Beyond the Walls - Potentiality Aborted.
The Politics of Intersubjective Universalism in Herman Melville's *Clarel*

Laura López Peña

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The Politics of Intersubjective Universalism

in Herman Melville's *Clarel*

TESI DOCTORAL

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To Rodrigo, for the universalism.

To Tim, for the intersubjectivity.

To Melville, for *Clarel*.

A mi familia, por *todo*.

A mi madre, por más.

"[…] but of all this you must of course be your own judge —I but submit matter to you —

I dont [sic.] decide." (Herman Melville, Letter to Nathaniel Hawthorne, 13 August 1852,

Correspondence 235)

"'The gate,' cried Nehemiah, 'the gate

Of David!' Wending thro' the strait,

And marking that, in common drought,

'Twas yellow waste within as out,

The student mused: The desert, see,

It parts not here, but silently,

Even like a leopard by our side,

It seems to enter in with us—

At home amid men's homes would glide.

But hark! that wail how dolorous:

So grieve the souls in endless dearth;

Yet sounds it human—of the earth!" (Herman Melville, *Clarel* 1976 1.24.77-88)

"Ye two are the opposite poles of one thing; Starbuck is Stubb reversed, and Stubb is

Starbuck; and ye two are all mankind." (Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick* 1851: 484)

"There's another rendering now; but still one text. All sorts of men in one kind of world,

you see." (Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick* 1851: 384)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

> "How is it, that while all of us human beings are so entirely disembarrassed in censuring a person; that so soon as we would praise, then we begin to feel awkward? I never blush after denouncing a man; but I grow scarlet, after eulogizing him. And yet this is all wrong; and yet we can't help it; and so we see how true was that musical sentence of the poet when he sang —
> 'We can't help ourselves'"
> (Herman Melville, Letter to Sophia Peabody Hawthorne, 8 January 1852, *Correspondence* 219*)*

I have been lucky. And I am aware that I have been lucky.

For years, I have looked forward to expressing my gratitude to the people who have become important in my life and who have made my existence a happier one during the years I have been writing the dissertation I present in this volume. Longing to express my debt to each and all of them, however, I painfully grow aware of the difficulty of such a task, of the incapability of language to capture my admiration, gratitude, and love for these people. And, yet, language is the only means I have to express such feelings (though I would be glad to complement words with a hug or two to those who wish it), and I like to think that it is the heart that guides the fingers that type these words, as I cannot think of any other source from which one could possibly *write.*

This dissertation owes its very existence to my advisor Dr. Rodrigo Andrés (Universitat de Barcelona), without whom no interest in Herman Melville would have ever emerged in the first place. I am deeply grateful to Dr. Andrés and to Rodrigo, for what are already many years of work, friendship, caring, mutual help, learning, unlearning, trust, laughter, travels, protection, poems, pilgrimages, growth… togetherness. For believing in me even when I did not; for being continually for me, with me; for helping me realize what moved me to write this dissertation and having

faith that I would find my way, for giving me the necessary freedom to do what was important to me, at my own pace; for allowing me to develop my own relationship with Melville and with his texts, for enabling me to 'dive' on my own and fill my lungs with oxygen for the plunge; for his excellent comments and deep dedication to this dissertation at all moments. For being a good friend and a good boss (although I, somehow, prefer the word 'teacher'), and for finding the balance between both roles. For expanding my sense of familiarity, and for becoming part of my family. For making me a member of other families. This dissertation stemmed from your contagious love for literature and is greatly indebted to your generosity ever since I met you as an undergraduate student in the spring semester of 2005 (oh, that memorable subject on "Teoria literària i textos anglesos", now sadly extinct). It is an homage to your professional guidance and your *care*. Esta tesis está dedicada a ti, Rodrigo, de corazón: "To what infinite height of loving wonder and admiration I may yet be borne […],— that, I can not tell. But already I feel that this Hawthorne has dropped germinous seeds into my soul…" ("Hawthorne and His Mosses" 1850: 59). Con infinita admiración y con mucho amor, subscribo a estas palabras de Melville, with much, much gratitude for the "germinous seeds", and aware that I could not have shared this trip –oh, what a trip!– with a better fellow traveler.

This dissertation is also indebted to the enormous generosity of Dr. Timothy Marr (University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill), who energized me with every conversation and illuminated my work at a time when I could see no clarity or direction. It is no exaggeration to affirm that Dr. Marr has been determining to the mid and final stage of this dissertation, believing in my work, and enabling me to discover the particular color of my own voice, why it was only me that could write *this* dissertation in the way this dissertation is written. I am very grateful for his amazing

kindness and generosity, professionally, personally, since our first meeting in Jerusalem in June 2009, and especially during my two research trips to Chapel Hill, NC, in the spring semesters of 2012 and 2013, respectively. Thank you, Tim, for 'adopting' me at UNC under your supervision on these different occasions, for your generous dedication, and for reading early and not so early drafts of this dissertation and providing important feedback. For sharing your time, your carrel, your home, your family, and your self with me, and for making me feel at home. For allowing me to learn with and from you so generously. For the healing, the peace, the conviviality, the sharing, the music. For speaking Melville, and for speaking *Clarel*. For the generous intersubjectivity (and the insights on intersubjectivity), and your capacity to generate heart-to-heart communication. For so many encouraging conversations, and for your piercing questions. For your "deep and noble nature" ("Hawthorne and His Mosses" 47), and for your "all-engendering heart" and "great, deep intellect, which drops down into the universe like a plummet" (51).

To Melville, for the potentiality; for connecting me to wonderful people. For living searchingly—

Most especially, I am grateful to the Melville Society for having welcomed me as their Melville Society Archive Fellow in January 2011, which allowed me to participate in the 15th *Moby-Dick* Marathon and to carry out research for two weeks at the Melville Society Archive hosted at the New Bedford Whaling Museum in New Bedford, MA. In a special way, I thank Dr. Wyn Kelley (MIT) for her warm-heartedness, hospitality, continuous help, generosity, and supervision during my two-month research trip in New Bedford and the Boston area in January-February 2011. Thank you, Wyn, too, for the precious gift of your time and company, and for taking me on those wonderful trips to Walden Pond and Pittsfield (and for introducing me to Burdick!). Also in February 2011, I was tremendously priviledged to have Dr. John Bryant (Hofstra University) as my guide to the New York Public Library and the Melville sites in Manhattan, not to mention the trip to Washington Irving's house in Sunnyside and to Sleepy Hollow, the visit to Melville himself at Woodlawn, and the picturesque view of the Hudson in an atypical February spring-like day that forced us to remove a couple of layers of sweaters before heading to Broadway. More recently, Thank you, John, too, for providing the means to attend the 2013 MEL Camp at College Station, TX, and for enabling me to become part of the *Battle-Pieces*–history team within the project.

On a more personal level –although the personal and the professional are for the most part inseparable in my case–, I want to express my gratitude to friends and family for continuing support, efforts to understand, and faith. I am not the first, and will certainly be not the last, to realize that writing a doctoral dissertation is a lonely process. I have experienced every second of that loneliness, sometimes feeling its heaviness, sometimes enjoying it immensely, yet I have not been alone, and I consider myself very lucky for not having been alone.

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"Filosofía inglesa" aunque yo no lo supiera. Y de modo especial, a mi madre, por esforzarse por entender.

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To Chapel Hill, for the peace. To UNC, for the energy. To the Old Well, for the water.

To Davis library, for the space, for the books.

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To the Jordan boy with shiny and hopeful blue eyes, for lingering in my memory.

"'Critical' does not mean destructive, but only willing to examine what we sometimes presuppose in our way of thinking, and that gets in the way of making a more livable world." (Judith Butler 2012)

"But look! here come more crowds, pacing straight for the water, and seemingly bound for a dive. Strange! Nothing will content them but the extremest limit of the land; loitering under the shady lee of yonder warehouses will not suffice. No. They must get just as nigh the water as they possibly can without falling in. And there they stand—miles of them— leagues. Inlanders all, they come from lanes and alleys, streets and avenues—north, east, south, and west. Yet here they all unite." (Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick* 1851: 22)

"Shipmates, have ye shipped in that ship?" (Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick* 1851: 98)

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"Being human, we can neither fulfil the hope nor cease hoping." (Zygmunt Bauman, *Community* 2001: 5)

"For possibility is the only power to save. […] when one is about to despair the cry is, Procure me possibility, procure possibility! Possibility is the only saving remedy; given a possibility, and with that the desperate man breathes once more […]."(Sören Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death* 1941: 59)

"Life is a long Dardenelles [sic.], My Dear Madam, the shores whereof are bright with flowers, which we want to pluck, but the bank is too high; & so we float on & on, hoping to come to a landing-place at last — but swoop! we [sic.] launch into the sea! Yet the geographers say, even then we must not despair, because across the great sea, however desolate & vacant it may look, lie all Persia & the delicious lands roundabout Damascus.

So wishing you a pleasant voyage at last to that sweet & far countree —

Beleive [sic.] Me"

(Herman Melville, Letter to Sophia Peabody Hawthorne, 8 January 1852, *Correspondence* 220)

INTRODUCTION

"I happen to believe that questions are hardly ever wrong; it is the answers that might be so. I also believe, though, that refraining from questioning is the worst answer of all."

(Zygmunt Bauman, *In Search of Politics* 1999: 8)

"Faith is to the thoughtless, doubts to the thinker."

(Herman Melville, *Mardi* 1849: 1085)

"O my body, always make me a man who questions!"

(Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* 1952: 206)

This dissertation on nineteenth-century American fiction writer and poet Herman Melville (1819-1891) finds its roots in a line of research opened by my advisor, Dr. Rodrigo Andrés, on the subversive potentiality of love between men in Melville's novella *Billy Budd, Sailor* (left unfinished at the author's death and posthumously published in 1924). Dr. Andrés had introduced me to Herman Melville as an undergraduate student in the spring semester of 2006 and, later, to the Melville Society as a graduate student in June 2009. This connection with the Melville Society has determined my interest in analyzing not only Melville's oeuvre, but also Melville himself as author-creator through my approach to his works, and it has also affected my resolution to analyze his 1876 work *Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land*, especially thanks to the memorable Seventh International Melville Society Conference "Melville and the Mediterranean" celebrated in East Jerusalem in June 17-21, 2009. This conference, largely dedicated to Melville's long and complex *Clarel*, and which I attended with Dr. Andrés when I was at an incipient stage of my doctoral research on Melville's Civil War and postbellum writings, was determinant to my eventual decision to write this dissertation which has eventually been exclusively dedicated to Melville's

17,863[1] line-long *Clarel*. The conference also exercised a crucial impact in both encouraging and helping me articulate my own reading of the poem at that early stage. The other principal influence came, again, from my advisor, whose research on socialist utopian universalism in the works of Jewish American writers Tillie Olsen (1912-2007) and Grace Paley (1922-2007), and whose project "'We expatriate ourselves to nationalize with the universe'. Socialist Universalism in Heterotopias", presented at the Universitat de Barcelona in December 2010, not only was enabling but determining to my decision to investigate the universalism (at that moment I termed it 'global consciousness') in Herman Melville's *Clarel*. Importantly informing the universalism[2] I defend in this dissertation was Dr. Timothy Marr (University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill), who introduced me to the notion of intersubjectivity and motivated me to develop my own research on this complex and fascinating subject in my first research trip to UNC under his supervision, in February – May 2012.

This dissertation aims to demonstrate that *Clarel* analyzes and defends the political potentiality of universalism to the creation of more democratic human relationships beyond the walls of individualism and of traditional communities such as those organized around the notions of nation-state, 'race', culture, religious affiliation, or sexual identities, among others.[3] The political and ethical democratizing potential of the intersubjective universalism I see articulated in Melville's literary production, in general, and *Clarel*, in particular, transcends cosmopolitan and internationalist claims for affiliation with 'the world', as those claims continue, paradoxically, to be deeply rooted

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[1] This number is the result of my own counting of the lines of the poem: 4,783 lines for Part 1, "Jerusalem"; 4,627 for Part 2, "The Wilderness"; 4,267 for Part 3, "Mar Saba"; and 4,186 for Part 4, "Bethlehem".

[2] The etymology of the term 'universal' is located in the Latin word *universalis* 'of or belonging to all'.

[3] In this dissertation, I use single inverted commas to differentiate my own estrangement with certain terms or concepts from quotations, which in all cases are marked with double inverted commas.

in nationalist parameters. My study analyzes how Melville's conception of universalism potentially leads readers to the humbling exercise of realizing the impossibility of complete knowledge or Truth ("Truth is the silliest thing under the sun", wrote Melville to Nathaniel Hawthorne in June 1851 [*Correspondence* 191]), as it points to an understanding of the partiality, authoritarianism, and narrowness of clinging to monolithic conceptions of meaning. The universalism defended in Melville's texts stems from a dynamic exercise in plural thinking by which the author places different conceptions of the world in an equivalential relationship. Yet, at the same time as they are positioned as equivalent, these worldviews are laid open, tested, critically assessed, and, sometimes, as with those views on the world that violate the plurality of humanity by upholding non-democratic worldviews and endorsing supremacist assumptions, eventually rejected. Overall, my conception of Melville's *Clarel*, in particular, and Melville's works, in general, in this dissertation corresponds to what Martin Land defined as the capacity to "answer questions with more questions".[4]

How to generate a form of togetherness that does not entail the sacrifice of the individual in favor of the collective is one of the most central, difficult, challenging, and recurrent concerns in the history of humanity. Philosophers, sociologists, academics, and artists of all times have examined the advantages and limitations of different local and global allegiances by which human beings are inserted into groups such as the family, the nation-state, ethnic or 'racial' communities, religious groups, social classes, political ideologies, or sexual identities. Starting in the second half of the twentieth century, a number of thinkers have excelled in their investigations of the (im)possibilities of transcending such traditional forms of communitarian belonging in

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[4] Paper titled "Against 'the Attack on Linking:' Rearticulating 'the Jewish intellectual' for Today" delivered by Martin Land (Hadassah College, Jerusalem), at the international conference "Jews and the Ends of Theory" (Duke University – UNC, 30 April-1 May 2013).

order to try and imagine more fluid ways for conceiving inter-human relationships beyond the binary Us/Them. My analysis of intersubjective universalism in Herman Melville's *Clarel* has been articulated through, and thanks to, the theoretical discussions on the notion of community in the midst of the research project "Literatura i comunitats: una visió des del gènere" (Plan Nacional de I+D+I [2008-2011], Ministerio de Economía y Competitividad, ref. FEM 2011-23808 [2012-2014]), led by Prof. Marta Segarra (Universitat de Barcelona), to which both my advisor and Prof. Segarra included me as a researcher in 2012.[5] In the context of this project, I have studied the work on community, politics, global ethics, and universalism of contemporary thinkers such as Giorgio Agamben, Hannah Arendt, Etienne Balibar, Zygmunt Bauman, Martin Buber, Judith Butler, Jacques Derrida, Roberto Esposito, Ernesto Laclau, Emmanuel Levinas, Jean-Luc Nancy, Martha Nussbaum, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Linda Zerilli, among others. The analyses of (inter)subjectivity, community, interpersonal relationships, global ethics, and universalism, developed by these thinkers, from the perspectives of poststructuralism, sociology, philosophy, politics, or ethics have given me the enabling theoretical and conceptual tools to analyze *Clarel* as a universalist political project. Also importantly, my approach to literature has been based on a firm belief in the necessity to consider literary artifacts as products of both those human beings who created them and of the contexts in which they were produced. In this respect, I agree with Melville's affirmation, in his 1859 lecture "Statues in Rome", that "To rightfully appreciate this, or, in fact, any other statue, one must consider where they came from and under what circumstances they were formed" (406). I also conceive the reading process as an intersubjective relationship between author, text, and reader.

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[5] My analysis on community is also indebted to a previous research project led by Prof. Marta Segarra: "Representacions de la comunitat en les escriptores i cineastes de la postmodernitat". Plan Nacional de Investigación Científica, Desarrollo e Innovación Tecnológica, D.G.I [Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia], ref. FFI 2008-03621/FILO (2009-2011).

As Melville remarks in *Clarel*, "A book's a man" (2.32.76), which may be connected to the author's previous humorous remarks in defense of proper book-binding in an undated anonymous note, published in the New York *Literary World* on March 16, 1850, today attributed to Herman Melville:

> Books, gentlemen, are a species of men, and introduced to them you circulate in the "very best society" that this world can furnish, without the intolerable infliction of "dressing" to go into it. In your shabbiest coat and cosiest slippers you may socially chat even with the fastidious Earl of Chesterfield, and lounging under a tree enjoy the divinest intimacy with my late lord of Verulam. Men, then, that they are—living, without vulgarly breathing—never speaking unless spoken to—books should be appropriately apparelled. ("A Thought on Book-Binding" 238)

In my claim for the connection between texts and their creators, however, I do not intend to defend an Author(itarian) or author-based conception of literature which annihilates the possibilities of readerly interpretations in order to defend an 'Author's Meaning' (since that would be an imposition of meaning in the form of a universalized particular and, therefore, an enforced one-sidedness). Authorial intentionalities, (political, personal) opinions, compositional processes, and 'Meanings' are expressly resistant to being graspable as monolithic Meanings shaping Herman Melville's texts. As a matter of fact, Melville himself was well aware that Meaning, like the whale, as he had Ishmael remark in *Moby-Dick* (1851), must remain "unpainted to the last" (240): "Dissect him how I may, then, I go but skin deep. I know him not, and never will" (338). The conception of literature upon which this dissertation is articulated regards texts as the products of their creators, each creator, in turn, 'produced' by a series of specific contexts, circumstances, experiences, concerns, and sensibilities that have constituted his/her individuality (an individuality inscribed within such contexts and in relation to the individualities of other human beings). I, therefore, believe in the importance of regarding the authorial dimension and the material conditions of literary

texts, for, as Dennis Berthold has noted on Melville's 1876 poem, "*Clarel* exists in a particular time and place in its genesis, composition, and setting" (2009: 231). So characters are "contingent individuals" (Berthold 232) in that they address issues determined by particular historical, political, social, economic, and personal contexts. My study, therefore, considers Melville himself, in his capacity as creator of literary polyphonic spaces, as well as the context in which *Clarel* is inscribed, as valuable sources of information, which are enabling, not limiting, to readerly interpretations past and present. The dialogic relationship between readers and writer through the space of the text –texts themselves "never speaking unless spoken to" (Melville, "A Thought on Book Binding" 238)– is an intersubjective one. Being the products of specific human beings –in turn, unfolded by other human beings who are 'produced' by other, also specific, contexts, and circumstances, and who have either similar or different sensibilities and worries–, and at the same time constituting global contexts in their capacity as microcosms peopled by characters which are 'samples' of humanity, texts are both products of, and 'accesses' to, humanity. This, I believe, opens up infinite possibilities for an inter-human –intersubjective– interplay of significations beyond the limits of time and space, of the boundaries between author and reader. My approach to Melville's *Clarel*, and my conception of literature, is also greatly influenced by Mikhail Bakhtin's notions of polyphony, heteroglossia, and dialogism. Even though *Clarel* is a poem, and would fall, therefore, outside the scope of Bakhtin's interest in the dialogical novel,[6] I believe that Bakhtin's theorizations of polyphony and fiction can be applied to

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[6] Some scholars, however, have thought of the poem as a narrative. Newton Arvin, for example, called *Clarel* "a novel of ideas in verse" (1950: 269), and Basem Ra'ad has similarly considered *Clarel* "a verse novel" (2006: 129).

my analysis of Melville's text.[7] Bakhtin connects polyphony to multivoicedness, defining polyphony as "*A plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses*" (1963: 6), and connecting it to dialogism: "*The polyphonic novel is dialogic through and through*" (40).[8] He conceives signification or meaning as a dialogical process that emerges from the interactions of the author, text, and reader, each of them inscribed in their particular social and historical contexts. In this process, Bakhtin claims, the author is not a "monologic" (88) source of meaning but "acts as an organizer and participant in the dialogue without retaining for himself the final word" (72). As I will argue, in *Clarel*, Melville makes Rolfe a model for what the narrator names (and himself enables) "Manysidedness",[9] a term denoting a capacity for plural thinking that stems from the dialogic exposure to, and interaction with, a multiplicity of human beings and the worldviews these represent. The poem itself is, like other Melvillean texts, a 'manysided' space that creates the kind of dialogism that Bakhtin theorizes. Thus, even though the study presented here may be regarded as a *Clarel* dissertation that is largely author-based, my approach to *Clarel* is determined by my conception of Melville's texts as spaces that represent the polyphonic character and construct the dialogism that Bakhtin theorizes in his analysis of Dostoevsky's works.

This dissertation defends the necessity of universalism, at the same time that it rejects the premises upon which traditional universalism, in its vindication of the universalization of certain particulars over others, has been constructed. The universalism I claim as a political project that may have a potentially democratizing impact upon human relationships is informed by the theoretical possibilities opened up

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[7] Bakhtin, in fact, refers specifically to the novel (and, even more specifically, to Dostoevsky's novels) but he acknowledges that the significance of polyphonic thinking "extends far beyond the limits of the novel alone" (3).

[8] Unless otherwise specified, in all cases, italics in quotations correspond to the original.

