicting(deshauciando) him, betraying him and escaping him, visiting him once in prison but finally deserting him- and always smugly(con suficiencia): 'Here I can cheaply purchase a delicious self-approval...'.

This "rather elderly man" -this "eminently safe man"(2330/3), in fact, with his snug(cómodo) business and snug retreat- though calling himself "a man of peace"(2330?) believes only in prudence. But in "Bartleby" the wordly passivity of this apostle [narrator-lawyer] of common sense, superstition and self-interest is confronted by the saintly passivity of an apostle of utter abnegation and step by step yields to his demands.

Compared to the inflexible single-mindedness(simpieza de mente) of Bartleby, this lawyer, who so prides himself on "method", seems merely

impulsive and paradoxical. Far from "a man of peace", he appears rather "the victim" (to quote his own words) "of innate and incurable disorder"(2342) -the ironic implication of the glass folding-doors behind which he sits no doubt being that such a person should not throw stones: at one moment filled with self-approval, the next with irritation; at one moment reconciled to Bartleby, the next falling into "spasmodic passions"; now feeling pity, now repulsion; now uneasy on Bartleby's account(relato, consideración), next minute giving him notice(despidiéndolo). And though he begins to perceive "some mysterious purpose of all wise Providence"(2348/3), gossip of fellow-attorneys and neighbors quickly hardens his heart. Like Peter to deny him thrice; and having been rejected, to flee(huir) -flee recognition, flee all responsibility. When he hears of Bartleby's arrest, he almost approves; yet on the same day he visits him in prison, even tips the grub-man(guardián, celador), only to ignore him again until it is too late.

For Bartleby -"this forlornest(el más desamparado) of mankind", "alone, absolutely alone in the universe"(2343)- far more subtly than Billy Budd gathers a Christ-like vocabulary. "Bartleby was one of those beings of whom nothing is ascertainable, except from the original sources, and, in this case, those are very small"(2330/1). Tranquil in a room full of lawyers and witnesses, passively led to the Tombs, alone in the midst of murderers and thieves, Bartleby, whatever the lawyer's boast(jactancia), is the true "man of peace"(?).

Christ, after all, was never a scrivener; let alone could he be conceived as a mechanical scrivener. Nor is Bartleby's abnegation essentially Christian; nor his vegetarian diet, consisting of ginger-nuts(pastel de nueces de jengibre) and cheese. There is more of a Hindu ascetic here than another Jesus. Bartleby, gentle(amable), firm, but utterly passive, allows the wall to crush him.

In a city of the dead -in Wall Street on Sunday, deserted as Petra- "Bartleby makes his home"(2341/2). The Evangelists, that is, the Epistles, the whole *New Testament*, including Matthew XXV('tuve sed y me diste de beber...' Juicio Final), are consigned (enviar, consignar) to the Dead Letter Office. For comedy in this story of office life plays not only on the surface but in its metaphysical depths. When the narrator asks Bartleby "having nothing else earthly to do"(2339/6) to carry some letters to the post office, or concludes his dismissal, "if, hereafter, in your new place of abode, I can be of any service to you, do not fall to advise me by letter"(2345/8), the ironies re-echo and sound -to the final sigh, "Ah, Bartleby! Ah, humanity!"(2355).

"Bartleby" can never be wholly interpreted as either writer or Christ-figure, artist or ascetic saint, nor is the story exhausted by such interpretations. At its roots lies a theme more compelling than both: of the doppelgänger, the shadow, the appointed(llamado) 'other'. Bartleby appears from nowhere, without identity, only a copyist. He is the secret sharer whom we cannot cast off(desamarrar), barter(cambiar, trocar) or pass by(ignorar), and whom we alone recognize -the figure of death (cadaver, apparition, incubus, ghost) behind the green screen (of life). Bartleby is Death-in-Life, "on errands(misiones) of life, these letters speed to death"(2355/1?): Bartleby is also Life-in-Death. As the symbolism is suggestive and imprecise, so finally the borderline between living and dead is blurred.

Within the spectrum of white and black in which the drama is played - by the sallow(cetrino, amarillento) Nippers, the sun of Turkey's countenance rising and setting, the green folding screen between- Bartleby's eyes alone are gray.

