

different. Beauty also—her type of loveliness—and yet she was lonely. In her rocking-chair she sat, when not otherwise engaged—singing and dreaming” (p. 456). Both Carrie and Hurstwood have come a great distance from their pleasant romance in Chicago.

Surely the Carrie of these concluding pages is not a specimen of “radical American immaturity” as Witemeyer would have us believe. Her journey from innocence to wisdom has been long and arduous, and the Carrie who has achieved fame in New York is not quite the same as the eighteen-year-old Carrie who arrived in Chicago from Columbia City by train. At the novel’s end Dreiser tells us that “even had Hurstwood returned in his original beauty and glory, he could not now have allured her. She had learned that in his world, as in her own present state, was not happiness” (p. 458). Likewise, her final meeting with Drouet, the perpetual boy, shows her as having left behind her youthful immaturity of an earlier time. When Drouet dines with her in New York after she has become “elegant” and “famous,” he begins “to imagine it would not be so difficult to enter into her life again, high as she was.” But his advances elicit no response from her: “‘You mustn’t talk that way,’ said Carrie, bringing in the least touch of coldness” (pp. 435–36).

Yet Dreiser does not leave us with a Carrie disillusioned and cynical. She still entertains a secret hope that happiness will some day come her way: “Though often disillusioned, she was still waiting for that halcyon day when she should be led forth among dreams become real” (p. 458). Perhaps it is in terms of this combination of realization and lingering illusion that Dreiser defines true wisdom.

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#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Theodore Dreiser, *Sister Carrie* (New York: Harper, 1965), p. 336.

#### Melville’s *Clarel* Continued

To the Editor:

If a very few, minor inaccuracies, which do not materially affect my conclusions, be deemed sufficient cause to reject as “quite irrelevant” my carefully elaborated philosophical analysis of *Clarel*, then Mr. Chamberlain’s criticism of my article [Forum, Jan. 1972] is subject to similar dismissal.

I shall begin with Mr. Chamberlain’s most egregious example of inaccuracy and misinterpretation, his item #5. Mr. Chamberlain objects to my shortened form of reference, “Star of Wormwood,” citing a Mel-

ville text—“ii.xxvi.22–24”—which closely approximates the *Revelations* phrase “The star is called Wormwood.” I should first like to point out that Mr. Chamberlain’s reference to the Melville text is inaccurate: it should read “ii.xxxvi.22–24.” Second, Melville later changes his own wording to “that Wormwood Star” (ii.xxxix.41), apparently not considering himself bound to stick as closely to the *Revelations* text as Mr. Chamberlain would require. More significant is Mr. Chamberlain’s misreading of Melville in his following objection to my analysis: “To apply these lines, spoken by the misanthrope Mortmain, to Nehemiah is misleading in the extreme.” Mr. Chamberlain has apparently missed Mortmain’s later comment upon his discovery of Nehemiah’s death in the bitter waters of the Dead Sea: “The Swede stood by; nor after-taste / Extinct was of the liquid waste / Nor influence of that Wormwood Star / Whereof he spake” (ii.xxxix.39–42). Mortmain sees Nehemiah’s death as fulfilling the implicit prophecy in his earlier statement, quoted by Mr. Chamberlain. It is true that Nehemiah goes to his death with a “beatific vision,” as Mr. Chamberlain said. I indicated this on p. 378 of my article, just after Mr. Chamberlain chose to end his quotation of my analysis. But Mortmain now rejects any consoling implications of such a death, seeing it as an authentic example of human mortality, of the primal death: “Mortmain, relentless: ‘See: / To view death on the bed—at ease—/. . . In chamber comfortable:—here / The elements all that unsay! / The first man dies. Thus Abel lay” (ii.xxix.45–46, 49–51). Clearly, then, my application of Mortmain’s lines to Nehemiah’s death is not “misleading in the extreme” but required for an understanding of that event.

Item #11 again reveals Mr. Chamberlain’s inability to read the Melville text accurately or to relate slightly separated sections of the text. Rolfe’s calling the priest’s act of lighting the Easter fire “cheatery” does not involve serious criticism of that act, as Mr. Chamberlain suggests, but a tolerance essential to his character. This can be easily shown by quoting in full the passage to which Mr. Chamberlain alludes: “Thus you see, / Contagious is this cheatery; / Nay, that’s unhandsome; guests we are; / and hosts are sacred” (iii.xvi.109–12). Rolfe continues: “as yon docile lamps receive / The fraudulent flame, yet honest burn, / So no collusive guile may cleave / Unto these simple friars” (iii.xvi.115–18). Though the discussion of the dead king on a live horse “occurs some eighty lines after,” as Mr. Chamberlain points out, it is part of a continuing discussion of clerical means of supporting faith, which extends from the Greek and Roman priests to the Lutheran: “does the Lutheran, / . . . In candor own the dubious weather” (iii.xvi.158, 161). Rolfe next admits that some modern pulpiteers and religious