[9] Melville uses this expression in reference to Rolfe in canto 3.16.236.

by poststructuralism in its rethinking of individual and collective identities, its problematization of monolithic Meanings, and its avowal of more fluid and plural forms to conceive human subjectivity and human relationships. Deeming him a quasi precursor of poststructuralist theoretical articulations, I claim that Herman Melville defended this decentralized and plural universalism throughout his oeuvre. In particular, Melville's 1876 *Clarel* creates a scenario that serves the purpose of, on the one hand, analyzing segregationism, and, on the other hand, investigating the necessity yet difficulty to transcend such sectarianism. Melville's global consciousness, together with his recurrent exploration of the tension between the One and the Many in his literary production, have often been noted by scholars and biographers, giving way to brilliant studies on Melville's capacity to reflect in his works a democratic understanding of the interrelation between human beings beyond boundaries of nation(ality), 'race', ethnicity, social class, religious beliefs, or cultural background: Edward Grejda's *The Common Continent of Men. Racial Equality in the Writings of Herman Melville* (1974), William Hamilton's "On 'Live in the All' Once Again" (1983), John Bryant's "'Nowhere a Stranger': Melville and Cosmopolitanism" (1984) and "Citizens of a World to Come: Melville and the Millennial Cosmopolite" (1987), Christopher Sten's "Melville's Cosmopolitanism: A Map for Living in a (Post-)Colonialist World" (2001), Timothy Marr's "Without the Pale. Melville and Ethnic Cosmopolitanism" (2005), Charles Waugh's "'We are not a nation, so much as a world': Melville's Global Consciousness" (2005), Peter Gibian's "Cosmopolitanism and Traveling Culture" (2006), Paul Lyons's "Global Melville" (2006), Amy Kaplan's "Transnational Melville" (2010), and Hilton Obenzinger's "Herman Melville Returns to Jerusalem" (2010), among others. These excellent examinations of the egalitarian (Grejda), cosmopolitan (Bryant, Gibian, Marr, Sten), transnational (Kaplan), global (Hamilton, Lyons), or globally conscious (Waugh)

aspects of Melville's works have been influential to the development of my analysis of Melville's *Clarel* as universalist. So have been the existing studies dedicated to Melville's complex *Clarel*, a poem which, still in the present moment (June 2013), continues to be one of the most unanalyzed of Melville's texts (Melville's poetry in fact remaining one of the most undiscovered aspects of the author's literary career by general readerships despite the permanently growing interest in Melville's oeuvre [some recent studies of Melville as a poet are Robillard's 2000 and Renker's 2006, among others]). Of studies on *Clarel*, Joseph G. Knapp's *Tortured Synthesis. The Meaning of Melville's* Clarel (1971), Vincent Kenny's *Herman Melville's* Clarel*: A Spiritual Autobiography* (1973), Bryan C. Short's "Form as Vision in Herman Melville's *Clarel*" (1979), the critical study carried out by Harrison Hayford, Alma A. MacDougall, Hershel Parker, and G. Thomas Tanselle in the Northwestern University-Newberry Library edition of *Clarel* (1991), Stan Goldman's *Melville's Protest Theism. The Hidden and Silent God in* Clarel (1993), Hilton Obenzinger's *American Palestine. Melville, Twain, and the Holy Land Mania* (1999), and William Potter's *Melville's* Clarel *and the Intersympathy of Creeds* (2004), have been most influential to my study. Walter Bezanson's work on *Clarel*, especially in his 1943 Ph.D. dissertation and in the 1960 Hendricks House edition of the poem, deserves a separate mention, as Bezanson's excellent research has become the most important foundation to all scholars who have ventured to analyze the poem's significance. For this reason, I am heavily indebted to Bezanson's work.

This dissertation interprets Herman Melville's 1876 *Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land* as a universalist poem which analyzes both the necessity, potentiality, challenges, and difficulties inherent to universalism, and, at the same time, the external obstacles preventing its actual development. *Clarel*, I claim, gives continuity to Melville's recurrent exploration of the dangers, beauties, and interlacings of intersubjectivity,

universalism, and democratic human relationships in his oeuvre. This exploration was always torn between the democratizing potentiality the author located in interpersonal relationships, and the bleak realization that human beings (in the hearts of whom "Evil and good they braided play / Into one cord", as Rolfe notes in *Clarel* [4.4.27-28]) might never materialize such democratic project. This dissertation purposes to demonstrate that *Clarel* captures this tension, and conceives universalism as the real interconnection between human beings (which is obscured by inter-human barriers ['race', nationality, culture, religion, etc.] making individuals blind to their universal connection with other human beings), and as a political process created through the interpersonal dialogic encounters of human beings who are different and who stand as representatives of both their own particular singularity and of human plurality. Melville locates in universalism the possibility to break through the walls that human beings have interiorized as 'naturally' existing between them. He, thus, places in universalism a transformative potentiality that may be democratizing for human relationships and may destabilize monolithic thinking. It is, I defend, in intersubjectivity –the space of "shared understanding" (*SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods* [468] and *Encyclopedia of Identity* [402]) or of "meaning between subjects" (*Blackwell Dictionary of Sociology* [161])– that the author locates the possibility of universalism, anticipating what Hannah Arendt remarked in 1955: "the world […] can form only in the interspaces between men in all their variety" (30-31). *Clarel*, I analyze, locates in intersubjectivity the possibility of transcending the multiple walls between human beings (national, cultural, social, 'racial', ethnic, religious, sexual, generational, etc.), which are often enforced by individualist attitudes as much as by communitarian forms of belonging. This is why I have chosen the phrase 'intersubjective universalism' to vindicate the political project I conceive as characterizing *Clarel*, in particular, and Melville's literary production, in general.

Melville's intersubjective universalism, I argue, emphasizes the mutual constituency, mutual dependency, and actual inseparability of the particular and the global (which blend at the interpersonal level), placing the possibility of democratic politics and ethics upon the very possibility of intersubjectivity. Triggering the development of plural thinking that may break through the rigid frontiers of 'one-sided'[10] or monolithic imaginations, and thus encourage democratic relationships, intersubjective universalism allows for interpersonal ways of relating which both transcend and challenge rigid egocentric mindsets and behaviors, as well as rigid conceptions of community, since, as Melville asserts in his lecture "Traveling" (1859), "Every man's home is in a certain sense a 'Hopper,' which however fair and sheltered, shuts him in from the outer world" (421).[11]

Melville, the present dissertation argues, conceived universalism as a real fact of the human condition given that all human beings are universally interconnected, not despite of but *in* their very *difference*, and that each individual, in his or her particular specificity, is a representative of the human race. Unlike other writers of his times such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Walt Whitman (the latter Melville's full contemporary), Melville was skeptical of universalisms that advocated for the 'universalization' of certain temporary feelings or mindsets while they (in)advertedly neutralized others. In

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[10] Melville uses the terms 'one-sided' or 'one-sidedness' recurrently, for example, in *The Confidence-Man* (1857). It is important to note that the author generally makes use of the dash in his writing of the word 'one-sidedness' but not of the term 'manysidedness'. In this dissertation, I have decided to follow Melville's criterion, interpreting the author's (non-)use of the dash as a willingness to reinforce the adherence to monolithic meaning (therefore, the imposition of thinking barriers) denoted by the term 'one-sidedness' and its derivates, on the one hand, and the dialogism and connective nature (therefore transcendence of the barriers of the mind) emphasized by 'manysidedness'. I have followed a similar criteria when making use of the terms 'inter(-)personal', 'inter(-)human', and 'inter(-)subjective' in this study, which I have written both with and without a dash at different moments in this dissertation, with the aim to emphasize the walls created between individuals (with a dash), on the one hand, or the transcendence of such walls and relational conception of being (without a dash).

[11] "In the isolated cluster of mountains called Greylock, there lies a deep valley named The Hopper, which is a huge sort of verdant dungeon among the hills. Suppose a person should be born there, and know nothing of what lay beyond, and should after a time ascend the mountain, with what delight would he view the landscape from the summit!" ("Traveling" 421).

this respect, attracted as he was by Emerson's pantheistic defense of the individual's merging within "the currents of the Universal Being" through nature (Emerson, "Nature" 1836: 10), Melville would confess that "there is some truth" in this "*all* feeling", at the same time as he warned that "what plays the mischief with the truth is that men will insist upon the universal application of a temporary feeling or opinion" ([1 June?] 1851, *Correspondence* 194). Melville's conception of universalism was rooted upon his belief in the humanity of *all* human beings, as well as in the necessary specificity and individualization of 'the human' in order to prevent falling into abstract –paradoxically, dehumanizing– categorizations divisive of this humanity. Deeply sensitive and respectful of the extraordinary plurality of humanity, and of the fact that plurality is itself the very trait defining humanity, Melville was, thus, critical of those projects and power-structures that neutralized human plurality and sacrificed the singularity of the individual within a collective 'Unum' in an attempt to both empower and universalize a specific particular. Instead, this dissertation argues, Melville claimed universalism as a "site of multiple significations" (making use of Linda Zerilli's phrase [1998: 8]), understanding it as an ethicopolitical process and as a potentially democratizing force, at the same time both tragically and beautifully conditioned, as *Clarel* analyzes, by the potentialities and limitations of those who may either develop or neutralize it: human beings determined by their fears, egocentric behaviors, and ultimately, by their imperfect, too human, humanity. These two trends –the potentiality as opposed to the difficulties preventing its materialization– are recurrent concerns in Melville's works. Melville analyzes in *Clarel* the "intervening hedge[s]" –or interpersonal walls– that prevent individuals from realizing the "wide landscape beyond" their particular mindsets and personal adherences ("Hawthorne and His Mosses" 1850: 48), that is, their universal belonging to the human condition. As a result, if *Clarel* defends

intersubjective universalism as a democratizing process with the potentiality of turning human beings into responsible social agents for the creation of responsible interpersonal relationships, the poem also expresses a sound lament at humans' failure to materialize the democratizing potentiality of universalism. Thus, *Clarel* vindicates the importance of intersubjectivity to the creation of universalism, yet reveals that the development of intersubjectivity is dependent on the disposition of those human actors who may create it. As a matter of fact, *Clarel*, I claim, analyzes how human beings defeat the possibility of intersubjectivity at the very doors of togetherness, choosing instead to remain locked in their egocentric natures and –frequently (self-)destructive, as the poem shows– one-sided thinking parameters, thus cutting off the inter-human space or relational disposition that may potentially unite them to fellow travelers in life and who share both the beauties and the burdens of life itself. These impenetrable subjectivities, and the monolithic thinking they perpetuate, *Clarel* laments, eliminate the possibility of intersubjectivity and, consequently, of universalism.

In order to develop my analysis of Herman Melville's *Clarel* as a universalist poem, I have divided my study into two chapters, which correspond to the two principal axes of this dissertation. On the one hand, the theoretical, philosophical, and political defense of the necessity of intersubjective universalism as a political project with the potentiality of encouraging the development of more democratic interpersonal relationships, beyond the rigid boundaries imposed by egocentric behaviors and one-sided thinking parameters (Chapter One); and, on the other hand, my reading of *Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land* as a poem –representative of Herman Melville's political literary project– that analyzes the potentiality yet eventual impossibility of universalism (Chapter Two).

Chapter One, "The Democratizing Potentiality of Intersubjective Universalism", defends the validity of universalism as a democratizing political project. The chapter articulates a plural and decentralized universalism grounded on intersubjectivity which, I claim, is constitutive of Herman Melville's 1876 *Clarel*. This articulation of intersubjective universalism is the result of the theorizations of twentieth- and twenty-first-century thinkers such as Hannah Arendt, Etienne Balibar, Zygmunt Bauman, Martin Buber, Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, Emmanuel Levinas, Eric Lott, Jean-Luc Nancy, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Nora Sternfeld, and Linda Zerilli, among others, from the perspectives of philosophy, politics, sociology, and ethics. Chapter One opens with a defense of the connection between universalism and democracy (Section 1). My defense of universalism starts with the recognition that universalism has historically earned a negative reputation as a patronizing and totalizing system that neutralized the plurality of humanity in a monolithic, hierarchy-reinforcing One, and consolidated the supremacy of a universalized particular that was white, Eurocentric, Western, Christian, Enlightened (literate, rational), heteronormative, male. Section 2 provides a historical overview of universalism, based on Ernesto Laclau's analysis of the different conceptions of the 'Universal' in different historical periods, and emphasizes how this Universal has been used to legitimize colonialist, even genocidal, practices, racial superiority, social and political discrimination, and authoritarian regimes. Such "universal fascism" (Gilroy 2000: 225) was condemned, on the one hand, by indigenous and non-Western intellectuals (from Africa, Asia, South America, as well as from the point of view of Islam), and, on the other hand, by intellectuals within the West who denounced the long history of marginalization of certain human groups (especially non-white communities, women, GLTBQIA associations) in 'democratic' societies across Europe and the United States. Focusing on this later questioning of traditional

universalism by oppressed groups within Western democracies, and especially in the United States (the national context which the 1876 *Clarel* places under evaluation through the fictional context of Palestine), Section 3 studies the emergence of identity politics movements asserting the 'identities' of these human groups in order to vindicate their recognition and equal share in sociopolitical rights. Whereas the political effectiveness of identity politics movements is undeniable, this section highlights how their articulation upon specific 'identities' has derived in a political reality of scattered particular struggles. At the same time, each of these particulars has absorbed the individual within the group for the sake of political activism, reifying some collective identities which, on the other hand, were also essentialist and constructed upon hierarchical (e.g., subordination of women within the group, homophobia) and excluding premises (only those subscribing to the established 'identity' of the group could belong to it). Focusing on the theorizations of Best and Kellner (1997), Cressida Heyes (2007), and Joshua Gamson (1995), among others, Section 4 analyzes poststructuralism as a main philosophical perspective that has questioned the very premise upon which identity politics was based, that is, identity, and has also contributed important theoretical tools to rethink subjectivity and collectivity. This vindication of more fluid conceptions of identity by poststructuralism has gone hand in hand with the rethinking of 'community' in recent years. Section 5 in this chapter investigates how the traditional notion of community has been revised from a poststructuralist perspective. This rethinking of community by contemporary theorists –in particular, Giorgio Agamben, Zygmunt Bauman, Judith Butler, Jacques Derrida, Roberto Esposito, Alphonso Lingis, Kuang-Ming, and Jean-Luc Nancy– informs my interpretation of *Clarel* as a poem which problematizes the segregationism of

communitarianism[12] through the specific context of Ottoman Palestine (a land of divisions and segregation in the poem, and which, I argue, evokes postbellum United States), in order to vindicate the necessity of universalism in the midst of a reality of both individual and communitarian separation. At this point in Chapter One, I claim the need to exploit the possibilities offered by poststructuralist theory to articulate the plural and decentralized conception of human relationships, beyond the limits of communitarianisms, upon which the intersubjective universalism that this dissertation claims as constitutive to Melville's *Clarel* is based. Also at this point, I defend the democratizing potentiality of such a political project, which I present as different from, and critical of, not only traditional articulations of universalism but also of the much nation(alist)-based agendas supported by other, more or less 'global', movements and worldviews such as multiculturalism, cosmopolitanism, or internationalism. Section 5, therefore, moves from 'identity' to the arguments, by poststructuralist thinkers, which both problematize and open up the concept of 'community'. This analysis culminates with 'culture' (Section 6), and nationalism (Section 7), in this same chapter.

Section 5 studies contemporary debates on community, in order to underline the limiting and dividing character of communitarianism to human beings' realization of their universal connectedness, as well as to the development of democratic interpersonal relationships. The first part of section 5 (5.1) opens with Benedict Anderson's work on national communities as imaginary, and proceeds to Zygmunt Bauman's theorizations of communities as sites of protection, which are born as a human response to the fear of strangers, perpetuate an artificial context of

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[12] My use of the term 'communitarianism' in this dissertation denotes those worldviews and nationalist systems which conceive human subjectivity within the more or less restrictive parameters of 'community', a concept in its turn articulated upon notions of collective identity and 'the common'. The etymology of 'community' is located in the Latin noun *communitas*, denoting a 'common' property or quality (see Esposito 1998: 2-3).

homogeneity, and impose inter-personal walls –often enforced physically– which prevent the development of universalism and, as a consequence, of democratic human relationships. This segregationism generated by the development of communities which Bauman describes bears, I argue, resemblances to the segregating communitarianism that Melville criticizes in *Clarel* through the particular context of Palestine, a land divided by hatred and inter-human divisions, much like postbellum U.S, the sociopolitical context in which *Clarel* is inscribed and which, I claim, the poem evaluates and connects to a more global context. The second part of this section (5.2) studies contemporary thinkers' theorizations of the notion of community, paying particular attention to those arguments that propose more fluid interpersonal bonds beyond the rigid boundaries of both communitarian and individual identity: Jean-Luc Nancy's defense of the singular plural character of being as being-*with*, of existence as coexistence, as well as his conception of 'we' as a praxis that is constructed every time it is said; Judith Butler's arguments on cohabitation and global ethics as articulated from her readings of the theorizations of Hannah Arendt and Emmanuel Levinas; Giorgio Agamben's notion of 'coming community' as a form of togetherness based on the very fact of belonging itself –understood as co-belonging– that does not vindicate a given identity; Jacques Derrida's defense of a 'democracy to come' based on the political character of interpersonal relationships –which he analyzes as the "politics of friendship"–, and his notion of hospitality; Roberto Esposito's introduction of the concept of nihilism to his rethinking of community, problematizing the traditional association of community with fullness and claiming, instead, that community is not constituted by an identity but by a non-identity, a 'non-thing'; Alphonso Lingis's community of those who have nothing in common, which locates community in nothingness, suffering, mortality, and death, and in the fact of being exposed to the

vulnerability of the other and to his or her difference, from which a sense of responsibility –and, therefore, a feeling of community– may emerge; and Kuang-Ming Wu's arguments on togetherness, within the line of cosmopolitanism, as a vehicle to establishing a middle way between particularism and universalism, enabling transversality among different cultures and a sense of interpersonal responsibility between human beings.

After identity (Sections 3 and 4), and community (Section 5), Section 6 shifts the focus to 'culture' and 'nation' through the analysis of multiculturalism. Born as an important reaction against racism and national homogeneity, the multiculturalist project vindicates the recognition of racial and cultural pluralism within the nation, much like identity politics movements do. This section emphasizes, however, how, at the same time that it questions the dominant culture for its homogeneity and demands the recognition of cultural and racial difference, multiculturalism accommodates itself within the dominant culture, ironically becoming a homogenizing force in its absorption of individual subjectivities within the collective 'identities' of those groups who have been historically marginalized. The potentiality of multiculturalism as a democratic political movement, therefore, is limited by the very parameters that, as noted in earlier sections, also constrain identity politics movements and communitarianism. Like communitarianism, thus, this section underlines, multiculturalism supports a segregationist conception of humanity by reinforcing, not dismantling, the 'walls' that stand between different human groups. Neither does it problematize the oppressive mechanisms of nationalism(s) or the power-structures leading to the oppression of the human groups demanding recognition in the first place. Quoting Zygmunt Bauman: "In a world of 'multiculturalism', cultures may coexist but it is hard for them to benefit from a shared life" (*Community* 2001: 135). My

analysis of multiculturalism in this section, therefore, leads me to conclude that more is needed to transcend the rigid boundaries of communitarianism, including those of the nation.

For this reason, Section 7 moves away from community in order to investigate forms of belonging such as cosmopolitanism or internationalism which aim to reconcile local attachments to more global allegiances. The section opens with an analysis (Section 7.1) of Immanuel Kant's universalist dream of federation between (European, white) nation-states, which has been influential to cosmopolitans, internationalists, and universalists alike in their defense of their respective visions of a 'world community'. Kant's 'universalist' project, scholars such as Pauline Kleingeld have noted, is not only Eurocentric but also racist and sexist, since Kant contemplated a 'natural' inferiority of non-white human beings and of women despite his professed yearnings for human communion. Section 7.2 analyzes, and problematizes, cosmopolitan and internationalist agendas claiming alliance both to 'the world' and to local forms of belonging such as the nation, in their efforts to find a balance between local and global affiliations. The section studies the work of cosmopolitan and internationalist scholars such as Kwame Anthony Appiah, Pheng Cheah, or Bruce Robbins, among others, critically noting their strong adherences to nationalism and to patriotism even though they claim for a global alliance with humanity. My problematization of these two currents of thought adds to that of scholars who have regarded cosmopolitanism as too abstract and ineffective to develop from an ideal into a political movement, or who have noted how internationalism, despite having proved more politically effective than cosmopolitanism, continues endorsing a nationalist agenda that does not dismantle but, on the contrary, upholds (in the same way that multiculturalism does) the very power-structures of the nation-state. Martin Heidegger best exposed this paradox when he

claimed that "Nationalism is not overcome through mere internationalism; it is rather expanded and elevated thereby into a system" (1993: 244), consequently leaving space to little more than supranational UN-like institutions, internationalist in scope but deeply grounded and protective of national interests, and which so far have been –are being– actually fruitless in their efforts to grant international human rights in face of particular nation-states' abuse of power. Section 7.3 provides an analysis of the theorizations of critical cosmopolitans and universalists such as Martha Nussbaum and Paul Gilroy. The viewpoints defended by these scholars may be considered, in my opinion, closer to universalism than to cosmopolitanism, since they dissociate themselves from the nationalist leanings professed by both cosmopolitans and internationalists, and, therefore, from rigid notions of communitarian belonging: Martha Nussbaum, thus, criticizes that patriotism overshadows, if not suppresses entirely, the possibility that human beings may feel an allegiance with humanity, and therefore prevents the development of a sense of inter-human responsibility beyond national boundaries; while Paul Gilroy exposes the constructed character of 'race' and vindicates the need to abandon such divisive concept in order to embrace a planetary type of humanism. While I acknowledge the arguments defended by both Nussbaum and Gilroy and the possibilities these arguments open up for the development of plural thinking, the defense of intersubjective universalism in this dissertation stems from the poststructuralist articulations of universalism by Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, or Linda Zerilli, among others, which are studied in section 8, and which informs my interpretation of Melville's universalist literary project in the 1876 *Clarel*. Section 7.3 closes with an analysis of how globalization has become a 'bad' kind of universalism: rather than implementing the practical socio-political reality of the world as a single space, globalization has neither eliminated inter-national borders nor enabled the free

circulation of human beings, but has served certain nation-states' imperialist economic appropriation of other nation-states' resources, thus contributing to economic inequality and exploitation. To think beyond capital and economic interests in re-imagining inter-human relationships seems, therefore, as imperative as it is challenging.