"Poor Bartleby! Poor Colt!"(2347/10) That is the final triumph of Melville's art, this blurring of the guide-lines, the landmarks of our normal

perception, until groping(yendo a tientas) in the nebulous landscape we can be sure of only one thing, that, like the blind men in the fable, we are roped one to another, conscious of only one law: that ye love one another. Sometimes his symbol is a ship's crew(tripulación) at sea; here it is a Wall Street lawyer's office; always it is a paradigm of Hell, with a glimpse of Heaven -between one black wall and one white, between the Pyramids or Petra and Trinity Church.

## **V. *THE BELL-TOWER* (1855)**

The lesson from Bannadonna's fate in "The Bell-Tower" is that art not only creates, but also maims(mutila) and kills. From the animate to the inanimate is but a step; from the bestial, Melville reverts (back through the chain of being) to the material: from "hearts of iron" to "plates of iron", from human assassins to a mechanical assassin, from cringing(servil, rastrero) slaves "of an inferior race" to the iron slave, who 'while serving' plots revenge (195). Bannadonna ('banish woman?') is again fatherless; again a 'cynic solitaire' glorying in self-esteem; again sole taskmaster of a subject creature of his contriving. Architect, bronze-caster(fundidor), sculptor, clock-maker, engineer -a Leonardo of all talents, his creative intellect is in itself destructive. The "practical materialist"(210), that is, who sees men only in terms of semaphore(muñeco con dos banderas), as puppets, whatever his pride in 'man', must be destructive. Not only destructive but self-destructive. Bannadonna -as violent, and a killer- is killed.

All Melville's work of these years is radically, self-consciously (tímidamente) literary: a literature of literature. "The Bell-Tower" is (in part) a variation on Hawthorne's "Ethan Brand", composed in the master's own voice,

crossed by imagery from *The Faerie Queene*, with widespread allusions to the *Old Testament* from Genesis to Daniel. Always there is this overlaying (superposición) of ideas, images, meanings, references; and if the recipe here seems overelaborated, the language stilted (afectado), the allegorical intentions too explicit, this only points the absolute, the Shakespearean, fusion Melville achieves elsewhere. (Paradoxically, during the half century of Melville's eclipse, this was his only story, twice reissued, to remain in print).

For the weakness of "The Bell-Tower" is not that the final paragraph reveals too much; it is rather that the precision of those five formulas is inadequate for its multiple and conflicting center: Bannadonna the "true artist" and Bannadonna "the great mechanician". The artist, killed in mid-artistry by his own creation, is a deeply felt -and personal- image, a symbol -for an age of science; and however private the core of experience, however mysterious the sexual echoes (when the tower, in the end, is "groined" (penetrada, poseída) by the bell's fall), however obscure the Spenserian allusions, it is scorn (desprecio) we are meant to feel. Increasingly, as the mid-century progressed, Melville fell foul (detestable) of the triumphs of the new technology. "The Bell-Tower" reveals, as it were, the metaphysics behind the loathing (aversión, odio). The materialists of his age, Melville argued, "stooped (inclinarse) to conquer" (210): for them "machinery" was "miracle", "Prometheus, the heroic name for machinist; man, the true God" (210).

It is too casual to recognize here only stage properties of gothic horror - of automata or the Golem. From Frankenstein to Čapek's Robots to the Androids of science fiction, the possibility of controlling his environment by the spontaneous artifacts of reason has fascinated man; beyond Haman (half man?) Bannadonna envisaged "an ulterior creature, a sort of elephantine Helot (servidor, esclavo), adapted to further, in a degree scarcely to be imagined, the

universal conveniences and glories of humanity; supplying nothing less than a supplement to the Six Days' Work"(209). The more directly, that is, machines can compete with men, the more pressing (Norbert Wiener, founder of cybernetics, agreed) their religious implications. An older humanism -of man "infinite in faculty... in apprehension how like a god!"(210???)- is doomed if the machinist is to be controlled by the machine. But this new "humanism", Melville answered, is suicidal.

"Like negroes, these powers own man sullenly(hoscamente, con resentimiento)", he headed "The Bell-Tower", "mindful(consciente, atento) of their higher master..."(195).