harmonizers approach religious truth more scientifically (III.xvi.192–206) but argues that the more “Astute ones . . . / Remind one of old tactics brave” (III.xvi.207, 209), and now we get the image of the corpse king led on a horse. This image, then, grows directly out of the discussion of the Easter fire and stands as a symbol for such ceremonial deception, Rolfe’s final words—“Ah, tolerate!” (III.xvi.218)—defining his attitude throughout. Since my paragraph on Rolfe attempts a summary analysis of his character, I do not see anything “methodologically questionable” in referring to his attitude in Book I as well as in Book III. In the section of Book I alluded to, Rolfe speaks approvingly of the Lima priest’s staking out of a new church after the earthquake: “In cheer / The priest reclaimed the quaking sphere. / Hold it he shall, so long as spins / This star of tragedies, this orb of sins. / . . . religion’s ancient port, / Till the crack of doom shall be resort / In stress of weather for mankind. / . . . But though ’twere made / Demonstrable that God is not— / What then? it would not change this lot: / The ghost would haunt, nor could be laid” (I.xxxi.180–83, 188–90, 197–200). The references to Books I and III both support my statement: “His ‘solution’ is to accept or tolerate any belief or action that contributes to man’s belief in the spirit, even if such belief or action is manifestly false” (p. 383). Clearly, I could not quote all this supporting evidence in my article or it would have been far longer than it is. Finally, I nowhere refer to Rolfe “as a hypocrite,” as Mr. Chamberlain states that I do. When Clarel rejects Rolfe’s “hollow, Manysidedness,” it is not for hypocrisy but, as I said, because “Clarel’s search for an authentic faith cannot accept this inauthenticity” (p. 383). I am sorry that Mr. Chamberlain cannot distinguish between hypocrisy and inauthenticity.

Item #7 provides a similar instance of Mr. Chamberlain’s opaqueness. He questions my statement “Through the Devil, Melville is meditating on the fact that spiritual uncertainty must always be part of man’s predicament,” arguing that “It is not a fact but an inference” and listing some characters “for whom it is not even that.” If some characters in *Clarel* affirm their spiritual certainty, neither Clarel nor Melville is satisfied that such certainty reflects a true facing of man’s predicament. For Melville, I insist, ultimate spiritual uncertainty was not an inference but a fact of human existence. Indeed my whole argument, as stated in my abstract, is that “Melville fails to find this faith, discovering instead through Clarel . . . a genuine awareness of the condition of death, a condition which destroys belief in absolutes.”

In item #8, Mr. Chamberlain enters into a long disquisition on the differences between *The Myth of Sisyphus*, on the one hand, and *Ecclesiastes* and *Clarel*,

on the other. This involves a misreading of my text since I did not suggest the total identification of these works but simply that “Camus’s existential starting point in *The Myth of Sisyphus*” (p. 379) is similar to the position developed by the other two works: the problem of knowledge in relation to the meaning of life.

In item #9, Mr. Chamberlain misquotes the following passage from my text: “Yet, always, in the back of his mind, causing him fits of madness, is the memory of his illegitimacy. In dreams he rails against his mother as a ‘Fair Circe—goddess of the sty!’ ” (p. 381). Mr. Chamberlain has omitted from his quotation of this passage, without any indication of an ellipse, the important phrase “causing him fits of madness.” I use the word “dreams” in the following sentence as a verbal equivalent of “fits of madness,” a state without clear definition of reality. If my use of the word “dreams” for Melville’s “moods . . . mad fitful ones” (II.ix.140) is perhaps unclear, this is not the case with the Circe reference which can only relate back to the “bale / Medean in his mother pale” (II.iv.134–35), occurring eight lines earlier. The classical references reinforce this association.

In item #10, Mr. Chamberlain questions “The implication that Ungar has been psychologically damaged by racial prejudice.” I need only quote Melville in answer: “Herewith in Ungar, though, ensued / A bias, bitterness—a strain / Much like an Indian’s hopeless feud / Under the white’s aggressive reign” (IV.v.106–09). Melville now traces his history back to the miscegenation between Cavalier and Indian maid which transmitted to Ungar “Along with touch in lineaments, / A latent nature, which . . . overrode the genial part— / An Anglo brain, but Indian heart. / . . . Outspoken in his heart’s belief / That holding slaves was aye a grief— / The system an iniquity” (IV.v.137–38, 140–41, 148–51). When I said that Ungar is a “victim of miscegenation in a racist society” (p. 381), I did not foresee that Mr. Chamberlain would construe this statement in a “stock sense.” It is nonetheless true that, like all the monomaniacs in *Clarel*, Ungar carries a psychological wound, one which my quotations should clearly show derives, in his case, from his mixed race in a racist society.