The concluding section in Chapter One, Section 8, rethinks universalism from a poststructuralist perspective, and defends the validity and necessity of intersubjective universalism as the political project I see anticipated in Herman Melville's *Clarel*. Rejecting traditional universalism, this section articulates what I have named intersubjective universalism. Such intersubjective universalism locates the possibility of universalist politics in the interpersonal level, as it is in the interpersonal level, in the contact amongst human beings who are different, that the local and the global blend, individual specificity and difference may be enjoyed, approached and negotiated, and the rigid boundaries and segregationist thinking imposed by both egocentrism and communitarianism may be transcended. Intersubjective universalism, I defend, has a potentiality to democratize human relationship that goes beyond cosmopolitan or internationalist claims for affiliation with 'the world' which are still deeply rooted in the nation or in identity and community-based ways of thinking. The universalism articulated in this dissertation, and which I interpret in Melville's *Clarel*, is based on the mutual constituency, and specificity, of the particular and the universal, proposing a conception of the universal that is not a pre-existing totality to be discovered, or a universalized particular of the kind traditional universalism negatively advocated, but a permanently evolving and decentralized process that I regard as a political praxis, and that is inseparable from the gradual construction of democratic ways of thinking and relating to others. Universalism, therefore, is created interpersonally, from intersubjective communicative processes between human beings, in their difference and

representative plurality. The first part in this section, 8.1, analyzes the notion of intersubjectivity especially through the theorizations of philosopher Martin Buber, and articulates a definition of intersubjectivity as a space of shared being (Nancy's conception of being as being-with resonates here), communication, mutuality, and collaborative negotiation of meaning between individuals, which will necessarily be different every time it is developed by different human beings, in every construction of the 'we'. Intersubjectivity, this section claims, is a political process (the interpersonal, I feel necessary to re-claim, is political) which may trigger the development of more fluid forms of interpersonal bonding and togetherness that transcend communitarian or identitarian ways of thought, as well as monolithic thinking. Following philosophers such as Buber or Levinas's arguments that the ethical and the political always emerge from, or respond to, the intersubjective, this section analyzes the potentiality of dialogue to the creation of democratic ways of thinking (Rolfe's capacity for plural thinking or "Manysidedness" in *Clarel*) and of ethical and political relationships (which frequently go hand in hand). The conception of dialogue articulated in this section corresponds, therefore, not to a competitive struggle to impose one's views above others', or of neutralizing the other's 'strangeness' (to make the other look more like me), but to the very affirmation of the other and his or her subjective position *as* different. This openness to the other may be a transformative (hopefully democratizing) experience to the parties involved, enabling the development of plural thinking which both separates and brings together the local and the global, the particular and the universal, the 'I' and the 'you'. The indispensable condition for the development of intersubjectivity –and, consequently, for the development of universalism–, however, is human beings' necessary predisposition toward the other which, as I argue Melville analyzes in *Clarel*, frequently clashes with human beings reluctance, resistance, negation,

and frustration of the possibility of intersubjectivity. The next section, 8.2, studies the possibility and necessity of a universalist ethics based on intersubjectivity, analyzing the arguments on plurality, inter-human responsibility, and dialogue developed by Hannah Arendt, Zygmunt Bauman, Judith Butler, Emmanuel Levinas, or Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. The section also pays close attention to Butler's project of global ethics, particularly her notions of unwilled adjacency and unchosen cohabitation, as well as to her denunciation –similar to Nussbaum's– of how nationalism conceals the fact that our existence is directly dependent on our cohabitation with others human beings, both near and distant. This section also focuses on Butler's defense of vulnerability as a common condition of human existence, which determines such existence as relational and dependent on others, and therefore conditions our responsibility for the preservation of the lives of those with whom we cohabit the earth. In relation to Butler's arguments, I defend that intersubjective universalism establishes a connection between this universal ethics and politics: in enabling the conception of the interpersonal, and consequently of human relationships, as political, and by conceiving intersubjective dialogue as based on a collaborative negotiation with the other as different, it establishes ethics as inseparable from politics, and empowers individuals to develop more democratic ways of thinking and relating that may be transformative at the interpersonal, and therefore social, level. Section 8.3, studies the plural universalism articulated, from a poststructuralist perspective, by thinkers such as Zygmunt Bauman, Ernesto Laclau, Eric Lott, Nora Sternfeld, or Linda Zerilli. In particular, the section addresses Laclau's revision of the Gramscian concept of 'hegemony' which the political theorist uses for his defense of a plural and decentralized universalism that constitutes the force of the democratic theory he articulates. This section, which closes Chapter One, ends by acknowledging the great difficulty of the task of transforming

segregationism and individualism into intersubjectivity and universalism, yet also vindicates the necessity of pursuing such project in order to construct democratic human relationships which transcend the limiting –self-centered– parameters of identity, of community, and of the nation-state. Universalism, I argue, as Melville analyzes in *Clarel*, stems (or not) from (the failure of) intersubjectivity, and is based on mutuality, interpersonal responsibility, polyphony, plurality. It may be generated through a dynamic dialogue that may enable the negotiation of life in common and the creation of political spaces (in the inter-subjective spaces or the 'spaces' between individual subjectivities) that promote such life in common while preserving plurality.

Intersubjective universalism, I contend, constitutes the political project of Herman Melville's 1876 *Clarel*, and of the author's literary production as a whole. Chapter Two, "Transcending the Limits of One-Sided Imaginations. Intersubjective Universalism in Herman Melville's *Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land* (1876)", argues that *Clarel* defends the necessity and potentiality of intersubjective universalism, at the same time that it analyzes how this potentiality is aborted by characters who cling to (self-)destructive manias and one-sided forms of thinking. These characters egotistically choose to fence themselves within their individual subjectivities, communitarian forms of belonging, and security zones, thus perpetuating egocentric behaviors and monolithic thinking which prevent the development of intersubjectivity and, consequently, of universalism. The chapter argues that, in *Clarel*, Melville locates the possibility of universalism –and, therefore, of democratic human relationships– in intersubjectivity, which he conceives as a dynamic collaborative dialogic process which has the potential of transcending the walls that human beings create, or are taught to believe as 'naturally' existing, between them. Chapter Two opens with an introduction (Section 1) defending my thesis that *Clarel* emphasizes the complex universal

interconnection of human beings and, at the same time, analyzes the segregationisms generated by egocentric behaviors and identity-based forms of communitarian affiliation, which make human beings oblivious of their connection with all other human beings, and block off the potential development of interpersonal bonds that may break through the 'walls' of such identitarian and communitarian adherences. Like other Melvillean works, *Clarel*, I argue, is a space for the imagining, exploration, and testing of interpersonal bonds and collectivities which move beyond traditional ways of belonging that often enforce one-sided visions of reality and humanity. Yet, at the same time that Melville investigates the democratizing potentiality of intersubjective universalism on human relationships, the author also portrays in *Clarel* how most characters in the poem arrest the possibilities of developing intersubjective relationships with other characters, and, consequently, undermine the very democratizing potentiality of universalism that the poem claims. Nonetheless, I contend that this incapacity of characters to participate in the construction of universalism neutralizes neither the importance of the exercise in plural thinking that *Clarel* encourages (and itself, as a text and a political space, creates) nor the democratizing potential that Melville attributes to such political process.

Section 2 historicizes *Clarel* by analyzing the specific context(s) in which it was written, as well as the material conditions in which the poem came to being. These contextual aspects, I defend, are important to my subsequent analysis of the politics of the poem in Section 3. Section 2 opens with a study of the circumstances surrounding the composition of *Clarel* in Section 2.1, analyzing the importance of writing to Melville, and paying close attention to the fact that, over the years he was writing *Clarel*, Melville could not devote his full time and full self to writing, as he had done with his previous works, due to his job at the New York Customs House. This section is followed by a

study of the writing context(s) of the poem itself (Section 2.2), which is divided into

three subsections: Section 2.2.1 analyzes the influence of Melville's actual trip to

Palestine in 1857 and of the journal the author kept during this trip; Section 2.2.2 points

at the fictionalization of Palestine and Jerusalem from the 1856-57 journal to *Clarel*; and

2.2.3 exposes my hypotheses on the origins and composition process of *Clarel*, the

writing of which I contextualize in the late 1860s and 1870s (I propose late 1867 as a

possible hypothetical starting date). This last section also claims the importance that

Melville's eldest son Malcolm's suicide at the age of eighteen may have had to the

conception of the poem-pilgrimage in *Clarel*, together with how other social and

political events, especially socio-political facts and transformations in the U.S. after the

Civil War, and also in other countries (particularly the 1871 revolutions in France), may

have shaped the writing of the poem. The following section, 2.3, moves from writing to

publication, analyzing the frenzy and domestic tensions that seem to have arisen in the

Melville household as *Clarel* was being revised and prepared for the press. The section

that follows (2.4.) provides a close look at the publication context itself, arguing that

Melville had probably abandoned any hopes for the recognition of his works by the

time he was writing *Clarel*, as there is evidence that the author's initial wish was to, if

publishing the poem at all, do so anonymously, perhaps in order to dissociate the text

from the automatic negative critical reception to Melville's works after his first two

successful novels *Typee* (1846) and *Omoo* (1847). Section 2.4 also analyzes how Melville's

uncle's generosity allowed for the self-publication of *Clarel*, yet also made the author

eventually renounce his initial wishes for anonymity. This intention to publish *Clarel*

anonymously, however, I argue, is important, because it might have given Melville more

creative freedom during the very process of writing the poem than his other previous

works (particularly his novels and short-stories, but also his 1866 volume of Civil War

poems *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War*) that were, already from the beginning, conditioned by publishers' and the market demands. Finally, Section 2 closes with an overview of the critical reception of *Clarel* at the time of its publication, emphasizing its subsequent neglect until very recently (2.5).

While Sections 1 and 2 are intended as the necessary introductory ground for my study of the politics of the poem, Section 3 constitutes the core of such analysis, since it defends my thesis that *Clarel* reveals Melville's universalist project. This section opens with some considerations on Melville's religiosity and views on religion (Section 3.1), because, even though my analysis of *Clarel* does not focus directly on religion in the way other studies (e.g., Goldman [1993], Potter [2004]) have done, it is undeniable that religion and religiosity are central subjects in *Clarel*, and that Melville's attitude toward religion is telling to the universalist project in the poem. Section 3.1, thus, argues that Melville's religious views, as expressed in his works, partake of a universalist conception of God, religion, and humanity, conceiving God, I claim, not so much as a metaphysical entity but as an ethical *praxis*, as the fact of being (and of being responsible) itself, not only individually but in our existence-*with* others. This section informs my analysis of the critique of one-sided thinking (among which religious blindness is particularly emphasized) and inter-personal or inter-community walls that I interpret in *Clarel* as preventing the development of universalism. The section also informs my study of the poem's analysis of belief, unbelief, faith, spirituality, dogma, religious mania, and doubt. Section 3.2 centers on Melville's choice of the subtitle "A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land", arguing that this phrase establishes an explicit connection between form and content that is placed at the service of *Clarel*'s universalist project. The section claims that, representative of Melville's larger literary production, *Clarel* not only stands up for universalism as a political movement with a

democratizing potential to human relationships, but becomes in itself such a movement, creating a political space and aiming to engage readers in the pilgrimage it constructs. Exposing the multiple walls separating human beings, *Clarel* points toward the transcendence of these walls, noting the democratizing potentiality of intersubjectivity to the establishment of interpersonal bonds beyond traditional forms of belonging. This section also analyzes form (the poem as artifact and political space) as supporting *Clarel*'s exploration of universalism, arguing that poetics in the poem contributes to problematize monolithic 'Meaning', supports the interconnection of separate elements, and at the same time, paradoxically, reproduces the multiple walls constraining the development of intersubjectivity and, consequently, of universalism. Section 3.3 focuses on *Clarel* as a critique of progress, claiming that the poem problematizes the national progress the U.S. was proclaiming itself epitome of at the time of the Centennial. In this section, I argue that *Clarel* turns away from celebratory images of national progress and patriotism and denounces how the official narrative of economic growth masked violent divisions in postbellum America. Section 3.4 defends the need of analyzing *Clarel* in relation to Melville's Civil War volume *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War* (1866), in order to better understand the loss of hope in American democracy that Melville expresses in *Clarel*. This section contends that Melville's political response to the American Civil War, *Battle-Pieces*, is not a breach within the author's universalist literary production (scholars such as Carolyn Karcher, Carme Manuel, or Michael Paul Rogin have perceived Melville's voice in this volume as strangely conservative), but that, paradoxical as this claim may seem, and significantly enough to the thesis defended in this dissertation, in *Battle-Pieces* Melville had chosen to become a bard of "Humanity"[13] even though this political project was inscribed within,

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[13] This is the phrase with which the concluding prose "Supplement" to *Battle-Pieces* ends.

and hindered by, the boundaries of U.S. nationalism, and limited by the very readership it aimed to address. Melville revealed how the internal wound opened by the war continued bleeding in the 1870s, a time of divisions and segregation which, I argue, resonates in the choice of the Holy Land as the context of the poem, as well as in the incorporation of the ex-Confederate veteran Ungar, who introduces the topic of the U.S. Civil War directly into *Clarel*. In this section, I connect Melville's critique of U.S. progress in the postbellum period, in particular, to a more global denunciation of progress and decline in democratic values. The world of *Clarel* is, therefore, one of universal waste and disillusionment, as no society analyzed in the poem provides a higher degree of hope or relief than the others.

Section 3.5 emphasizes how the local and the global merge in the particular contexts of Jerusalem and the Holy Land. Through the context of Jerusalem/Palestine, Melville analyzes in *Clarel* the inter-human separation and segregationism imposed by the walls of communitarianism, presenting these as obstacles that block the development of universalism. Through this context, I argue, Melville also evokes the violent animosities, inter-human hatreds, irreconcilable divisions, segregation, racist violence, and social conflict of postbellum America. *Clarel* establishes a parallelism between Palestine and the U.S., which is reinforced by the poem's exploitation, and critique, of the U.S. foundational connection between America and biblical Israel to the construction of U.S. national identity, based on the discourse of exceptionalism, for centuries abused by the U.S. and by Zionists in their construction of collective memory and nation(ality) or sense of peoplehood. Section 3.6 focuses on the many walls emphasized in *Clarel* at the same time that it argues that the poem transcends these walls by remarking human beings' universal connectedness in their individual sufferings. This section defends that *Clarel* underlines the segregationist component of

communitarianisms of different kinds (nation, religion, class, etc.), which is evoked by the walls of Jerusalem themselves, the city's segregated neighborhoods and areas, the existing separation between communities, and the fact that some of Jerusalem's human groups and individual characters (e.g., Celio) are forced to live and die literally facing the walls that separate them from other human beings. Melville's project to counter this segregationism of communitarianism and one-sided ways of thinking is intersubjective universalism, as I analyze in the section that follows.

Section 3.7, thus, studies *Clarel*'s political project of intersubjective universalism: its necessity, potentiality, challenges, difficulties, (im)possibilities. If, as this dissertation argues, *Clarel* defends intersubjective universalism as a democratizing project which is built from plurality and which triggers the development of plural thinking, the poem also shows how individuals remain unable to transcend their singular or communal forms of egocentrisms and one-sided thinking parameters. The section is divided into three parts. The first one is Section 3.7.1, which defends universalism as Herman Melville's life-long literary project, and situates *Clarel* within the larger context of Melville's oeuvres. In this section, I argue that Melville does not defend universalism in the abstract in his texts but develops a literary project that enacts the very exercise in dialogism and plural thinking the characters of which are, for the most part, incapable of performing. The following section, 3.7.2, interprets *Clarel* as a poem that constitutes a universalist context, and analyzes the formal devices the poem uses in order to construct a space of dialogue as a potential platform for plural thinking. To this end, 3.7.2 is divided into four subsections. The first subsection, "a", analyzes the crucial importance of dialogue to the development of intersubjective universalism. As Chapter One in this dissertation argues, this intersubjective dialogue resides in the collaborative exploration of 'meanings', an exploration which is central to the creation of democratic

interpersonal relationships. In a Bakhtinian way, *Clarel* (and Melville's works in general) generates a dynamic dialogue that affirms each of the voices involved, in a process which creates multiple interpretations, embraces a plural and more relational type of thinking, and, thus, de-centralizes and is critical of monolithic views on 'Meaning' and 'Truth'. This dialogic (using Bakhtinian terminology) process within the poem, and the dialogic reading-process it engages readers with, I claim, *are* political processes themselves working at the service of the universalist project in *Clarel*. The next subsection, "b", claims for the character of Rolfe as an example of the manysidedness and capacity for plural thinking that Melville stimulates in *Clarel*. In this respect, the dialogue-generator Rolfe, I argue, is also a model for the young Clarel of the diver that knows how to penetrate into the depths of human nature without condemning himself to self-destruction (Nathan, Mortmain), bitterness (Ungar), or passivity (Agath). Described by the narrator as "a messmate of the elements" (1.31.21) and a "genial heart" (1.31.14), Rolfe is central to the careful process of dialogue-construction built by the poem, as well as an important piece in *Clarel*'s efforts to move beyond one-sided worldviews that are nourished by egocentrisms and inter-personal and inter-communitarian walls. Constantly predisposed toward others, Rolfe is capable of interlacing and comparing different worldviews and human traditions: he questions, ponders, evaluates, juxtaposes contraries, establishes connections, and makes his fellow travelers speak, also emphasizing their resonating silences. Rolfe is an important connector and weaver in the text. His capacity for plural thinking, together with his communal disposition, liberates him from the one-sided thinking and views of the world that trap the rest of his fellow travelers into their individualist selves, communitarian affiliations, and monolithic conceptions of Meaning, which prevent the development of intersubjectivity/universalism. Besides the particular character of Rolfe,

Clarel also uses structural devices that encourage plural thinking, for example a series of episodes which juxtapose different interpretations of a same motif. Section "c" analyzes the palm cantos in Part 3, "Mar Saba", which give voice to different characters (namely, Vine, Mortmain, Derwent and the Lesbian, Rolfe, and Clarel) who express their respective responses and emotions in contemplation of the palm hovering over the precipice within the walled Orthodox monastery of Mar Saba. The palm cantos reveal the most private individuality of each of these characters, incommunicable to the rest due to the fact that the impressions on the palm of all these interpreters remain secreted between each of them, the tree, the narrator, and the readers. For this reason, at the same time that they constitute a respectful space for characters to directly expose their individuality, the palm episodes, like so many other textual instances throughout the poem, emphasize the ultimate aloneness which suffuses the inner self of each of these and other characters in the poem. Yet, *Clarel* does portray moments of togetherness and pleasure which are juxtaposed to the aridity of the Palestinian land and the bleakness of existence, and which invite the pilgrims to (briefly) forget the hardships of their lives and their feelings of aloneness. Section "d" analyzes one of such moments of conviviality and temporary togetherness among some characters within the walled monastery of Mar Saba. This togetherness, however, is merely momentary and contributes little to creating a long-lasting sense of connectedness among these fellow travelers. The analysis of this transitory moment of conviviality in this section anticipates the study, in Section 3.7.3, of how characters abort the possibilities of togetherness, thus feeding their aloneness and thwarting the opportunities of creating universalism or thinking "without the walls" (Melville, *Journals* 1989: 87) that separate them from their fellow human beings.

This third part of Section 3.7 (3.7.3) argues that the majority of characters in *Clarel* hinder the possibility of intersubjectivity, and, consequently, of universalism, remaining instead walled subjectivities. The section claims that *Clarel* criticizes how egocentric behaviors (both individualist and communitarian) clash with the plural thinking the poem points at as the necessary means to transcend monolithic thinking. This impossibility to materialize universalism, therefore, perpetuates one-sided conceptions of the world, in turn reinforcing interpersonal walls, egocentric behaviors, and self-centered worldviews which prevent human beings from conceiving their universal connection and from relating to one another. Section 3.7.3 features two subsections. The first one, "a", analyzes *Clarel*'s portrayal of individuals who prevent the development of intersubjectivity by rejecting the possibility of loving other human beings. This first section claims, in particular, that the poem poses a tension between heterosexual and homosexual love, and that these two kinds of love are made to converge and conflict in the young Clarel himself, whose attitude toward his own homosexual longings evolves, I claim, from initial fear to a will to explore and to a final repression of the "Unknown" (1.11.51) within himself. The section analyzes Melville's exploration of love in *Clarel* in connection to the possibility of establishing intersubjective relationships, as the poem reveals human beings' incapability of trespassing the inter-personal walls which prevent the development of such intersubjective bonds. The section also approaches the young student's quest for love in relation to the rest of the characters' generalized failure to develop interpersonal bonds with other characters. Section "b" studies how monolithic thinking of different kinds and egocentric behaviors neutralize the possibility of plural thinking and prevent the development of democratic interpersonal relationships characterized by acceptance, not absorption, of the other and his/her worldviews. This section is, in turn, subdivided

into the analysis of three principal limitations, which correspond to different manias, madnesses, one-sidednesses, and egocentric behaviors that the poem emphasizes and is critical of: (i) religious and scientific one-sidedness; (ii) blinding optimism; and (iii) (self-)destructive bleakness. Like communitarian affiliation, these monolithic adherences to fixed Meanings stand as evident obstacles to the potential development of intersubjective universalism in the poem.

Chapter Two closes with Section 4, which gathers together, as a mode of conclusion, the main questions addressed in the chapter. A continuation of Melville's literary project, Melville's *Clarel* defends the potentiality, and the necessity, of intersubjective universalism to the development of democratic human relationships, and, consequently, democratic societies, at the same time that it painfully laments how such potentiality is neutralized by characters who cannot transcend their one-sided worldviews. *Clarel* analyzes the complexity of human relationships, explores human beings' too human limitations, and exposes the egocentrisms that block away the possibilities of plural thinking and universalism. Relevantly enough, *Clarel* points to democratic possibilities "Beyond the walls",[14] and significantly moves characters (and readers) *beyond* the oppressive walls of Jerusalem (symbolic, as Chapter Two analyzes, of inter-human walls), by embarking the young Clarel and his fellow travelers (readers included) in a journey through sandy deserts. Also significantly, Melville eventually returns his characters back to the walled city of Jerusalem, the oppressiveness and violent inter-human divisions of which the author had depicted in Part 1 (the longest) of the poem. This decision to end the 17,863-verses pilgrimage in Jerusalem may perhaps be indicative of Melville's painful realization that the inter-personal walls blocking the potentiality of universalism are too well-interiorized by human beings, who

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[14] This is actually the title of canto 1.7, which I analyze in Section 1 of Chapter Two in this dissertation.

continuously undermine their own possibilities of togetherness and happiness. By Part 4, the desert has invaded the global city of Jerusalem, now a scenario of universal pain and a city of separate human wails deaf to one another, of aloneness, and of interpersonal gulfs without bridges. This painful conclusion, however, does not invalidate Melville's belief in the potentiality of intersubjective universalism, which human beings, Melville laments in *Clarel*, are too limited, imperfect, selfish, perhaps too human, to bring to reality. The task of transforming segregationism and individualism into democracy and universalism is certainly not an easy one; yet, Melville seems to indicate, this is no reason why we should abandon the project. *Clarel*, I believe, is an important work to unfold the democratizing political potentiality of Melville's oeuvre.

"[…] the abandonment of universalism undermines the foundation of a democratic society." (Ernesto Laclau, *Emancipation(s)* 1996: 122)

"Would it still make sense to speak of democracy when it would no longer be a question […] of country, nation, even of state or citizen?" (Jacques Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship* 2005: 104)

"It avails not, time nor place—distance avails not,

I am with you, you men and women of a generation, or ever so many generations hence,

Just as you feel when you look on the river and sky, so I felt,

Just as any of you is one of a living crowd, I was one of a crowd,

Just as you are refresh'd by the gladness of the river and the bright flow, I was refresh'd,

Just as you stand and lean on the rail, yet hurry with the swift current, I stood yet was

    hurried,

Just as you look on the numberless masts of ships and the thick-stemm'd pipes of

    steamboats, I look'd."

(Walt Whitman, "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry", 1856, *Leaves of Grass* 160-161)

CHAPTER ONE. THE DEMOCRATIZING POTENTIALITY OF INTERSUBJECTIVE UNIVERSALISM

1. Introduction: In Defense of Universalism

> "Where is the country of man? Where the central point of the earth? Every where, the answer may be."
> (Johann Gottfried Herder, "*Outlines of a Philosophy of the History of Man* 1803: 18)

> "[…] we saw that familiar swastika flying again: this time alongside the Confederate flags and burning crosses of affirmative but declining segregationism. This too was an interpretative challenge. What 'theory' of racial difference, or racial prejudice, could explain these transcultural patterns of identification?"
> (Paul Gilroy, *Against Race* 2000: 4)

> "[…] it should lead us to accept the scattered meaning of the universal, and elaborate the passages between its different modalities. The philosophical project would thus become to articulate these differences […]—which is always, in the last instance, a matter of ethical and political choice rather than pure speculative or theoretical construction."
> (Etienne Balibar, "Ambiguous Universality" 1995: 49)

"Universalism exists, yet unknown to those myopically unaware of its meshes". These words by a renowned Melville scholar in conversation (May 2012) summarize not only the vision of universalism that I will defend in the present chapter, but also the understanding of humanity and human relationships that, as will be argued in Chapter Two, I interpret in Herman Melville's *Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land* (1876) as representative of Melville's life-long literary project. Universalism is real because, on a scientific basis, human beings are, inevitably, both biologically and physically interconnected not only to one another but to other living beings around the

planet.[15] But if universalism is real, that is, if human beings on a planetary level are interconnected and, as a matter of fact, mutually interdependent for life and survival as a species, the imperative questions seem to be (1) how to make human beings aware of such interconnection, despite the 'walls' that keep them apart, and (2) how to articulate a sociopolitical project that pushes beyond this biological awareness of universalism based on universality, to the creation of more democratic forms of relating which liberate human beings from the imperialistic 'Us' vs. 'Them' binary-thinking, and which should not neutralize, but emerge from, the very plurality that characterizes humanity. Melville himself emphasized in his 1850 "Hawthorne and His Mosses" how "a man may travel along a country road, and yet miss the grandest, or sweetest of prospects, by reason of an intervening hedge, so like all other hedges, as in no way to hint of the wide landscape beyond" (48). If such "intervening hedges" not only obscure "the wide landscape beyond" but also separate human beings, the challenge is, therefore, to understand that there are no 'foreign', 'alien', or 'illegal' peoples in a world where all human beings are interconnected not only biologically, but also through space that connects all places, and through time that unites these individuals born at different moments to both past and future generations.

My defense of universalism, however, starts with the recognition that universalism has had many detractors. As a sociopolitical project, universalism continues to be negatively associated with homogenization, a neutralizing project aiming to absorb the plurality of humanity in a monolithic 'One'. Due to its negative

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[15] On a biological and also physical level, such connection is particularly found in water, which not only constitutes an important percentage of the bodies of all living organisms but also, as recent scientific discoveries have shown, the very source of life itself, and the space that both unites and separates lands and peoples. This demonstrates that not only are human beings biologically interconnected to one another but also to other living beings around the planet, a connection which is, therefore, not imaginary or invented (in Benedict Anderson's sense of an "imagined" community) but real.

reputation, indigenous and non-Western intellectuals (from Africa, Asia, South America, as well as from the point of view of Islam), on the one hand, and, identity-based groups within the West, on the other hand, have long disregarded universalism as a valid political movement for the construction of democratic societies, since all of them have felt deeply marginalized by the traditional Eurocentric, white, and heteronormative 'Universal'. It is necessary, however, to discharge universalism from its negative association with homogenization and oppression in order to defend its validity —and indispensability— in our violently divided, and yet, perhaps paradoxically, increasingly globalized world. I believe with Etienne Balibar that "no discussion about universality (and, consequently, no discussion about its contraries or opposites: particularity, difference, singularity) can usefully proceed with a 'univocal' concept of 'the Universal'" (1995: 48). Such a "univocal" universal is the form that universalism has adopted at different times in history: to the present moment, multiple societies have witnessed, or are witnessing, the failure of communism, the progressive spread of capitalism and Westernization, and the consolidation of a, well-established by now, society of consumers characterized by individualism and rampant materialism. Such a reality may make the kind of plural universalism Balibar defends seem utopian, if not naïve, and perhaps unthinkable, or, if conceivable at all, extremely problematic and ultimately deprived of the political possibilities Balibar projects in it. Logically, universalism continues to be regarded with skepticism due to its claims for equality and 'oneness', which political agendas defending the recognition of different sectors of the population consider menacing because of the potentially homogenizing consequences of a project intended to unify differences. These groups believe that, in the same way that nationalist efforts to foster patriotism and national unity, and movements emphasizing 'pure' particularisms and monolithic conceptions of community,

universalism can dangerously result in new totalitarianisms and homogenizing enterprises. Detractors of universalism perceive this project as being anchored in the old-fashioned notion of the 'human subject', also hierarchical, dangerously neutralizing, and ultimately imperialist and totalitarian. Nonetheless, I aim to defend in this chapter that universalism is not only inseparable from democracy and democratic thinking but, in fact, the very component that makes democracy possible at all. In spite of the problems of articulating a plural universalism, and because of its potentiality, philosophers, sociologists, and political theorists seem to continue to be both attracted and troubled by universalism, struggling to find ways to 'reconcile' the particular and the universal, or, in other words, wondering about how to historicize universalism in order to prevent it from becoming a dangerous and totalizing abstraction or a politically inefficient cosmopolitan utopia. As Dipesh Chakrabarty claims:

> […] as discussions of human rights increasingly make clear, universalistic assumptions are not easily given up, and the tension between universalism and historical difference is not easily dismissed. The struggle to find a middle ground remains. "Strategic essentialism" (associated with Gayatri Spivak [1988]), "hybridity" (associated with Homi Bhabha [1994]), "cosmopolitanism," and the like are expressions that remind us of particular strategies formulated in the course of this struggle. (2000: 654)

I am well aware of the difficult challenges of the task of rethinking universalism: the critical questions of (1) how to express plurality in a universalist political movement and type of thinking that is truly polyphonic and, as a consequence, democratic, while, at the same time, respecting and empowering particularisms; and (2) how to understand that –and open up– human existence and human subjectivity as inevitably intersubjective (Nancy's conception of 'being' as 'being-with') in a world of individualisms and communitarian clingings. These two premises constitute basic concerns in Melville's articulation of universalism in *Clarel* –a universalism I have

termed intersubjective. Abandoning universalism implies a renunciation of our bond with other human beings across the globe at a historical moment in which human beings and population groups are largely self-centered, estranged from, and deaf to one another, despite the reality of globalization, and, paradoxically, at a time of heterogeneous populations and prominent global media which bring us closer to the sociopolitical realities of different corners of the world. Didier Coste presents a universalist vision that already contains some of the characteristics of the universalism that the present chapter will defend, and which I consider inherent to the development of democratic human relationships:

> Although a vote has not been taken, I guess that most of us, ordinary people, citizens and subjects, at planetary scale, would rather have *one* world than two or more conflicting ones. It is also fairly obvious that huge sectors of the population of the world are not ready or nearly ready to pay the price of a *single* economic, political or symbolic model in order to achieve such unity. Understandably, any such model is immediately branded "imperialist," except by the minority of agents who identify with it and are actively or passively engaged in propagating it. In other terms, we do want *one* peaceful world, but it should be like a public space, an open forum, a playground, a *maidam*, not an *ecclesia* or community of beliefs […]; we want it varied, multifarious, not ruled from above by common principles of behavior and representation (such as a shared grand historical narrative). (Coste 2004: 37)

Coste's vision is in tune with the conception of universalism that I will present in the following pages, which perceives the earth as a planetary society in which there are no 'foreign' peoples or elements, but different human beings connected to others in their diversity. Plurality, therefore, is intrinsic to this universalism, as it is intrinsic to humanity itself. As Hannah Arendt noted in 1958: "Plurality is the condition of human actions because we are the same, that is, human, in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives or will live" (8). Starting from a rejection of both traditional universalism and 'pure' particularisms, the present chapter will analyze the democratic potentialities of a plural universalism that does not neutralize the

singularity of the subjectivities it embraces but which, on the contrary, is nourished by difference and inseparable from the 'particulars' that constitute it and from which it takes the possibility of its very existence and strength. The defense of universalism in this chapter considers as its starting point Ernesto Laclau's affirmation that there can be no democracy without universalism (1992: 122),[16] a claim which informs my approach to Herman Melville's narrative poem *Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land* (1876), in Chapter Two. The aim of the present chapter is, therefore, to articulate a plural universalism, which I have termed intersubjective universalism, from the analysis of the arguments posed by contemporary intellectuals, philosophers, sociologists, and political theorists such as Giorgio Agamben, Hannah Arendt, Etienne Balibar, Zygmunt Bauman, Judith Butler, Jacques Derrida, Paul Gilroy, Ernesto Laclau, Emmanuel Levinas, Eric Lott, Jean-Luc Nancy, Martha Nussbaum, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Nora Sternfeld, Linda Zerilli, or Slavoj Žižek, among others. This analysis will hopefully provide me with the theoretical framework through which I shall approach the text that is central to my dissertation: Herman Melville's 1876 *Clarel*, a complex poem and pilgrimage.

2. Universalism: A Historical Overview

"The category of totality continues haunting us through the effects that derive from its very absence."
(Ernesto Laclau, *Emancipation(s)* 1996: 13)

"When you say feminism, when you say socialism, please remember to say British socialism, British feminism; those national markers are important political markers,

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[16] In both my articulation of intersubjective universalism, in this chapter, and my analysis of Melville's *Clarel*, in Chapter Two, I am interested in the possibilities of universalism for the development of democratic human relationships. My use of the term 'democracy', therefore, refers to this intersubjective dimension, and it is in it that I locate the possibility of politics and political changes.

not because these things have nationalities but because
otherwise the universalizing comes easy."
(Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "An Interview with Gayatri
Chakravorty Spivak" 1993: 41)

Human beings of all places and periods have struggled with the tension of reconciling

the individual and the group, the particular and the universal, singularity and plurality.

Different historical moments and human groups have procured different conceptions

of the relationship between particularity and universality, articulating such relationship

from areas such as philosophy, religion, spirituality, linguistics, culture, reason, politics,

nationality, and ideology.[17] Many of these articulations have claimed the inevitable

incompatibility of both concepts, arguing that favoring a given particularism inevitably

implies rejecting a universal, and that affirming a universal, in turn, signifies the

negation of any particulars. However, as Linda M. G. Zerilli notes, "[…] the political

question of universalism cannot be posed properly as long as it remains tethered to the

classical philosophical 'problem of universals'"; it is therefore necessary to investigate

the interconnection between the particular and the universal, Zerilli claims, in order to

"understand intersubjective agreement in a democratic culture" (1998: 4). In his article

"Universalism, Particularism, and the Question of Identity" (1992) –incorporated as the

second chapter to his volume *Emancipation(s)*, published in 1996–, Ernesto Laclau

analyzes the different historical approaches to thinking universality and particularity

together. Laclau distinguishes three tendencies in such historical conceptions. First, he

notes how classical ancient philosophy perceived a line separating the universal and the

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[17] Among these articulations, it is important to acknowledge universalist projects, throughout
history, such as: on a political level, the utopian socialisms of the late nineteenth, and beginnings of the
twentieth, century in Eastern Europe; on a linguistic level, the Esperantist movement, which emerged in
the late nineteenth century avowing for the implementation of a common international language; or on a
religious level, Sikhism, born in the Pujab region in the fifteenth century and promoting universal
brotherhood, and the Baha'i faith, founded in Persia in the nineteenth century and encouraging the
belief in the unity of humanity.

particular, arguing that this line could be grasped by reason and had the function to prevent any contact between both concepts, which would corrupt one another through this interaction (1992: 48): "Either the particular realizes the universal in itself (i.e., it eliminates itself as particular and transforms itself in a transparent medium through which universality operates) or it negates the universal by asserting its particularism (but the latter, as purely irrational, has no entity of its own and thus can only exist as a corruption of being)" (1992: 84-85). Laclau notes the problems of where to place the line separating universality and particularity, a question for which ancient philosophy, he concludes, provides no answer. The second approach to the particular/universal relationship that Laclau analyzes is that of Christianity, which conceived the universal as incarnated in God and, therefore, as inaccessible to mortals through human reason.[18] The logics of incarnation posed by Christianity, Laclau notes, had an important influence in modern forms of thinking the universal, which replaced God as absolute source of knowledge by reason (1992: 85). This leads to the third approach he distinguishes. Replacing the theocentric view of Christianity by a rationalist conception of the universal, modernity appropriated Christian logics of incarnation postulating a specific particular *as* the universal, which would become the source for the development of the, infamous, universal subject of the Enlightenment that would be consolidated during the nineteenth and even the twentieth century (Laclau 1992: 85-86).[19] At that time, European culture would emerge as the particular body incarnating the universal. This conception of the universal would justify centuries of European imperialist expansion and colonial conquest:

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[18] It is interesting to note, in relation to Laclau's arguments, the etymology of the word 'Catholicism', one of the oldest forms of the Christian religion, which is located in the Greek term *katholikós* 'universal'.

[19] This is also the context for Kant's cosmopolitan articulation, analyzed in Section 7.1 in this chapter.

So European culture was a particular, yet at the same time it was the expression (no longer the incarnation) of universal human essence (in the same sense that the Soviet Union was later considered the motherland of socialism). Crucial here is that there was no way to distinguish between European particularism and the universal functions it was supposed to incarnate, given that European universalism had constructed its identity through the cancellation of the logic of incarnation and, as a result, of the universalization of its own particularism. So European imperialist expansion had to be presented in terms of a universal civilizing function, of modernization, etc. As a result, the resistances of other cultures were presented not as struggles between particular identities and cultures, but as part of an all-embracing, epochal struggle between universality and particularisms—the notion of peoples without history expressing precisely their incapacity to represent the universal.

This argument could be conceived in explicit racist terms, as in the various forms of social Darwinism, but it could also be given more 'progressive' versions, as in some sectors of the Second International, by asserting that the civilizing mission of Europe would lead to the establishment of a universally freed society of planetary dimensions. Thus the logic of incarnation was reintroduced—with Europe representing for a certain period universal human interests. (Laclau 1992: 86)

The previous passage underlines some of the reasons why, after two centuries of (ab)use of the Eurocentric 'Universal' subject with oppressive, even genocidal consequences to many peoples and cultures, universalism has come to be dismissed as an unacceptable political project. As Nora Sternfeld has argued: "'Universalism' was subjected to strong criticism by the postcolonial and feminist camps and was exposed as white western particularism. What was challenged was the very fact that only some were (and still are) 'everyone', while others were (and are) not; that while people talked about 'universal rights', what was assumed to be universal was actually a western, male perspective" (2007). Furthermore, the nineteenth century gave rise to the nation-state model, which legitimized the creation and consolidation of national communities that were based on a one-nation/one-state principle, and were created upon homogenizing 'common' features –often, historico-political and linguistic similarities, but also racial empowered/disempowered identities, manipulated through nationalist discourses aiming to establish a national feeling of communion. These common features cohered

the 'national family' as an homogeneous One, and established the well-delimited boundaries of the state, and, consequently, the frontiers between those who were inside(rs) and outside(rs).[20] Closely connected to imperialist ideologies and colonialist expansionism, the rise of nationalisms and the consolidation of the nation-state model –a model which (perhaps paradoxically to our seemingly globalizing age), continues to have so much force in the twenty-first century that we find it impossible to imagine a political alternative to it– contributed to determine the (Western: mostly European [specially French, Spanish, British, Portuguese, Dutch…] but also Angloamerican) nation-state model as the particular that would, for centuries, represent the universal paradigm for state-formation and organization, and be frequently 'exported' through colonial imposition.

To this consolidation of European culture as the particular incarnating the universal over the nineteenth century, which would promote the elimination of the particularisms without this universalized particular, and also legitimize imperialism, colonialism, and homogenizing ideologies, was added the infamous appropriation of universalism by the left in their destructive transformation of the socialist universal dream into a totalitarian nightmare of, using Paul Gilroy's phrase, "universal fascism" (2000: 225). Ernesto Laclau explains the authoritarian turn of socialism by noting how, following the logics of Eurocentric universalism, the working classes were gradually replaced, first, by the party and, eventually, by the figure of the autocrat (Laclau 1992: 86). As a consequence, socialism built itself upon a basis of social inequality, empowering this party/autocrat as the "bodies incarnating the viewpoint of the universal class" (Laclau 1992: 44), universalizing such particularities and their ideology

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[20] For a detailed analysis of the origins of nationalism and the creation of 'national communities', see Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983).

as 'objective knowledge', and both dismissing and disempowering other particularities outside the universalized particular. "From this point on", Laclau concludes, "the authoritarian turn was unavoidable" (1992: 87). This, as Etienne Balibar notes, turned socialism into the last utopia announcing the end of the very possibility of utopias (1995: 51).

By the twentieth century, universalism had become a notion used to legitimize colonialist –even genocidal– practices, justify social and political exploitation, discrimination, and sustain authoritarian regimes. It is, thus, no wonder that universalism was rejected from a number of non-Western perspectives[21] over the twentieth century, as well as by philosophers, political theorists, scholars, and political activists, within the West, claiming for the recognition of human groups (women, non-white racial and ethnic groups, GLTBQIA, the working-classes, etc.) whose identities had been made invisible and even persecuted by sociopolitical regimes claiming to be universalist.[22] As Linda M. G. Zerilli explains, it is not surprising that universalism was dismissed "not only because, historically speaking, it has been a fraud, an inflated particular, but also because it is no longer desirable even as an ideal. The language of universalism, on this view, cannot provide the terms of intersubjective agreement in a plural democracy" (1998: 10).[23] This tendency is only slowly changing today, thanks to

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[21] Universalism has been rejected by thinkers from different cultural backgrounds and locations in African, Asian, Arab, and South American countries, who have questioned the construction of the Western white, Christian, male, heteronormative, literate, non-tribal 'human subject' vindicated by traditional universalism. In order to be able to concentrate on the necessity to move beyond communitarianism and the fights of particularisms vindicated by identity politics, multiculturalism, and even other 'global' projects such as cosmopolitanism or internationalism especially in the U.S. context, I will, in the next sections of this chapter, focus on the critique undergone by universalism within the West, particularly in the United States. Nevertheless, even though I shall not trace the history of non-Western critiques to traditional universalism in the next sections, some of these perspectives are enabling to my articulation of intersubjective universalism, as well as to my analysis of the universalist project in Melville's *Clarel*.

[22] I will examine the main arguments against traditional universalism in the section that follows.