In item #4, Mr. Chamberlain argues that the angels who kept vigil at Christ’s tomb “are ‘starry watchers’ in a completely different sense than the Magi,” but Christ’s metamorphosis into a star is suggested almost immediately in the text: “Nay, is He fled? / . . . or, fresh and clear, / A charm diffused throughout the sphere, / Streams in the ray through yonder dome?” (I.v.37, 39–41). Melville characteristically uses the adjective “starry,” as in the case of “Starry Vere” in *Billy Budd*, to suggest the abstracted state of a star

gazer. The angels, despite their “aspects bright” (i.v. 34), can, then, be considered “starry watchers” (i.v.35) in the same sense as the Magi. If I am correct that the Star-Magi imagery forms an important structural trope in *Clarel*, then it is not surprising that Melville’s reference to the angels as “starry watchers” would suggest a further allusion to the Magi and announce this major structural trope. Indeed, the passage contains a double reference, since both the angels at the tomb and Magi at the birth “kept / Vigil at nap-kined feet and head / Of him their Lord” (i.v.35–37), construing the napkins as both shroud and swaddling clothes.

In item #3, Mr. Chamberlain considers it an “unjustified assumption that Ruth died of grief for her murdered parents.” Since Melville leaves open the choice between fever and grief as the cause of Ruth’s death, I concur with Walter E. Bezanson, the editor of *Clarel*, in his statement: “Ruth dies of grief” (p. 546). I must admit that Mr. Chamberlain, in item #2, has caught me in the error of anticipating her mother Agar’s death. But if Ruth died of grief, it could only have been for the murder of her father and the destruction of the Jewish community by the marauding Arabs; so my larger interpretation still holds.

In item #1, Mr. Chamberlain does point to a garbled sentence. The pilgrimage, of course, ends at Jerusalem, as I suggest in my reference to the Via Crucis on page 384, Bethlehem being the penultimate stop.

Item #6 simply cites a misquotation of two words in the Melville text, due to a verbal carry-over from one line to the next.

Item #12 involves a quibbling over a second of time. Derwent sees the bird and skullcap at the moment when, with a “shrill cry” (iii.xxv.121), the bird drops the skullcap it had been carrying into the ravine.

Apart from the minor, though regrettable, inaccuracies noted in items 1, 2, 6, and 12, Mr. Chamberlain’s broad attack has little foundation and can hardly support a dismissal of my conclusions as irrelevant. I would hope that students of Melville will be more concerned with my attempt to show the structural form of this dense and complex work and to illuminate its philosophic meaning.

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### Johnson’s *Rasselas* Continued

To the Editor:

I gather from Donald M. Korte’s comment [Forum, Jan. 1972] on my article entitled “The Biblical Context of Johnson’s *Rasselas*” (*PMLA*, 84, 1969, 274–81) that we have no disagreement about Johnson’s use of Bishop Patrick as a source for “images, sentiments,

and ideas” (p. 274) in *Rasselas*.<sup>1</sup> His reservations concern Johnson’s use of the “reformed” school of interpreting Ecclesiastes, the school that claims the Preacher, after directing man’s attention to heaven by showing the impossibility of finding perfect happiness in this world, exhorts him to “enjoy to the fullest the limited joys it offers” (p. 279). As I argued in the article, I agree that the ideational thrust of *Rasselas* rejects the possibility of perfect happiness in this life and is directed toward happiness in the next life. But this does not mean that Johnson asserts a negative view of the joys that are available in this life. Mr. Korte claims that “*Rasselas* himself does not reveal a gift for enjoying life.” Precisely, and as I suggested in the article, he may never obtain this gift completely, for *Rasselas*, Nekayah, and Pekuah, even near the end of the apologue, are “still dreaming of a perfect state of happiness” (p. 281). They exemplify two ideas Johnson expounds in his sermon on Ecclesiastes i.14, “I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit.”<sup>2</sup> The first idea refers to man’s failure to learn from experience: “So great is our interest, or so great we think it, to believe ourselves able to procure our own happiness, that experience never convinces us of our impotence” (ix, 395). The second refers to man’s inability to limit his imagination: “When to enjoyments of sense are superadded the delights of fancy, we form a scheme of happiness that can never be complete, for we can always imagine more than we can possess” (ix, 400).

At the end of the apologue all of the travelers “diverted themselves . . . with various schemes of happiness which each had formed” (p. 219), and as Mr. Korte claims, this is certainly “idle conversation.” But “Imlac and the astronomer were contented to be driven along the stream of life without directing their course to any particular port” (p. 220). Mr. Korte rightly notes that I see this passage as evidence of “positive activity” and of a “deep” commitment-to-life. The verb “were contented” recalls the positive statement (even if the positiveness is only momentary, as Mr. Korte claims) Nekayah, quoting Imlac, makes to *Rasselas*: “Of the blessings set before you make your choice, and be content” (p. 134). This statement is part of the long, positive passage that concludes Nekayah’s pessimistic and negative remarks on family life and marriage mentioned by Mr. Korte. Moreover, this statement echoes Bishop Patrick’s claim that the Preacher “persuades all men to be content with things present” (p. 279). The verb “driven” does indeed connote “a lack of control over one’s destiny,” but that, I think, is one of the main points Johnson is making in his insistence that man cannot make a “choice of life” in the sense of choosing a specific state or condition of life. Imlac and the as-