[23] For a thorough analysis of contemporary theories' devaluation of universalism, and a historicist study of the emergence of a bourgeois conception of universalism see Lazarus, Evans, Arnove, and Menke's "The Necessity of Universalism" (1995).

the work of thinkers (e.g., Balibar, Bauman, Butler, Laclau, Zerilli, Žižek, among others) who have engaged in the articulation of a plural kind of universalism beyond the traditional universalism that emerged from the Enlightenment.[24] These scholars vindicate the necessity of universalism today, claiming its democratic potentiality to human relationships, the actual inseparability of universalism and democracy, and, even, the impossibility of democracy without universalism. The universalist project that I shall defend in this dissertation is not the "realization of 'the Absolute'" (Balibar 1995: 48), but a dynamic *praxis* that emerges from human beings' intersubjective sharing of being and negotiation of life in common, which, I claim, may have potentially democratizing effects in human relationships, both at the political and ethical level, in that it may trigger the possibility of transcending the rigid boundaries of nationalism, communitarianism, and individualism. It is, therefore, in intersubjectivity –in interpersonal relationships and in the collaborative creation of interhuman bonds through ongoing dialogue and negotiation– that, I argue, the radical, democratic, both ethical and political, potential of universalism lies. This project is certainly not without difficulties –the first difficulty being not only how to make human beings grow aware that they are connected to one another (the strings in a net might be a pertinent metaphor for that matter), beyond boundaries of family(arity), community, or proximity, but also how to move from the intersubjective, to the social and to the political. There are certainly no promises to the success of this project (*Clarel* itself shows the multiple walls and difficulties any universalist project is bound to face). As Zygmunt Bauman notes, humanity "faces the task of finding *unity in diversity*. An

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[24] In order to differentiate between these two separate projects, I will use the phrase 'traditional universalism' or 'classical universalism' to refer to the conception of universalism inherited from the Enlightenment, and 'plural universalism' to refer to an articulation of universalism developed from theories by contemporary thinkers. Eventually, I will term my own articulation of universalism 'intersubjective universalism', which, I defend, corresponds to the universalist project in Herman Melville's *Clarel* (1876).

attempt known for being undertaken many times before, but always stronger in its declaration of intent than reliable in its delivery. In the past, up to now, either unity or diversity had to give way. And there is no guarantee of any kind that history won't repeat itself this time" (*Community* 2001: 94). This task of finding unity in heterogeneity and plurality, of embracing the polyphony of humanity without strangling it, I believe, cannot be articulated neither through communitarianism nor through pure particularisms, often deaf to the voices that are outside their well-delimited 'walls'; it cannot be articulated either through a universalism that endorses a hierarchical and excluding conception of a 'human subject' and which neutralizes plurality into an homogeneous One. The project this dissertation avows, instead, is a plural universalism rooted in intersubjectivity and in the connection of human beings on a planetary level beyond the 'borders' that separate them. This intersubjective universalism, I claim, is a political project that may have a democratizing potentiality to human relationships, by raising awareness of the interdependency and complex intertwinements of human lives both in proximity and distance. Equally aware of its difficulties as I am of its necessity, this intersubjective universalism is the political and ethical movement that I shall vindicate in the present chapter, and which I will analyze in Chapter Two as informing Melville's 17,863 line-long *Clarel* (1876), as representative of Melville's literary project.

3. Against Traditional Universalism: The Rise of Identity Movements and the Wars of Pure Particularisms

> "Inherent Eurocentrism is one reason why universalism looks suspicious, but relativism is not an unproblematic option either."
> (Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Universalism and Belonging in the Logic of Capital" 2004: 653)

The critique of traditional universalism derived into struggles for identitarian recognition. In the West, the second half of the twentieth-century became a period characterized by the emergence of reformation movements, which brought to the fore the long history of marginalization, oppression, and violence suffered by certain social groups in Western 'democratic' societies across Europe and the United States, and which, at the same time, asserted the distinctiveness of these groups with the aim to achieve sociopolitical rights and equality. Frequently organized around the very identities they vindicated (e.g., woman, black, gay, lesbian, etc.) these movements opposed the –white, Eurocentric, male, heterosexual, Christian– 'universal' subject inherited from the Enlightenment, which embodied the racist, patriarchal and heterosexist pillars upon which the nationalist character, the sociopolitical structures, and the political practices of many (if not all) Western societies had been made to rest (and whose more or less corporeal phantoms continue prevailing at the present moment). In the particular context of mid-twentieth-century United States –a patriarchal, Angloprotestant 'democracy' of legal racial segregation, gender submission, and (borrowing Spivak's phrase in her analysis of nationalism) "reproductive heteronormativity" (2010: 12), where national discourses enforced the assimilation of any form of difference which might disrupt the self-perpetuating mechanisms of the nation-state–, reformation movements such as the Feminist Movement, the Civil Rights Movement, or the Gay Rights Movement became especially active and have been undoubtedly influential for decades. These identity politics movements, each with its own political agenda, denounced the principal fronts of oppression in American society (i.e., racism, patriarchy, heteronormativity), transforming into a reaffirming sense of self and community the negative complex of inferiority these identities had for centuries

been imposed by the dominant societal powers. As Nora Sternfeld claims: "The exclusions and inequalities [imposed by traditional universalism] meant that a consciousness, that particular positions and politics had to be created, which demanded access to the universal. Nevertheless, it is still in the name of equality and the prospect of achieving it – those 'Equal rights for all!' – that marginalized positions claim their rights" (2007). There was indeed a universalist component in identity movements: vindicative of historically neglected sociopolitical standpoints, identity movements were effective platforms for the gradual visibility and recognition of marginalized gender, racial, and sexual identities, as they demanded for the inclusion of these identities on an equal basis within the specific (national) system of power which produced them in the first place and against which they were responding, and, thus, access to the privileges which had historically been barred to them. Yet, such universalist component –the demands for equal rights for a given social group– was also restrictive and excluding, since, by claiming equality for a given social group or 'identity', many groups paradoxically generated a politics of inequality that is exclusive and undemocratic in its very heart (Sternfeld 2007). Sonia Kruks notes the particularistic dimension underlying the demands for recognition of identity movements:

> What makes identity politics a significant departure from earlier, pre-identitarian forms of the politics of recognition is its demand for recognition on the basis of the very grounds on which recognition has previously been denied: it is *qua* women, *qua* blacks, *qua* lesbians that groups demand recognition. The demand is not for inclusion within the fold of "universal humankind" on the basis of shared human attributes; nor is it for respect "in spite of" one's differences. Rather, what is demanded is respect for oneself *as* different. (2001: 85)

It is precisely this articulation of identity movements upon particular subject positions –both determined and legitimized by specific experiences of oppression (sexism, racism, homophobia, etc.)– that empowers the politics of identity, at the same time that

it exposes what we might consider its absolutizing drive. As a matter of fact, identity movements incorporate personal struggle into the political agenda of the group to which individuals subscribe, therefore subsuming individual identities to the identity of the group (Best and Kellner 1997: 33). Moreover, if experience is the legitimizing component upon which the political claims of identity movements rest, such claims become, in themselves, excluding, as they deny the possibility that those not sharing the 'experience' or 'identity' defining a given group might join in its political struggle. This, at the same time, prevents the formation of political coalitions and the creation of political dialogue (Heyes 2007). As Eric Lott notes: "Identity-based movements, as many have observed, have often run on exclusivist energies (no-gurls-allowed, for example), and in any case risk essentializing political urges in marginalized bodies rather than extensively disrupting the normative regimes that produce them in the first place" (2000: 667). Thus, while the political effectiveness of identity movements in the long struggle for the achievement of sociopolitical rights for traditionally marginalized sectors of the population is undeniable, the foundations upon which these movements are articulated are problematic due to their essentialism. Moreover, while identity politics movements certainly disrupt the political system in which they are inscribed through their demands for recognition and social and political rights, they also present themselves as conservative in the sense that, because they demand a place within the very system that has traditionally oppressed them, they eventually perpetuate such system of oppressions (perhaps a traditionally marginalized identity will manage to become part of the system after a long struggle, but others will continue to be oppressed and, what is worse, that identity now not marginalized anymore may even end up contributing to their oppression). Many have noted how the fact that identity politics articulates its claims upon a single identity (gender, race, sexuality, etc.) enforces

'membership' in a group, as well as the identification of 'members' in that group with a 'defining' identity, consequently disregarding other aspects that may in fact be crucial to these individuals' understanding of themselves (Spelman 1988, Heyes 2007). This essentialism, K. Anthony Appiah claims, runs the risk of replacing "one kind of tyranny for another" (1994: 163), by merging the complexity of individual subjectivity and societal plurality into a single feature that uniformizes the group. This, then, does not disrupt but, on the contrary, reproduces the assimilationist tendency and hierarchical mechanisms employed by dominant culture to oppress and marginalize certain sectors of the population. As Cressida Heyes notes: "Just as dominant groups in the culture at large insist that the marginalized integrate by assimilating to dominant norms, so within some practices of identity politics dominant sub-groups may, in theory and practice, impose their vision of the group's identity onto all its members" (2007). The proliferation of identity politics movements over the 1960s and subsequent decades, as a matter of fact, developed into a sociopolitical reality of communitarianism, with identities constituting both the features defining the different groups and their political agendas, that is, the boundaries that both established them as unique and, at the same time, separated them from other movements. While it is true that many of these movements grounded their particularist vindications on claims for equality and universal rights, they also eventually became communitarian formations, articulated around notions of sameness, which sometimes paradoxically reproduced mainstream hierarchies and power-structures.[25] Such a communitarian reality allowed little space for 'strangers' to trespass and few possibilities for coalition with other groups who, in spite of sharing the same political values, did not –could not– share in the given experience

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[25] This gave way, for example, to patriarchal and heterosexist racial communities, a racist and exclusively middle-class-oriented feminism, or gay rights movements reinforcing sexism and the patriarchal system.

of oppression underlying the claims of a particular group. This led to a separatist tendency "ghettoizing members of social groups as the only persons capable of making or understanding claims to justice" (Heyes 2007), and also neutralizing the individuality of their 'members' by simplifying the complexities of human subjectivity for the collective interest of the group. Hannah Arendt noted the complexity of individual subjectivity in the 1971 "Thinking and Moral Considerations": "For myself, articulating this being-conscious-of-myself, I am inevitably two-in-one – which incidentally is the reason why the fashionable search for identity is futile and our modern identity crisis could be resolved only by losing consciousness" (442). Eric Lott similarly notes that "nobody will be represented in total by just one movement; no movement will capture the entirety of a given human being" (2000: 667). And yet this impulse is precisely the one that identity movements enforced in their, on the other hand, crucial and decisive, sociopolitical struggle.

Considering the problematics of the politics of identity, many theorists have proposed alternative forms of political activism based on less rigid conceptions of identity and community, but which, at the same time, may preserve the political effectiveness of identity movements. This is, for example, the case of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, who, while rejecting essentialism as a basis for exclusion and oppression, would vindicate in the 1980s the necessity of a "strategic" kind of essentialism that was exclusively directed toward political goals without losing the awareness that the claimed identity does not imply, in any case, real uniformity or authenticity beyond the 'political game' (Spivak 1990: 15).[26] More radical was the critique of poststructuralism to identity movements, which problematized the very concept of identity itself. This gave way to a paradoxical situation: precisely at a time

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[26] As a matter of fact, Spivak has distanced from this position since the early 1990s, even rejecting the very phrase 'strategic essentialism'. See footnote 125 on page 174.

when traditionally marginalized groups were coming to visibility for the first time in

history, identities started to be questioned and even deconstructed.

4. Poststructuralism and the Deconstruction of Identity

> "The basic point is this: I cannot assert a differential identity without distinguishing it from a context, but in the process I am asserting the context as well. The opposite is also true: I cannot destroy a context without also destroying the identity of the particular subject who carries out the destruction. It is a well-known historical fact that an oppositional force whose identity is constructed within a certain system of power is bound up with that system: it may prevent the full constitution of that identity, but, at the same time, it is its condition of existence."
>
> (Ernesto Laclau, "Universalism, Particularism, and the Question of Identity" 1992: 88)

In the 1960s, poststructuralism became a determining turning point for rethinking

identity and subjectivity.[27] Interrogating the very notion of 'identity' and stressing both

the homogenizing and the constraining essentialism of identity-based groups,

poststructuralism has introduced ways to (un)think subjectivity beyond 'identity' and

other historical *grands récits*. Proclaiming the end of grand narratives in *The Postmodern*

Condition: A Report on Knowledge (1979), Jean-François Lyotard, for example, envisioned

postmodernism as a project that enabled the expression of difference, and which gave

voice to a plurality of standpoints.[28] By the 1980s, postructuralism had entered

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[27] The paragraphs that follow are intended merely as a brief introduction to the theoretical approach that will inform my articulation of intersubjective universalism in future sections of this chapter. Without engaging yet in the debates that such approach proposes, the text presented in this section constitutes a summary of some of the theoretical and philosophical arguments that inform the theorizations of well-known scholars and thinkers on questions such as community, ethics, politics, universalism or democracy, which I shall analyze in detail in the following sections.

[28] The importance of Lyotard's theorizations has been widely acknowledged. However, scholars such as Gary Browning have also noted the problems inherent in Lyotard's postmodernist project, mainly, the fact that the French philosopher fails to explain how a postmodern project based on plurality

theoretical discourses in which the impact of the social movements of the 1960s was still much evident. This led to the spread of new perspectives within the fields of feminism, queer theory, cultural studies, postcolonialism, and theories based on notions of 'race', which departed from the rigid conceptions of modernism and pointed toward new conceptual spaces (Best and Kellner 1997: 10). In this respect, since the 1980s,[29] poststructuralism has contributed to freeing political activism from rigid conceptions of subjectivity and communitarianism, opening up the way for more fluid standpoints from which to imagine more plural and decentralized –and, therefore, less hierarchical and oppressive– subjectivities and interpersonal ways of relating. As a consequence, poststructuralism has situated plurality, hybridity, and heterogeneity at the center of contemporary debates on politics and subjectivity. Viewing subjectivity as a product of discourse and not as an essence or substance inherent to the individual, poststructuralists regard the discursive construction of identity as both enabling and restrictive: the subject is always a product of discourse and, therefore, subjected to the forms of socialization imposed by society (Heyes 2007). Such inscription of subjectivity into discourse, Cressida Heyes notes, "represents both the condition of possibility for a certain subject-position and a constraint on what forms of self-making individuals may engage. There is no real identity—individual or group-based—that is separable from its conditions of possibility, and any political appeal to identity formations must engage

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and social justice should be developed: "Lyotard's political perspective, like his overall philosophy, appears most plausible in serving as a critique of other perspectives. In itself, it suffers from valorizing difference while failing to address questions of how a reasonable political order, permitting difference, might be constructed or maintained. Lyotard fails to develop constructive accounts of how questions of social justice, or the discrimination of legitimate from illegitimate activities within a polity, might be developed" (2000: 10).

[29] As regards to the chronological framework in which the emergence of postmodernism is contextualized, Best and Kellner have noted how, even though some of the earlier theorists of postmodernism belonged to the generation of the 1960s (e.g., Jean Baudrillard, Jean-François Lyotard, Michel Foucault, etc.), it was only in the 1980s that the movement gained its prominence thanks to the task of a younger generation of individuals and groups "who picked up on postmodern discourses during the 1980s and 1990s, often in more extreme and aggressive forms, renouncing modern theory and politics en toto" (1997: 11).

with the paradox of acting from the very subject-positions it must also oppose" (2007).[30] Approaching identity as a constitutive difference, William Connolly argues that identity "is established in relation to a series of differences that have become socially recognized" (2002: 64), and that are indispensable for the existence of identity itself: "Identity requires differences in order to be, and it converts difference into otherness in order to secure its own self-certainty" (64). Explaining Connolly's observation, Cressida Heyes importantly concludes that "The dangers of identity politics, then, are that it casts as authentic to the self or group an identity that in fact is defined by its opposition to an Other. Reclaiming such an identity as one's own merely reinforces its dependence on this dominant Other, and further internalizes and reinforces an oppressive hierarchy" (2007).

Poststructuralist groups have argued that identity politics promotes a politics of victimhood that perpetuates the very mechanisms of oppression upon which the marginalization of certain human groups has been traditionally sustained. Wendy Brown, for example, has claimed that a "Politicized identity thus enunciates itself, makes claims for itself, only by entrenching, restating, dramatizing, and inscribing its pain in politics", and that, therefore, "it can hold out no future—for itself or others—that triumphs over this pain" (1995: 74). Wondering whether identity movements must or must not "self-destruct", Joshua Gamson has analyzed, from the perspective of queer theory, the possibilities and limitations both of political movements articulated around identities and of political activism based on the deconstruction of such identities, eventually advocating the necessity of "social movements in which collective identity is both pillaged and deployed" (1995: 403). Showing that collective identities are often bases for oppression and political power at the same time, and centering his

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[30] Heyes's latter observation is in tune with Joshua Gamson's arguments about essentialism and deconstruction of identities, which I analyze in the next paragraphs.

analysis on sexual identities, Gamson underscores the limitations of deconstructionism to opening up political possibilities for activism, as well as its dangers: "Even in its less nationalist versions, queer can easily be difference without change, can subsume and hide the internal differences it attempts to incorporate" (396). Even though queerness claims itself to be a "multicultural, multigendered, multisexual, hodge-podge of outsiders" (Gamson 396), it might eventually end up, as Steven Seidman realizes, "denying differences by either submerging them in an undifferentiated oppositional mass or by blocking the development of individual and social differences through the disciplining compulsory imperative to remain undifferentiated" (Seidman 1993: 133; qtd. in Gamson 396). A similar challenge is the difficulty of queer theory to build up a political project from its deconstructionist tendency:

> Deconstructive strategies remain quite deaf and blind to the very concrete and violent institutional forms to which the most logical answer is resistance in and through a particular collective identity. The overarching strategy of cultural deconstruction, the attack on the idea of the normal, does little to touch the institutions that make embracing normality (or building a collective around inverted abnormality) both sensible and dangerous. (Gamson 400)

Many questions remain yet as to how to engage in an effective political activism beyond identities and communitarianism, and as to whether poststructuralism may prove politically effective at all: is it possible to politicize subjectivities which we claim 'have' no identity? In other words, if identity –and, with it, the very subject for which politics is vindicated– is deconstructed, how are we to engage in effective political activism? And, finally (and here perhaps lies the most painful critique to poststructuralism), how can a 'subject' claim not to be an 'x-subject' when s/he is read as an 'x-subject' by society? Are we equipped, and prepared, to transcend identities? Does poststructuralism need to be supplemented by a 'strategic' kind of essentialism, similar to the one

advocated by Spivak? Is universalism a viable political option; and, if so, in what shape? Theoreticians and activists have been revolving in these questions for decades. "The problem, of course", as Joshua Gamson notes, "is that both the boundary-strippers and the boundary-defenders are right" (400).

Zygmunt Bauman has pointed out the necessity to abandon particularisms and turn toward universalism in the defense of human rights, conceiving such universalism as a vehicle that can accommodate the plurality of humanity:

> Universality of citizenship is the preliminary condition of all meaningful "politics of recognition". And, let me add, universality of humanity is the horizon by which all politics of recognition, to be meaningful, needs to orient itself. Universality of humanity does not stand in opposition to the pluralism of the forms of human life; but the test of truly universal humanity is its ability to accommodate pluralism and make pluralism serve the cause of humanity – to enable and to encourage "ongoing discussion about the shared conception of the good". (*Community* 2001: 140)

I shall defend in the next sections the necessity to use poststructuralism to articulate a decentralized and plural universalist project that is developed intersubjectively, through ongoing dialogue and constant negotiation of meaning, which may prove ethically and politically democratizing for human relationships. As Linda M. G. Zerilli (bluntly) and Ernesto Laclau, respectively, claim:

> Now that "we" all know and agree that poststructuralism is critically valuable but politically bankrupt; now that we all know and agree that the "old universal" was indeed a "pseudo-universal," so the homecoming narrative goes; we can get on with the project of constructing a "new universal." This authentic universal would really be inclusive of all people, regardless of race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nationality, and whatever else attaches to the "embarrassing etcetera" that, as Judith Butler reminds us, inevitably accompanies such gestures of acknowledging human diversity. (Zerilli 1998: 3-4)[31]

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[31] While I generally agree with the views Zerilli exposes in her 1998 article, and believe with her that a more politically effective movement than poststructuralism is needed today, I am aware that Zerilli's words here may prove totalizing in her assumption that "'we' all" are in accordance with her views.

> The correct question, therefore, is not so much which is the politics of poststructuralism, but rather what are the possibilities a poststructuralist theoretical perspective opens for the deepening of those political practices that go in the direction of a "radical democracy". (Laclau 1990: 191)

The tension between the essentialism of identity politics movements and the deconstruction of identities undertaken by poststructuralist theorists –or, in more general terms, the efforts to reconcile particularism and bigger forms of collectivity, or to redefine interpersonal bonds– continues to inform contemporary debates on community, as well as on universalism and democracy. The central issue seems to be not only the deep complexity of subjectivity and societal inscriptions into discourse(s), but also the difficult equilibrium between this complex 'one' and the 'many': the balance of individual and society; the 'opening up' of parochial conceptions of interpersonal bonds and attachments (friendship, family, community, nation, etc.); the difficult question of belonging without losing particularities or neutralizing the particularities of others. To these ends, Jeffrey Weeks notes, "There is no privileged social agent […]; merely the multiplicity of local struggles against the burden of history and the various forms of domination and subordination. Contingency, not determinism, underlies our complex present" (qtd. in Bauman, *Community* 2001: 140). The possibilities to articulate such a plural conception of universalism, potentially democratizing of human relationships both in political and ethical terms, is the central question that the present chapter addresses, in order to move away from the segregationist and confronting tendency of communitarianism and vindicate the necessity of a non-essentialist, plural, and polyphonic universalism. This plural universalism, I shall analyze in Chapter Two, is a project that, already in the nineteenth century, Herman Melville was capable of

relentlessly visualizing, constructing, pursuing, testing, and exploring in his literary production, as I will analyze through the long narrative poem *Clarel* (1876).

5. The Rise –and Fall(?)– of Community

> "A world of absolute 'sameness' permits no one to make a difference."
>
> (Wai-chee Dimock, *Empire for Liberty* 1989: 82)

The first sections of the present chapter have analyzed the politization of identities as a response to the excluding and hierarchical totalizing tendencies of traditional universalism within the West. They have also pointed out that poststructuralism has brought about new ways to rethink subjectivity and human relationships. The present section is intended as a progression from 'identity' to 'community' which shall culminate in an exploration both of 'culture' and of the 'nation-state' model in Sections 6 and 7 of this chapter respectively. The aim of my analysis in the following sections is to underline the interconnection of these different notions (identity – community – culture –nation/state) both in terms of their emergence and of their more recent problematization.

Both poststructuralists and leftist thinkers have contributed arguments against traditional conceptions of communitarianism and, more generally, have rethought the notion of 'community', from viewpoints such as sociology, political theory, philosophy, and literary theory, among others. This movement away from community is directly connected with the questioning that 'identity' has undergone over the last decades. Some of these thinkers have also directed their attention toward universalism, exploring the possibilities, impossibilities, and challenges, for both democracy and social justice, of a plural and decentralized universalist project that moves beyond, and, above all,

outdoes philosophical interpretations and sociopolitical practices based upon traditional (totalitarian and neutralizing) conceptions of universalism. In this respect, for example, Ernesto Laclau has noted how the demands for integration and recognition of identity groups "cannot be made in terms of difference; rather, they must be made on the basis of some universal principles that the ethnic minority shares with the rest of the community: the right to have access to good schools, to live a decent life, to participate in the public space of citizenship, etc." (1992: 89). I will come back to the analysis of the plural universalism articulated by philosophers such as Laclau, and join in these thinkers' reevaluation and defense of universalism, in future sections of this chapter. The present section examines contemporary debates about community and communitarianism, in order to underline the restraining character of community to the development of democratic dialogue and intersubjective relationships beyond the walls of communitarian formations.

In a process parallel to the deconstruction of identity, poststructuralism has contributed to de-essentializing and, above all, problematizing the very notion of 'community'. This has derived in a critique of the inevitably dividing component of communitarianism, as well as in a movement away from identity-based communities (the 'communities of sameness' that Zygmunt Bauman critically analyzes in *Community* [2001], that is, communities articulated on the basis of a shared set of attributes or characteristics which cohere the group, build its identity, delimit its boundaries, define its members, and sets them apart from its non-members)[32] in favor of more hybrid and plural forms of association and relating which result from the questioning of the very concept of community itself. In this respect, both poststructuralist and leftist thinkers

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[32] As I will analyze in future sections of this chapter, Bauman has noted how this communitarianism built upon notions of sameness risks becoming a voluntary ghetto that reinforces the separation between Us/Them rather than fostering togetherness and life in common.

have underlined the segregationist component of communitarianism, pointing out, at the same time, the fact that communities are frequently constructed upon dominant modes of power and ideology that are hierarchy-reinforcing and even supremacist.[33] Similar questions to the ones expressed in the previous paragraph haunt this delicate debate: if it is true that, as history proves every day, communities may indeed be divisive, even claustrophobic to individuals, isolating, and dangerous 'classifying systems' that neutralize the complexities of plurality into the simplicity of homogeneity and create insiders and outsiders, history has also shown, and continues to demonstrate, how communities are, not only essential strategic positions from which to claim visibility, but, most importantly, the crucial –still unfortunately– necessary refuges for protection and survival of many people who continue to be persecuted, and severely punished, for expressing their 'identities'.[34] In practical terms, we may well be not ready to abandon in these cases the security of such communities while the lives of so many sectors of the population are still literally dependent on them. What we can do, nevertheless, is to rethink –and imagine as *possible*– more fluid forms of connectedness among human beings which may cross the frequently rigid boundaries of communitarian thought. And this, I believe, is a *political* task.

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[33] For example, communities articulated upon 'race', but which, however, reinforce patriarchy, heterosexism, and even racism prove good examples of this affirmation. See footnote 25 on page 55.

[34] This was, for example, the case of African Americans after emancipation, whose lives (and the lives of those who sympathized with them) were under threat in the South if they tried to assert their recently acquired freedom or enact the civil and political rights that were effectively, thanks to Radical Republicans in Congress, being passed by the federal government in the Reconstruction period. Due to this constant fear, many African Americans chose to establish themselves in black communities. These segregated geographies, and the deep racist hatred and constant violence against African Americans permeating the Southern society and politics of the moment, gave way to a reality of segregation that translated into official segregation, which was enforced by state laws after Reconstruction, and which would only be challenged over a hundred years later, with the Civil Rights Movements of the 1960s.

5.1. Haunted by Community: Seeking Security, Erecting Walls

> "[…] 'community' stands for the kind of world which is not, regrettably, available to us – but which we would dearly wish to inhabit and which we hope to repossess. […] 'Community' is nowadays another name for paradise lost – but one to which we dearly hope to return, and so we feverishly seek the roads that may bring us there."
>
> (Zygmunt Bauman, *Community*, 2001: 3)

Philosophers of all historical periods have been haunted, to a major or minor extent, by the question of community. All of them have provided their arguments about how to construct a 'we' out of different individualities that can still preserve the plurality of its parts, and have analyzed what it is that unites and separates human beings. In recent years, the questioning of the concept of community by thinkers in several disciplines has, perhaps paradoxically, been accompanied by the reinforcement of communitarian formations as a response to the increasing feeling of uncertainty and insecurity in present-day societies.[35] This contemporary feeling of fear that is consequence of the anxiety generated by the disappearance of "little islands of safety" (Bauman 2003: 28) –and, more generally, of the deconstruction of grand narratives posed by postmodernism–, as well as globalization, the diversification of even traditionally uniform societies, the emergence of more or less 'global spaces' and the growing contact with 'strangers', the sense of 'cold war' between different nation-states in the world, and the politics of fear endorsed by governments and politicians, have provoked a generalized search for security which has derived in the cultivation of communities as refuges against fear. Yet, contrary to the insecurity it aims to alleviate, communitarianism has also enhanced fear: in its endeavor to build up communities

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[35] Zygmunt Barman uses the phrase "liquid modernity" to refer to present-day society as a society of uncertainty.

constructed around notions of sameness or common features, which bar entrance to 'strangers' and set the limits separating inside and outside, communitarianism has engendered social segregation, therefore reinforcing the very fear, insecurity, and anxiety it intends to avoid, by blocking any possibilities for communication and mutual understanding that can only spread from the implementation of togetherness among the different population groups who, instead, choose to be voluntarily segregated in communities that distort the plurality of society into a false image of homogeneity.

In his influential exegesis of nationalism *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983), Benedict Anderson defines 'national community' as an *imagined* consciousness of horizontal communion between people who feel to be connected to one another. National communities, Anderson explains, come to existence only when they are imagined, and they are imagined because in most cases it is almost impossible that members in a community know all their fellow members, even if they feel united to them (6). According to Anderson, it is precisely this imaginary quality that produces (i.e., invents) communities. Even though it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to follow Anderson in his exegesis of nationalism and historical analysis of how national communities have been constructed, Anderson's understanding of communities as imagined is of importance to my own analysis of communitarianism in this dissertation, at the same time that I turn in the next pages to other influential thinkers that have theorized on the notion of community.

Zygmunt Bauman has recently defined community as an unreachable shelter in which we project our desire for a security and certainty that our "liquid" (in Bauman's terminology) societies keep us from finding. Community, Bauman claims, is a word that evokes warmth, familiarity, and protection; a context in which there are no strangers, and where we, therefore, feel safe. That ideal community, however, clashes in reality

with those collectivities pretending to embody the community of our dreams, but which, however, demand the sacrifice of individual freedom in the form of obedience and loyalty to the community in question:

> Do you want security? Give up your freedom, or at least a good chunk of it. Do you want confidence? Do not trust anybody outside your community. Do you want mutual understanding? Don't speak to foreigners nor use foreign languages. Do you want this cosy home feeling? Fix alarms on your door and TV cameras on your drive. Do you want safety? Do not let the strangers in and yourself abstain from acting strangely and thinking odd thoughts. Do you want warmth? Do not come near the window, and never open one. (Bauman, *Community* 2001: 4)

The problem, of course, as Bauman concludes, is that "if you follow this advice and keep the windows sealed, the air inside would soon get stuffy and in the end oppressive" (4). Such oppressiveness, consequence of the sacrifice of individual freedom, is a harsh price to be paid for community. In its promotion of togetherness and a cosy 'community feeling' between those inside, community creates an otherwise non-existing separation from those outside, sometimes even leading to the generation of violent attitudes against 'outsiders' sustained by dangerous notions of communitarian 'purity'. As Richard Sennett claims:

> The narrower the scope of a community formed by collective personality, the more destructive does the experience of fraternal feeling become. Outsiders, unknowns, unlikes become creatures to be shunned; the personality traits the community shares become ever more exclusive; the very act of sharing becomes ever more centered on decisions about who can belong and who cannot... Fraternity has become empathy for a select group of people allied with rejections of those not within the local circle. [...] Fragmentation and divisions is the very logic of this fraternity, as the units of people who really belong get smaller and smaller. It is a version of fraternity which leads to fratricide. (qtd. in Gilroy 2000: 207-208)

Communities are, therefore, often responses to the fear of being in contact with 'strangers'. As Zygmunt Bauman has analyzed, this contact with the unfamiliar and

unknown often leads to a response characterized by a rejection of difference that is based on fear of the other, and to a retreat into what we might call 'refuges of sameness' which are created from, and perpetuate, this very fear. This withdrawal away from the 'alien' and into the familiar fosters inter-human divisions, since it is based on the (physical) separation of human beings on grounds of different identities or features. The common and familiar is enclosed in such communities, while the different and unknown is left outside. The separation between these groups is psychological but frequently also physical: members of these (intended to-be homogeneous and homogenizing) communities are physically separated from the rest of the population by walls, more often than not real fences, which 'lock' certain people in and certain people out. As Bauman notes: "fences have to have two sides. Fences divide otherwise uniform space into an 'inside' and an 'outside', but what is 'inside' for those on one side of the fence is 'outside' for those on the other" (2003: 107). The practical consequence of this fencing-off is segregation: the creation of homogeneous communities divides human beings cohabiting a same area, preventing inter-mixing (sometimes by law) among those 'in' and 'out' of the community walls. By creating a 'voluntary community', 'involuntary ghettos', as Bauman notes, are also created: "The fence separates the 'voluntary ghetto' of the high and mighty from the enforced ghettos of the down and hapless. For the insiders of the voluntary ghetto, the involuntary ghettos are spaces where 'we won't go in'. For the insiders of the involuntary ghetto, the area to which they have been confined is the space where 'we can't get out'" (Bauman 2011: 62). Communities articulated upon notions of sameness promote the elimination of any possible 'alien' element from its heart, hinder any possible contact with 'strangers', and, with it, of any potential development of dialogue beyond community walls. The boundaries that such a communitarian (di)vision of society imposes are obstacles to a

democratic and heterogeneous cohabitation, which block the possibilities for the generation of life in common. Walls (physical borders, identity markers) block interpersonal communication, by 'classifying' people according to identities or communitarian formations (gender and sexuality-based communities, religious communities, ethnic and 'racial' communities, the nation, etc.), which keep human beings separate and only interacting with those within their familiar circle. These walls not only generate a distorted image of society but pose "intervening hedge[s]" (using Melville's own phrase ["Hawthorne and His Mosses" 1850: 48]) to the possibilities of developing interpersonal (and, therefore, intercultural, interracial, interreligious, etc.) understanding and to potentially escape one-sided conceptions of the world and of human relationships. Communitarianism, therefore, blocks the possibilities of interpersonal communication beyond the parameters of community, thus preventing universalism. This perpetuates fear and generates walls that are too often too hard to demolish, creating segregated societies where life in common cannot be negotiated because each community ignores and negates the legitimacy of one another's claims, and, sometimes, even their right of existence. One only needs to turn to the Middle East, among many other contexts in the world, to painfully witness and literally *touch* walls that are, psychologically, if not physically, present in most, if not all, societies around the globe today.[36] The direct consequence of such segregation, as Bauman notes, is the "*disintegration* of locally grounded shared communal living" (2003: 109). How to move from such a segregationist reality toward a universalist way of thinking and relating based on the plurality of humanity is an urgent task. The indeterminacy

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[36] I find it important to already anticipate here the specific context of the Middle East, as this context will be crucial to my analysis of Herman Melville's *Clarel*. In this poem, as I shall analyze, the action is located in Palestine, a setting which is certainly not accidental, and which, I will argue, bears resonances of the segregations of postbellum United States.

produced by the complexities of such a task, Bauman claims, "is, no doubt, daunting. But it can also mobilize to a greater effort" (*Community* 2001: 140).

Growing used to 'homogeneous' communitarian forms of living, the presence of strangers might be both a source of attraction and of anxiety. Though it might momentarily ease feelings of insecurity by locking the 'source of anxiety' (i.e., strangers) outside, erecting walls merely enlarges such anxiety and, as a consequence, continues perpetuating intolerance toward difference and rejection of plurality. Developing interpersonal relationships with those who are different (and who is not different?), and strange to us is not an easy task (as I will argue in Chapter Two, Melville's *Clarel* actually analyzes characters' incapability of developing interpersonal relationships with others, which prevents the development of intersubjectivity and, as a consequence, of universalism): one is always vulnerable to being deceived, hurt, changed. Yet, life forces us to having to trust others, and most of the time these others are people we do not know and whose impact in our lives we cannot possibly anticipate. Human beings are mutually dependent on one another for the continuation and preservation of life. This affirmation knows no borders, yet, in general terms, such interconnection is not positively taken as the basis to generate more democratic bonds but, on the contrary, is frequently negatively abused: the comfortable life of a smaller part of the population of the globe directly rests upon, and is made possible thanks to, the work of a much larger and poorer part of the population of the globe; the (enormous) wealth of some people rests on the (also enormous) poverty of others; the economy of any country nowadays depends on the economy of other countries; our safety in one corner of the world depends on the safety of others in other corners of the globe; the survival of the species –human and otherwise– depends on how present generations inhabiting the earth treat it; the social security of a given place depends on the social stability of the inhabitants

of that place; immigrants arriving in a particular country are dependent on locals of that place for integration. Moreover, whereas communities are, on the one hand, barriers impossible to be trespassed by 'strangers' who do not belong in those communities, on the other hand, they reveal a hypocritical reality, as the walls of communities are trespassed at convenience whenever this trespassing is conceived as 'beneficial' to the community itself: Western national communities pose solid barriers to incoming immigrants from countries in Central and South America, Asia or Africa, yet these very same Western national communities exploit thousands of natural and human resources in those very countries, often contributing to the detriment of the local –specially indigenous– populations. This fundamental injustice demands, therefore, universalism in order to expand human loyalties beyond particular forms of community. And it requires the transcendence of one-sided thinking that is reinforced by communitarian formations, and which perpetuates the abuses described above. In order to articulate universalism, though, it is necessary first to detranscendentalize and open up the ways in which the concept 'community' has traditionally been conceived, a task which the following section aims to pursue.

5.2. Rethinking Community, Without the Walls

> "The 'we' feeling, which expresses a desire to be similar, is a way for men to avoid the necessity of looking deeper into each other."
> (Richard Sennett, "The Myth of a Purified Community"
> 2008: 176)

> "[…] in the decline of modernism […] what is left is simply difference itself and its accumulation."
> (Jonathan Friedman. "The Hybridization of Roots and the Abhorrence of the Bush" 1999: 239)

> "We are all interdependent in this fast globalizing world of ours, and due to this interdependence none of us can be the master of our fate on our own. […] Whatever separates us and prompts us to keep our distance from each other, to draw boundaries and build barricades, makes the handling of such tasks yet more difficult. We all need to gain control over the conditions under which we struggle with the challenges of life – but for most of us such control can be gained only *collectively*.
>
> Here, in the performance of such tasks, community is most missed; but here as well, for a change, lies community's chance to stop being *missing*. If there is to be a community in the world of individuals, it can only be (and it needs to be) a community woven together from sharing and mutual care; a community of concern and responsibility for the equal right to be human and the equal ability to act on that right".
>
> (Zygmunt Bauman, *Community* 2001: 149-150)

One of the earliest and most important voices in the debate on community is that of Jean-Luc Nancy, who, in works such as *The Inoperative Community* (1983) or *Being Singular Plural* (1996), put forward the necessity to reformulate 'community' and, more generally, existence, in order to conceive more plural forms of togetherness and bonding beyond totalizing absorptions of individual plurality into identity-based groups. Separated by thirteen years in their dates of publication, both works analyze the dangers of a unifying –and, therefore, potentially totalitarian– communitarianism, theorizing a conception of being that is grounded in its very plurality. Still today, *The Inoperative Community* stands as a landmark in contemporary analyses of community. In this volume, Nancy predicates the impossibility of community: arguing that communities based on essences constitute the closure of the political due to their totalitarianism, he turns away from notions of 'common being' and 'communion of being' advocated by these communities in order to predicate what he terms 'being *in* common'. This 'being *in* common', Nancy claims "has nothing to do with communion, with fusion into a body, into a unique and ultimate identity that would no longer be exposed. Being *in*

common means, to the contrary, *no longer having, in any form, in any empirical or ideal place,*

such a substantial identity, and sharing this (narcissistic) 'lack of identity'" (1983: xxxviii).

Nancy's (re)formulation of community rests on the political Left. While he

acknowledges the failure of communism, he also vindicates the necessity that the Left

engages in a rethinking of community which moves away from totalitarianism into a

form of togetherness that is respectful of each and every one of the parts it involves.

The difficult question is, however, how to empower politically such a community

without essence –a community that, in Nancy's view, "is neither 'people' nor 'nation,'

neither 'destiny' nor 'generic humanity'" (1983: xxxix-xl)–, as well as "How can we be

receptive to the *meaning* of our multiple, dispersed, mortally fragmented existences,

which nonetheless only make sense by existing in common?" (xl). Nancy goes as far as

to claim that if we do not confront these questions we run the risk of losing the

political completely (xli), which would imply, as Hannah Arendt also noted,

totalitarianism and the consequent disappearance of democracy and freedom. Even

though in *The Inoperative Community* Nancy proclaims the end of community, by rejecting

communities of essences, he also envisions a non-identity-based form of community,

which, in my opinion, falls into the problems of communitarianism at the same time

that it tries to transcend them. Yet, contrarily to communities of essence, Nancy's

avowed community is constituted through a bond that is both connecting and

separating at the same time: in Nancy's words, "a bond that forms ties without

attachments, or even less fusion, […] a bond that unbinds by binding, that reunites

through the infinite exposition of an irreducible finitude" (xl).

Nancy would continue analyzing the question of being-together in *Being Singular*

Plural. Claiming that the singular is already a plural and that, therefore, it is inseparable

from plurality because it is constituted by, and in relation to, it,[37] in this volume Nancy

continues analyzing the question of how to speak of a 'we' that is plural without turning

this 'we' into a totalitarian and homogenizing expression of collectivity. *Being Singular*

Plural also transcends the notion of 'community' that, despite his critique, Nancy had

still defended in *The Inoperative Community*. Thus, the philosopher avoids using the very

word 'community' at all, and avows, instead, for the more fluid 'being-with' or 'being-

in-common' as something radically different from community,[38] and which, he argues,

gathers individuals together at the same time that it separates them in their singular

plurality: "singulars singularly together, where the togetherness is neither the sum, nor

the incorporation, nor the society, nor the 'community' […]. The togetherness of

singulars is singularity 'itself.' It assembles them insofar as it spaces them; they are

linked insofar as they are not unified" (1996: 33). Meaning, Nancy argues, is the sharing

of being, and being is nothing but "being-with-one-another, circulating in the *with* and

as the *with* of this singularly plural coexistence" (3); not a "community of ipses, but a

coipseity" (44). Most importantly, and this is an argument I will come back to in my

vindication of universalism as a democratizing political project,[39] Nancy perceives this

togetherness or 'we' as a praxis that is created every time, rather than as an 'essence' on

which 'meaning' or any groupal form of 'membership' rests. This articulation of the

'we' as a praxis, according to the philosopher, even blurs the boundaries between the

ethical and the ontological (99):

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[37] Looking at the etymology of the word 'singular', Nancy notes that "In Latin, the term *singuli* already says the plural, because it designates the 'one' as belonging to 'one by one.' The singular is primarily *each* one and, therefore, also *with* and *among* all the others. The singular is a plural" (1996: 32). This 'singular plurality' captures the philosopher's conception of Being, as it is already announced in the title to his book.

[38] This 'being-in-common', Nancy notes, is precisely what communism abolished under a 'common Being' (1996: 43).

[39] See Section 8 in this chapter.

> […] we do not have to identify ourselves as 'we,' as a 'we'. Rather, we have to disidentify ourselves *from* every sort of 'we' that would be the subject of its own representation, and we have to do this *insofar as* 'we' co-appear. Anterior to all thought—and, in fact, the very condition of thinking—the 'thought' of 'us' is not a representational thought (not an idea, or notion, or concept). It is, instead, a *praxis* and an *ethos*: the staging of co-appearance, the staging which is co-appearing. (71)

There is no room for the strategic in Nancy's words. Following this line of thought, existence is unthinkable without the fluid intertwining of irreducible singular plural existences: "*Being singular plural* means the essence of Being is only as coessence, […] the 'with' is at the heart of Being" (30). The individual, the philosopher claims, is an intersection of singularities; individuality is not singularity but the 'with' (85). This 'with', I believe, resembles what Martin Buber terms the 'inter-human'.[40] In *Being Singular Plural*, Nancy conceives plurality as a uniting element in difference; all existences are connected through a relation of contiguity and it is in this contiguity that each singularity makes sense with and through the other, yet by no means neutralizing the other in itself (6). Nancy's approach undermines Otherness and Stranger-ness, as well as binary thinkings articulated upon the Same/Other dichotomy. The philosopher vindicates instead an ontology of "being-with-one-another" (53-54) that is for everybody, without exclusion; and argues that the other (cf. Other) "is 'one' among many insofar as there are many; it is *each one*, and it is *each time* one, one *among* them, one among all and one *among* us all" (11): "In the same way, and reciprocally", Nancy claims, "'we' is always inevitably 'us all,' where no one of us can be 'all' and each one of us is, in turn […], the other origin of the same world" (11). Alterity is, therefore comprised within each singularity in that each singularity is an 'access'[41] to "the origin of the same world" that both expresses and conceals itself in its multiplicity. This way, singularities

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[40] Buber's arguments on intersubjectivity are analyzed in Section 8.1 in this chapter.

[41] In Nancy's view the 'origin' is not a pre-given essence or meaning: the origin is not "that from which the world comes, but rather the coming of each presence of the world, each time singular" (15).

allow each other to approach the origin, even though such an origin can never be apprehended. The other becomes the Other, Nancy claims, when individuals intend to appropriate the origin and fix its meaning (20-21). According to Nancy's arguments, the unity of the world, therefore, is its very diversity (185). Humanity exposes existence (i.e., exposes being) and there is no existence without coexistence (i.e., without being-with). The world is, therefore, a sharing of humanity, where human beings are mutually and constantly exposed to one another (17-18). Such exposure, nevertheless, does not neutralize the plurality of individuals but, on the contrary, preserves and is constituted by it.

Both *The Inoperative Community* and *Being Singular Plural*, as I have analyzed, undermine the notion of 'community', pointing beyond more plural forms of being that move away from the segregating and hierarchy-reinforcing view of the world imposed by communitarianism. In both works, Nancy analyzes the possibilities of articulating forms of 'being-together' that are neither based, nor dependant, on a specific figure of identification or common identity. This is also the concern of other thinkers such as Judith Butler, Giorgio Agamben, Jacques Derrida, Roberto Esposito, Alphonso Lingis, and Kuang-Ming Wu, whose arguments I will analyze in the next pages of this section.

Judith Butler's notion of cohabitation, which she conceives as constituting the very fact of existence, is similar to Nancy's 'being-with'. Butler applies these concepts to her articulation of a global ethics based on cohabitation and global responsibility. In a lecture given at the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA) in July 2011, Butler argued that vulnerability is not a contingent circumstance, but the feature that determines our relation to the world and establishes our existence as relational. We are inevitably and necessarily bound to one another, Butler notes, and it is this inescapable bond to others that conditions our existence because it exposes our (individual, social,

political) vulnerability. This "unwilled adjacency" (Butler 2011: 5), the fact that we are connected to those we do not know or do not choose to be connected to, which determines our vulnerability, promotes a sense of ethical obligation and responsibility towards those we are bound to, which transcends the limits of community, proximity, and familiarity. It may also give way to a global sense of ethics beyond the local, by which the 'here' and 'there' –the lives of those in different locations– are bound to one another in a provisional form of global connectedness beyond communitarian bonds, which may encourage the ethical response (Butler 9):

> I want to insist upon a certain intertwinement between that other life, all those other lives, and my own – one that is irreducible to national belonging or communitarian affiliation. In my view (which is surely not mine alone) the life of the other, the life that is *not* our own, is also our life, since whatever sense 'our' life has is derived precisely from this sociality, this being already, and from the start, dependent on a world of others, constituted in and by a social world. (13)

From the concept of cohabitation, Butler articulates her notion of global ethical obligation, dwelling on Emmanuel Levinas's claim that our moral obligation to the other is something that pre-exists our individual sense of self: "I *am* my relation to the 'you' whose life I seek to preserve, and without that relation, this 'I' makes no sense" (Butler 15). Butler also incorporates Hannah Arendt's arguments on the respect of the plurality of the earth, in order to construct her global ethics. Claiming with Arendt that the plurality and heterogeneity of the earth is not only the very condition of the social and the political, but also of our own existence (17), Judith Butler subscribes to Arendt's ethics of cohabitation: to the fact that we are responsible for the lives of others, and that we have the obligation to preserve the plurality of the earth by preserving the lives of those we are –without choice– bound to, not only in proximity

but also in distance.[42] This view that Butler shares with Arendt certainly goes beyond community-based forms of identification, and perhaps even reaches, I believe, toward a plural and heterogeneous universalism such as the one I will articulate in latter sections of this chapter, and which I interpret in Herman Melville's *Clarel*: "[…] no specific communitarian mode of belonging grounds the right to belong. […] 'belonging' must actually no know [sic.] bounds and exceed every particular nationalist and communitarian limit. Both the arguments against genocide and the arguments for the rights of the stateless depend upon underscoring the limits of communitarianism" (Butler 20). It is from this conception of universality and plurality that social and political institutions need to be developed,[43] which are based on the awareness of the shared condition of precarity and vulnerability of all human lives, and destined to preserve such lives, their equality, and, therefore, the characteristic plurality of the earth (21).

Giorgio Agamben has also theorized a notion of community which points beyond communitarianism in itself, and which, I believe, can be connected to Nancy's and Butler's reasonings. Similar to Nancy's 'being-with' and Butler's arguments on cohabitation, Agamben's notion of the 'coming community' does not denote a community of essences but a being-together of existences (comparable to Nancy's 'being-with' and to Butler's 'cohabitation'), which points beyond the boundaries of any political, religious, national, cultural, or ideological identities. Agamben avows for a form of togetherness grounded on the very fact of belonging itself, rather than on characteristics upon which such belonging might be constructed. As a matter of fact,

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[42] Arendt notes that some attempts to decide with whom we want to cohabit the earth may derive into genocidal practices.

[43] Institutions have been founded and developed in a more or less effective way: such as the UN, the International Court of Justice of Nüremberg and, more recently, The Hague, the international Red Cross and Red Crescent movements, the World Health Organization, Amnesty International, Intermon Oxfam, etc.

Agamben identifies belonging as co-belonging; not only existence but the fact of existing together. Agamben's 'coming community', therefore, takes its shape from the co-existence of what he calls 'whatever singularities':[44] "[…] not a being that is *in* this or that mode [i.e., not defined by an essence or property], but a being that is *its* mode of being [or of not being]" (1990: 27). This singularity, Agamben claims, is liberated from having to choose between the particular and the universal:

> The Whatever in question here relates to singularity not in its indifference with respect to a common property (to a concept, for example: being red, being French, being Muslim), but only in its being *such as it is*. Singularity is thus freed from the false dilemma that obliges knowledge to choose between the ineffability of the individual and the intelligibility of the universal. The intelligible, according to a beautiful expression of Levi ben Gershon (Gersonides), is neither a universal nor an individual included in a series, but rather 'singularity insofar as *it* is whatever singularity.' In this conception, such-and-such being is reclaimed from its having this or that property, which identifies it as belonging to this or that set, to this or that class (the reds, the French, the Muslims)—and it is reclaimed not for another class nor for the simple generic absence of any belonging, but for its *being-such*, for belonging itself. (1)

Existence (i.e., co-existence) –the "taking place" of every singularity (23)– is, therefore, what is common in every human being, and that from which Agamben's 'coming community' (a community that is 'coming' in that, like Derridean democracy, it is 'to come') takes its strength.

What are, then, the politics of Agamben's coming community? The philosopher vindicates a community that does not assert a given identity or condition of belonging, but which appropriates belonging –and, consequently, co-belonging– in itself (Agamben 87). This, he claims, "is the task of our generation" (65), to engage in the struggle for forms of belonging that do not reinforce the nation-state model or

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[44] Agamben traces back the meaning of 'whatever singularities' to the Latin word *quodlibet* ('whatever'), specifying that, in Latin, '*quodlibet* being' does not only refer to 'whatever' in the sense of 'being, no matter which', but also in the sense of "being such that it always matters" (1).

national(ist) power-structures but which move beyond such dividing and supremacist national communities:

> *The novelty of the coming politics is that it will no longer be a struggle for the conquest or control of the State, but a struggle between the State and the non-State (humanity), an insurmountable disjunction between whatever singularity and the State organization.* This has nothing to do with the simple affirmation of the social in opposition to the State that has often found expression in the protest movements of recent years. Whatever singularities cannot form a *societas* because they do not possess any identity to vindicate nor any bond of belonging for which to seek recognition. (84-85)

Agamben's 'coming community', born from the co-belonging of singularities and not constructed upon concepts of commonality, is almost defined in anarquist terms, as something that is different from previous communities and that has never before yet been. The philosopher defends that this coming political community of whatever singularities will not be a nationalist fight for supremacy but a struggle between the state and humanity; a form of belonging that appropriates belonging itself while rejecting identities and divisive borders that establish conditions to such a belonging.[45]

Jacques Derrida also explores the possibilities of a democratic model of community from the notion of interpersonal sharing (what he calls a 'community of friends') in *The Politics of Friendship* (1994). Derrida explores the case of "friends seeking mutual recognition without knowing each other", friends who are strangers yet belong together in their solitude, "in a world of solitude, of isolation, of singularity, of non-appurtenance" (41-41). Tracing a genealogy of the concept of friendship and fraternity, Derrida critiques the phallocentric character which has dominated the traditional conception of friendship in Western philosophical and political thought. Through this

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[45] Perhaps the 'Occupy movements' that have emerged since 2011, as response to present-day politics and politicians and in defense of human rights, could be claimed as examples of an incipient form of politics of the kind Agamben is vindicating. However, even though these movements have emerged on a global level, they remain very much connected to nation-state governments and socio-political realities.

genealogy, Derrida analyses how 'friendship', 'brotherhood' and 'fraternity' have been placed since antiquity at the center of democratic politics and justice despite constituting exclusive and excluding models. This led to the creation of sociopolitical models based on family and territorial filiation (i.e., the nation-state), sustained by the phallocentric conception of the social bond as friendship, from which women were excluded as possible participants (Derrida 1997). His study, and deconstruction, of the notion of friendship leads Derrida to an analysis of democracy itself. Democracy, the philosopher claims, is difficult to be located: it means "minimally, equality – and here you see why friendship is an important key, because in friendship, even in classical friendship, what is involved is reciprocity, equality, symmetry, and so on and so forth. There is no democracy except as equality among everyone" (Derrida 1997). Aware of the dangers of absorbing singularities within a 'universal fraternity', Derrida notes the contradiction of having to reconcile singularity with such a claim for equality, which is at the very heart of democracy, and which relates closely to some of the questions I have posed in earlier sections of this dissertation as continually haunting the notion of universalism as well: e.g., where is the dividing line between particularism and universality; is there such a line?; can universalism be historicized?; and, in Derrida's words: "How can we, at the same time, take into account the equality of everyone, justice and equity, and nevertheless take into account and respect the heterogeneous singularity of everyone?".[46] Derrida's proposition is that of a "democracy to come", which, like Agamben's notion of "coming community", the philosopher defines not as a 'future' democracy in the form of a new democratic regime that will improve pre-existing ones, but as the *promise* of democracy:

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[46] This question is central to my articulation of intersubjective universalism in this dissertation, both in this chapter and in my interpretation of Melville's *Clarel* as a universalist poem in Chapter Two.

The idea of a promise is inscribed in the idea of democracy: equality, freedom, freedom of speech, freedom of the press – all these things are inscribed as promises within democracy. Democracy is a promise. That is why it is a more historical concept of the political – it's the only concept of a regime or a political organisation in which history, that is the endless process of improvement and perfectibility is inscribed in the concept. So, it's a historical concept through and through, and that's why I call it 'to come': it is a promise and will remain a promise, *but 'to come' means also not a future but that it has 'to come' as a promise, as a duty*, that is 'to come' immediately. *We don't have to wait for future democracy to happen, to appear, we have to do right here and now what has to be done for it.* […] if we dissociate democracy from the name of a regime we can then give this name 'democracy' to *any kind of experience in which there is equality, justice, equity, respect for the singularity of the Other at work*, so to speak – then it's *democracy here and now*; but of course this implies that we do not confine democracy to the political in the classical sense, or to the nation-state, or to citizenship. (Derrida 1997, my italics)

Derrida conceives democracy as a historical concept which enables the creation of democratic relationships outside nation-state boundaries, even with people who cannot be identified as citizens of any nation-state or that do not have any citizenship rights at all (refugees, exiles, the displaced, illegal immigrants, etc.). Derrida's 'democracy to come', thus, plants the seeds for a politics of separation that, however, incorporates a universal(ist) component at its very core, without losing touch of singularity and historicity. In this democracy, friendship has indeed a crucial political function, by allowing us to open ourselves up to others without neutralizing their difference. Derrida calls this idea 'hospitality': "We have to welcome the Other inside – without that there would be no hospitality, that the Other should be sheltered or welcomed in my space, that I should try to open my space, without trying to include the Other in my space" (1997). Hospitality is not to assimilate the other in "my space" and, therefore, remove his/her otherness by making him/her adopt my cultural practices, religious beliefs, ways of behavior, etc.; in opening myself to others, I should not ask them to leave no trace of their presence or otherness in me. This inevitably leads to an inevitable mutual influence and to the difficult acceptance of the fact that the other may alter or radically

transform my space. Hospitality, Derrida claims, is unconditional, much like the intersubjectivity that Martin Buber theorizes,[47] and, as such, it runs the risk that the ethics of friendship be perverted (1997). Due to this unconditionality, my relationship with the other needs to be supplemented by continuous negotiation from both parties, which may, in turn, enable the creation of a new language built upon, and from, the mutual respect of one another's singularities:

> I have to accept if I offer unconditional hospitality that the Other may ruin my own space or impose his or her own culture or his or her own language. That's the problem: hospitality should be neither assimilation, acculturation, nor simply the occupation of my space by the Other. That's why it has to be negotiated at every instant, and the decision for hospitality, the best rule for negotiation has to be invented at every second with all the risks involved, and it is very risky. Hospitality, and hospitality is a very general name for all our relations to the Other, has to be re-invented at every second, it is something without a pre-given rule. That is what we have to invent – a new language for instance. When two people who don't speak the same language meet, what should they do? They have to translate, but translation is an invention, to invent a new way of translating in which translation doesn't simply go one way but both ways, and how can we do that? That's the aporia, and this is political, the new form – […]. (Derrida 1997)

Derrida's notion of hospitality as an ongoing negotiation that has to be constantly reformulated and re-invented every time anew with every human encounter is of importance to my defense of intersubjectivity and interpersonal dialogue as vehicles to potentialy encouraging more democratic human relationships. According to Derrida, the Other is not simply outside but is already part of ourselves,[48] which implies that this hospitality toward the Other needs to be negotiated within ourselves. Derrida vindicates in *The Politics of Friendship* a form of collective bonding based on the friendship for, between, and of humanity –"My friendship for the humanity of the human being", for "*human qua human*" (1994: 196), in a universalist-like community which binds both

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[47] See Section 8.1 in this chapter.

[48] This is similar to Emmanuel Levinas's claim that the other is myself. See Levinas's arguments on interhuman connectedness and moral responsibility in Section 8.2 of this chapter.

friendship and democracy together through sharing and participation. Derrida claims that human beings have merely been capable of comradeship and not friendship until the present time (283). The philosopher invites us to rethink both friendship and democracy beyond phallocentric parameters and nation-state boundaries in an exercise that may allow us to articulate the friendship that Derrida so beautifully already starts to think: "There is no friendship as yet, it has not yet begun to be thought. But, in a sort of mourned anticipation, we can already name the friendship that we have not met" (283). This politics of friendship may help us rethink not only democracy but also the political and friendship itself, and consider the transformative power of the interpersonal.

In a similar way as Derrida, Giorgio Agamben has also considered the political potentiality and significance of friendship. Conceiving the human community as cohabitation (i.e., in the Latin sense of *convivere*, 'to live with') in an argument which might be connected to Judith Butler's own notion of cohabitation or to Nancy's 'being-with', Agamben regards friendship as a proximity which cannot be represented or turned into a concept, an existence that in its own sense of existence also feels the existence of the friend (2004: 4). Friendship, Agamben argues, is charged with a political potency:[49] "the 'syn', the 'con-' which divides, disseminates and renders con-divisible—in fact, already always con-divided—the very perception, the very pleasantness of existing" (6), a sharing of existence which, according to Agamben, has a political significance. What characterizes the human community, to Agamben, thus, is not a common essence but the very fact of cohabitation.

Like Agambem, Roberto Esposito has also distanced from the conception of community as 'property' or 'essence' that absorbs the self in what he terms a

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[49] Agamben, however, does not make it explicit in his essay how this political potency of friendship may be implemented politically.

"hyperthrophic figure of 'the unity of unities'" (1998: 2). Engaging in an etymological analysis of the concept of 'community', his work *Communitas. The Origin and Destiny of Community* (1998) follows Martin Heidegger and George Bataille's perceptions of the relationship between community and 'no-thing'-ness. Esposito defines community not as something that certain people have in common, but as an absent gift[50] that places its members in a relationship of exchange, as well as of obligation and sacrifice, since, once one has accepted the gift, s/he has to return it. Community, Esposito claims, is constructed upon an absent. This is why 'community'

> cannot be thought of as a body, as corporation […] in which individuals are founded in a larger individual. Neither is community to be interpreted as a mutual, intersubjective 'recognition' in which individuals are reflected in each other so as to confirm their initial identity; as a collective bond that comes at a certain point to connect individuals that before were separate. The community isn't a mode of being, much less a 'making' of the individual subject. It isn't the subject's expansion or multiplication but its exposure to what interrupts the closing and turns it inside out: a dizziness, a syncope, a spasm in the continuity of the subject. (7)

Esposito notes how, over history, community became associated with belonging and connected to a spatial context, thus constituting itself as a jurisdicopolitical institution and incorporating into its center the preservation and defense of territorial borders (9). Esposito's examination of community goes hand in hand with the notion of *immunitas*, which shares in etymology with *communitas* despite constituting an actual semantic opposite to it. Immunity clashes with the bonds and obligations brought forth by the gift that binds people into a community. By underlining the risks that the communitarian bond (ex)poses to its participants –i.e., vulnerability at the exposure to strangers (something that both Butler and Derrida also emphasize), threat of potential 'contagion' of one's self and space, etc.–, Esposito emphasizes the paradox of

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[50] Esposito traces the origin of 'communitas' in the Latin term *munus* (gift, office, obligation).

community: "if community is so threatening to the individual integrity of the subjects that it puts into relation, nothing else remains for us except to 'immunisize us' before hand and, in so doing, to negate the very same foundations of community" (13). In a similar way as in the Hobbesian Leviathan, communitarian bonds –that is, the very relationship between human beings– are consequently sacrificed for the preservation of immunity. Esposito explains how in modern times, community is recognized in both its absence and necessity, noting how modernity insists on the emphasis of a communitarian essence which reduces the general character of 'being in common' for the particularity of a common subjectivity or identity, which distinguishes the group and sets it apart from other communitarian forms of belonging: "Once identified, be it with a people, a territory, or an essence, the community is walled in within itself and thus separated from the outside" (16). This separatist component translates into a fear of the other's trespassing of the community's walls, –a desire for 'purity' and self-preservation, rooted on the notion of 'immunity', that is characterized by a 'mixophobic' (using Zygmunt Bauman's terminology) drive and a rejection of hybridity. This reevaluation of community in recent years, however, as I have noted in previous sections, goes hand in hand with the rethinking and deconstruction of the concept. In this respect, Esposito realizes that community is rooted upon its very lack:

> Community appears to be definable only on the basis of the lack that characterizes it. […] men are united by a 'not' that joins them in a difference that cannot be lessened. […] Kant registers for the first time the antibiological character of *communitas*: its being a gift that does not belong to the subject, indeed that weakens [*reduce*] the subject and that hollows him out through a never-ending obligation, one that prescribes what it prohibited and prohibits what it prescribed. (16-17)

Esposito's theorization of community dwells on Bataille's emphasis on the *munus* in rethinking the central lack of community: "[…] the gift of self to which the subject feels

driven by an unavoidable obligation because it is one with the subject's own proper desire" (18). Esposito places *immunitas* –the impulse of self-preservation– at the heart of his theorization of community:

> It is the *non-being individual* of the relation; the continuum that originates out of and to which we are drawn by a force that is directly counterposed to the instinct for survival; the wound that we cause or from which we emerge when we ourselves are changed when we enter into a relation not only with the other but with the other of the other, he too victim of the same irresistible expropriative impulse. This meeting, this *chance*, this contagion, more intense than any immunitarian cordon, is the community of those that manifestly do not have it, when not losing it, and losing themselves in the very same process of flowing away from it. (Esposito 18-19)

Esposito poses the difficult question of how to open up community while at the same time preserving its singularities; how to transcend its walls without sacrificing the particularities of community in the process or, in Esposito's terms, how to "immunize" community from the risk of death contained in its very heart (28). In the "Appendix" to his volume, Esposito wonders if nihilism –traditionally conceived as a tendency directly opposed, and even confronted, to community– can contribute to opening up the possibility of new ways to rethink community. "No-thing", Esposito claims, "is what community and nihilism have in common" (137). With this affirmation, Esposito lays bare the traditional association of community with fullness, arguing that community is not constituted by an identity but by a non-identity, a "non-thing" (138). That is, community is not an entity or a collection of subjects but the very relation that separates those subjects from their individuality and places them in a contact-zone with others (139): it "unites not through con-vergence, con-version, or con-fusion, but rather through di-vergence, di-version, and dif-fusion. […] We see this decentering in the same idea of partition […], which refers both a 'sharing with' and a 'taking leave of' […]" (139). This certainly bears resonances of Jean-Luc Nancy's conception of

community and communitarian bonding as the circulation of being in the 'with'.[51] How to understand the "nothing", Nancy claims, is the question faced by our times.[52] This was also the question faced by Herman Melville in his oeuvre, as I shall analyze through his 1876 narrative poem *Clarel*.

In a similar way as Esposito, in *The Community of Those Who Have Nothing in Common* (1994), Alphonso Lingis connects community with nothingness, arguing that community emerges from human beings' estrangement to each other; that is, it is the very fact that people are strangers to –and, as a consequence, fearful of– one another that community finds its expression. Lingis, thus, turns away from forms of community built upon a common identity or shared features which give unity to a group, differentiates and, therefore, constitutes it as separate from others, and, by doing so, asserts its specificity and particularity. Every individual form of communitarian belonging, therefore, produces its own strangers: as Guert Biesta claims, "Each time a rational community is constituted, it draws a borderline, it creates at the very same time an inside and an outside" (2004: 319). Noting how these communities usually become communitarian fortresses protected by impenetrable walls, Lingis criticizes the excluding nature of identity-based communities, which leave outside of their boundaries the strangers they cannot comprehend and whom they fear, this way avoiding mixing and preventing cohabitation.

Lingis's proposed community is not articulated on the premise that individuals have something in common but takes at its heart the fact that human beings are

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[51] As a matter of fact, Esposito acknowledges his indebtedness to Nancy's *The Inoperative Community* (1991) in the notes section to his book.

[52] This 'nothingness' (which can, perhaps, be related to the 'hollow' Clarel perceives in Rolfe in Melville's *Clarel*) may reflect more the absence of 'truth' or essences than nihilism itself, since, if 'nothing' is the world itself and our sense of being and making sense of our selves in relation to, and from our relation with, the world, then we may claim that this nothing is something present and real, yet unfixed and fluid, without a fixed 'core' or center, in the same way as meaning is elusively scattered among as many different interpretations or 'accesses to meaning' as human beings are on earth.

exposed to other human beings –all of them strangers to one another– with whom they may share nothing beyond existence itself. This is of particular relevance to my analysis of the universalism which I interpret articulated in Herman Melville's 1876 *Clarel*. Lingis's arguments on the ways in which such exposures between strangers take place, I believe, may be connected to Judith Butler's more recent arguments on the notions of vulnerability and cohabitation as fundamental concepts to the development of a global ethics that contemplates not only proximity ('hereness') but also distance ('thereness'): as Lingis argues, "One exposes oneself to the other […] not only with one's insights and one's ideas, that they may be contested, but one also exposes the nakedness of one's eyes, one's voice and one's silences, one's empty hands. For the other, the stranger, turns to one, not only with his or her convictions and judgments, but also with his or her frailty, susceptibility, mortality" (11). Lingis places community and, more generally, human connectedness in the bleakest vulnerability of life itself, in suffering, nothingness, mortality, and death:

> Community forms when one exposes oneself to the naked one, the destitute one, the outcast, the dying one. One enters into community not by affirming oneself and one's forces but by exposing oneself to expenditure at a loss, to sacrifice. Community forms in a movement by which one exposes oneself to the other, to forces and powers outside oneself, to death and to the others who die. (12)

According to Lingis, it is not in familiarity but in the obligation toward the other that kinship is to be found (156). This obligation that might be encountered in the vulnerability of the other, in their suffering and their death, may encourage one to transcend his/her individuality and perceive his/her existence as connected to the existence of the other: "One takes the others as equivalent to and interchangeable with oneself. […] In this equivalence and interchangeability, one sees oneself in the others

and sees the others in oneself" (Lingis 164).[53] Not only does death unite existences that are simultaneous in time but even lives that are temporarily separated: according to Lingis, the fact that new generations of human beings come to the world to occupy the spaces opened up by previous generations, unites past, present, and future individuals.[54] As Amy Kaplan also notes in her reading of Herman Melville's *Clarel*, "Today we often hear that catastrophe, which reveals our shared vulnerability, offers a way to expatriate ourselves.[55] That is, 9/11 and Katrina have exposed the illusion of national sovereignty, and the threat of environmental catastrophe should make us feel part of a global community with a shared concern for the planet" (2010: 51). Kaplan further claims that, already in the nineteenth century, Herman Melville anticipated those thoughts: "Melville has thought those thoughts before us: Are all his motley crews of mariners, renegades, and castaways federated along the keel of destruction? Or do they represent other democratic potentialities?" (2010: 51). As I shall argue in Chapter Two, Melville was capable of envisioning human bonds that transcended interhuman boundaries such as 'race', ethnicity, religion, and even the nation-state. His works, thus, constitute spaces for the acknowledgment and federation of those whom the author would name in "The Encantadas" the "ragged citizen[s] of this universal nation" (1856: 125).

In a similar way as Agamben's coming community of 'whatever singularities', Lingis's community of those who have nothing in common may prove disruptive to

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[53] The movement Lingis describes in this quote is important both to my articulation of intersubjective universalism in future sections of this chapter and to the analysis of Melville's *Clarel* in Chapter Two, as a text that explores the difficulties and (im)possibilities of such intersubjective universalism.

[54] "One sees the succession of days that recur indefinitely equivalent and interchangeable, and in which one has cast the time of one's life, prolonging itself in the lives of others. In this way, one gives oneself the feeling that the strength one finds again for the tasks of the day is a crest on the current of life that comes from an immemorial past and continues into the unterminating future" (Lingis 165).

[55] Kaplan's affirmation, I think, is in line with Judith Butler's articulation of global ethics from the notions of vulnerability and cohabitation.

forms of power that cannot conceive collective bondings outside identity or some sort of common attributes.[56] Lingis uses the phrase "murmur of the world" in order to refer to the diversity of the earth, the multiplicity of human forms, and the polyphony of human voices. He conceives communication as a form of violence, arguing that every effort to assert one voice implies the silencing of others. Here Lingis not only criticizes traditional communitarianism but also classical universalism in its effort to "purge" the noise and "silence the rumble of the world" (81). In special, the philosopher claims that it is against those "noises" which we do not understand, the "noises" that are strange to us, that such silencing impulse most evidently emerges. This is, he claims, the logics operating behind traditional communitarianism: that is, the development of communication amongst those sharing a common feature that brings the community together, while, at the same time, protecting such communication from the "noise" of strangers; an impulse which neutralizes the "murmur" of the world, and, therefore, the very plurality by which the earth is constituted:[57] "The community that forms in communicating is an alliance of interlocutors who are on the same side, who are not each Other for each other but all variants of the Same, tied together by the mutual interest of forcing back the tide of noise pollution" (81). This relates to Zygmunt Bauman's analysis of 'communities of sameness' which construct themselves as refuges against the polyvocal "wilderness" outside (Bauman, *Community* 2001: 117). Traditional communities –both "rational communities", in Lingis's terms, and "communities of sameness", in Bauman's terms–, fence themselves up against strangers and their

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[56] As Lingis shows, rational communities give voice to their members, even though this is so only within the linguistic and logical parameters dictated by the community. This is, therefore, a representative type of freedom that does not challenge established parameters (Biesta 2004: 315).

[57] This impulse to silence the noise of strangers and the "rumble of the world" (Lingis 75) may be dangerously connected to the much more radically violent practice of choosing with whom to cohabit and not to cohabit the earth, which, as Hannah Arendt already noted, is always a genocidal practice and an attempt against the very plurality that not only characterizes but, most importantly, constitutes humanity.

incomprehensible 'noise', eliminating thus any possibility of communication or attempt to abridge the separation between Us/Them. Security, therefore, has a price of (self-)isolation and separation. Communication –i.e., the openness for a democratic communication that does not silence but listens to polyvocality–, like Derridean hospitality, involves the abandonment of security for the unpredictable risk of being exposed to the other, yet also the richness of that very contact; both the threat and the beauty of being potentially altered, enriched or, on the other hand, injured by the communication experience. As Bauman explains:

> To enter into conversation with another is to lay down one's arms and one's defenses; to throw open the gates of one's own position; to expose oneself to the other, the outsider; and to lay oneself open to surprises, contestation, and inculpation. It is to risk what one found or produced in common. To enter into conversation is to struggle against the noise, the interference, and the vested interests, the big brothers and the little Hitlers always listening in—in order to expose oneself to the alien, the Balinese and the Aztec, the victims and the excluded, the Palestinians and the Quechuas and the Crow Indians, the dreamers, the mystics, the mad, the tortured, and the birds and the frogs. One enters into conversation in order to become an other for the other. (1994: 87-88)

Most human beings tend to perceive the noise as coming from outside, struggling to find ways to prevent it from filtering into their spaces. It is necessary, I believe, to begin to understand not only that the noise may indeed come from outside, but also, contrarily to what we tend to perceive, that we are also part of the noise, contributors to the murmuring voices in the earth. Guert Biesta has argued that Lingis's community of those who have nothing in common turns away from totalizing tendencies in the understanding of community while speaking a language of ethical and political responsibility (2004: 310). Examining Lingis's work, Biesta notes how, when one speaks with the language of the rational community, one is merely reproducing the language of the community without speaking with his/her own voice; this implies that, when one

exposes oneself to the stranger, it is necessary that one first finds his/her own unique individual voice so that dialogue based on a democratic 'language' (cf. the imperialist and neutralizing language of the community) may be generated (Biesta 317). This language we may use to speak to strangers, Biesta argues, is a language of responsivity and responsibility: "I want to suggest that the language that we use in such encounters should not be understood as language in the sense of a set of words or utterances. What matters is not the content of what we say, but what is done. And what is done, what needs to be done, and what only I can do, is to respond to the stranger, to be responsive and responsible to what the stranger asks from me" (317). This encounter is, therefore, the beginning of an interpersonal relationship based on an ethical bond. Lingis's community of those who have nothing in common is, in this respect, an ethical community, in which we are exposed to the ethical demand of strangers and are responsible to answer it (Biesta 318).

Although I will dedicate a section in this chapter to the analysis of cosmopolitanism,[58] I want to already point out here that the concept of community has also been rethought by cosmopolitan thinkers. In his volume *On the 'Logic' of Togetherness* (1998), Kuang-Ming Wu, for example, theorizes a more fluid and dynamic form of interpersonal bonding that connects, in difference, individuals belonging to diverse cultural, 'racial', religious, etc., groups. This transnational and transcultural bonding proposed by Wu is respectful of communitarian forms of belonging, at the same time that it transcends the rigidity of communitarianism, by 'opening up' community-based boundaries and placing human beings in a dynamic transversal process. Wu terms such process 'togetherness': "Togetherness typifies our interactive, inter-constitutive mode of being, enabling us to express ourselves in a dynamic cross-cultural, cross-communal,

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[58] See Section 7.2.

and cross-personal manner. Togetherness traverses and constitutes every move, everything; it is an ontological constitutive traffic, an interactive universal transversal" (389). Aware of the problems of both traditional universalism and particularism, Wu finds in togetherness a middle way where particularism and universalism might blend. Wu's cosmopolitan togetherness interlaces different cultural outsiders "into a coherent unity—an inside made up of many outsides" (69), claiming that this allows for a potential ethics constructed upon the grounds of being-together, in a dynamic and fluid interpersonal learning from and sharing of difference. This togetherness, Wu argues, encourages a transversality that abridges the separation between the universal and the particular: cultural togetherness allows for "transversality, communicability, among the radically different cultures. This is to answer the question of how to obtain a universal common ground (of cultural discourse) in the teeth of different cultural presuppositions. Our answer is dynamic reciprocal transversality" (72). This transversality is designed to embrace even those whose views are directly opposed to the democratic spirit of togetherness in itself:[59]

> Being together with everyone, including the ones who disagree among us, involves (a) learning from them (being inside them) (b) without practicing their practices and endorsing their views (being outside them). (a) Learning from them includes understanding them, absorbing their valuable intentions, and sometimes even being stimulated by their sheer differences into realizing something valuable on our own. (b) Not endorsing their views and their practices amounts to drawing the line between our integrity and theirs. After all, we are outsiders looking in, fascinated, while disagreeing with them. (Wu 70)

The condition of togetherness is, therefore, contact instead of separation, so that the feeling of togetherness may be developed. Wu turns away from an abstract

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[59] This may be connected, in turn, to Slavoj Žižek's claim that democracy also includes its non-democratic ingredients: "Democracy includes its imperfection in its very notion, which is why the only cure against democratic deficiencies is more democracy" (2008: 106).

understanding of Otherness, claiming that "Far from being an abstract notion, the Other is the all too concrete not-I […]" (88). It is the moment of encounter with the Other, Wu argues, that marks the birth of togetherness and, with it, the emergence of ethics: "Togetherness is the community of our 'Others'. Here ethics is born, forbidding the subject to objectify other subjects, that is, to identify, think of, contain, integrate, and manipulate other subjects as the I's objects […]. Instead, the I must meet, respect, and treat the Thou's as the others I's, as I's *alter egos*, as the I treats itself; I must love my neighbor-Thou as myself" (98). Wu's ethics of togetherness is in tune with analyses on global ethics developed by thinkers such as Zygmunt Bauman or Judith Butler, among others.[60] This ethics of togetherness is grounded upon one's responsibility –and, therefore, responsiveness– for the other, as well as upon the respect of his/her singularity and difference. This places human beings into a relationship of reciprocal responsibility and solidarity which may abridge their separation yet without eliminating their individuality; this type of relationship characterizes the togetherness or unity in diversity defended by Wu. This unity in diversity, at the same time, is constitutive to human beings' identity, since it is through this relational togetherness with the Other that individuals understand their own existences. In an almost Levinasian way,[61] this implies that there is no existence without co-existence: I cannot exist without the Other, and, in turn, the Other cannot exist without me. The lives of both I and the Other are, therefore, not only interconnected but even interdependent, which gives unity to the existences of both in their very separation: "the Other and myself are one, in the *unity* of interdependence, to become our respective distinct selves—the self, the Other. […] this unity is that of difference, of *diversity*. For I exist by virtue of my being

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[60] We will discuss notions of interpersonal ethics, particularly in relation with intersubjective universalism, in Section 8.2 of the present chapter.

[61] Emmanuel Levinas's arguments on interpersonal responsibility are analyzed in Section 8.2 of this chapter.

not the Other, as other than the Other, in the same manner as the Other exists as other than myself" (Wu 102). Such "togetherness-thinking", as Wu terms it, liberates individual subjects from "egocentric-thinking", by placing them in a relationship where they are forced to find a balance between the singularity of each individual (i.e., the part each individual plays in relation to others) and the dialogue that these individuals may generate together, which is in continuous negotiation with other individuals on a basis of equivalence or dynamic transversality, and thus constantly (re)adapted to the specificity of each human encounter. Wu compares this process of interpersonal responsibility and of negotiation of singularity-plurality to the quest for harmony in the creation of music, an image that Mikhail Bakhtin had already used in his own articulation of heteroglossia and polyphony versus monolithic sound or cacophony, and which Zygmunt Bauman also uses in more recent theorizations. Togetherness, Wu claims, is making music with others; it is the mutual creation of a space in which individuals blend with one another on the grounds of equality which allows such "playing together" for the creation of music and prevents it from deriving into a cacophony of sounds. This music or dialogue, which is different every time, is a dynamic and co-creative process; an act of creative mutuality where each of the parties is responsible for the togetherness that is created jointly. Each part is equally crucial in the process of 'creation' and carries the same weight as the rest: "Lacking in either *one*, there would be no music. […] The radical equality of contributions in making music exists not only among the composer, the performer(s), and the audience, but among the musical *notes* themselves which are performed by the performers" (133-134). Every note is, therefore, equally unique and important to the collectively created piece, the harmony of which is directly dependent on each of its notes, at the same time that the harmony of each note is dependent on, placed at the service of, and reinforced by other

notes, voices, tunes, participating in the piece. The togetherness vindicated by Wu is, in this sense, an ethical community in which subjects are united by their mutual obligation in a relationship of co-responsibility and co-responsiveness, without expecting reciprocation. This co-responsibility implies, as we noted before, a component of risk as well, since it exposes the vulnerability of each of the individuals that are involved in the ethical relationship. Nonetheless, no self can be developed without the other, and it is only in togetherness that the boundaries (im)posed by individualism and identity-based communitarianism (nation, religion, culture, ideology, race, etc.) may be transcended, and that we might start creating interpersonal ways of relating that are fully democratic and respectful of the difference of the others and of our own.

While I will study the eventual limitations of cosmopolitanism due to its non-problematization of communitarian forms of belonging such as the nation,[62] it is important to acknowledge these arguments for cosmopolitanism to the rethinking of community at this point, and to incorporate the cosmopolitan perspective to those of the theorists analyzed in this section. The next section in this chapter turns its focus to the nation-state model. It analyzes the homogenizing tendencies of national communities and acknowledges multiculturalism's role in giving visibility to human groups that are oppressed within official constructions of national identity. Paying particular attention to the U.S. context, I, however, eventually emphasize the identity-centered and community-based conception of society endorsed through multiculturalism, and analyze the multiculturalist movement's limitations in its reluctance to question the oppressive mechanisms of the nation-state, promote interpersonal dialogue across cultures, and move beyond a sectarian view of society in which such cultures are regarded as separate.

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[62] See Section 7.2 in this chapter.

6. 'Absolutizing difference':[63] Multiculturalism and Intercultural Separation

"Contemporary humanity speaks in many voices and we know now that it will continue to do so for a very long time to come. The central issue of our times is how to reforge that polyphony into harmony and prevent it from degenerating into cacophony. Harmony is not uniformity; it is always an interplay of a number of different motifs, each retaining its separate identity and sustaining the resulting melody through, and thanks to, that identity."

(Zygmunt Bauman, *The Individualized Society* 2001: 93-94)

"What is identity politics… but apartheid thinking in another guise?"

(Susan Mathieson and David Attwell, "Between Ethnicity and Nationhood: Shaka Day and the Struggle over Zuluness in Post-apartheid South Africa" 1998: 112)

"'Multiculturalism' is fast following 'postmodernism' from the isolation ward of scare quotes into the graveyard of unusable, because overused, jargon. But if the word no longer emits an audible buzz in many of the circles in which it confidently moved and mixed a decade ago, the crises of cultural identity and authority, national self-confidence and democratic conscience, to which its promiscuous uses attested, show no signs of resolution. […] the issues of social justice and cultural 'survival' debated under the rubric of 'multiculturalism' have taken on fresh political urgency."

(David Bennett, "Introduction". *Multicultural Status. Rethinking Difference and Identity* 1998: 1)

Since the 1960s, and as a direct consequence of the emergence of identity politics movements, the idea of 'multiculturalism' has consolidated in countries such as the United States (the national context on which the present section is largely centered), England, or India, as a sociopolitical model for dealing with cultural and racial diversity at the nation-state level. While multiculturalism is conceived largely as a 'Western'

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[63] This phrase paraphrases Bauman's own terminology in his claim that "the logic of the 'recognition wars' prompts the combatants to absolutize the difference" (*Community* 2001: 77).

–particularly U.S. and British– phenomenon, Etienne Balibar notes how many countries that were historically under colonial domination were actually the first to experience multiculturalism (1995: 52). Each of these multiculturalisms is different depending on the national context in which it emerges; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has noted the complexities of multiculturalism in her claim that "[…] multiculturalism is a very complicated scenario, because it's one word" (1993: 40).[64] The value of multiculturalism as an important struggle against monocultural imperialism and cultural assimilation within national identities hegemonizing a cultural particular over others, therefore, cannot be denied. As many scholars have noted, multiculturalism is intimately connected to, and actually inseparable from, the long history of racism experienced by different human groups throughout history, and it consequently carries a close connection to 'race' and culture in its very heart, as well as an opposition to racism and demands for racial justice (Blum 1998: 74). It is also an outcome, as Jon Stratton and Ien Ang have explained, of "the failure of the modern project of the nation-state, which emphasized unity and sameness – a trope of identity – over difference and diversity" (1998: 138). The basic claim of multiculturalism is recognition and tolerance of racial and cultural pluralism within the particular national context in which it emerges,[65] in the hopes that such recognition contributes to oust racism and cultural superiority, therefore bringing to an end centuries of monocultural supremacy. In this respect, Stefan Sullivan has claimed that multiculturalism "is less about diverse ethnic groups cohabiting a common state or nation than a specific ideological *Zeitgeist* that promotes the recognition of these individual groups in various political, economic, and cultural spheres" (1997: 37). Similarly, Charles Taylor has analyzed the harm that both non-

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[64] For a more direct insight into Spivak's views on multiculturalism see Danius and Jonsson's 1993 interview of Spivak.

[65] 'Cultural pluralism' is a phrase coined by the early twentieth-century multiculturalist Horace Kallen.

recognition and misrecognition can inflict upon an individual or group of individuals who internalize a distorted image of themselves in the construction of their own identity. Taylor has emphasized how "a healthy democratic society" (1994: 36) can only stem from the equal recognition of its citizens and their distinctiveness as individuals or groups: "Due recognition",[66] he claimed in 1992, "is not just a courtesy but a vital human need" (25). This recognition necessarily rests on a principle of universal equality (the human right to recognition), even though it moves away from universalist claims in order to stress the specificity of a community that has been either ignored or absorbed within the dominant hegemonic culture. The emphasis of multiculturalism, therefore, is upon national cultural diversity and difference. As this section shall analyze, Taylor's work has been problematized by many scholars, but I want to note at this point how his claims on recognition are representative as constitutive to the multiculturalist project, yet also important to any universalist project that claims itself to be democratic. As the focus of the present section is principally U.S. multiculturalism, due to the fact that Melville was an American writer and that the postbellum U.S. context is central to my analysis of the 1876 *Clarel*, I also want to emphasize that, even though I here conceive multiculturalism as a conservative political project, it is important to note that, in the moment of its emergence, multiculturalism was perceived by Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.'s and other liberal supporters of the American 'melting pot' as a menacing and disrupting force endangering assimilation and integration in the United States, and therefore endangering the national 'Unum'.[67]

Tolerance and respect of cultural and racial difference are the pillars upon which multiculturalism rests. However, the positive recognition of difference vindicated by

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[66] Taylor locates such "Due recognition" in the tolerance of difference. More than tolerace, however, is needed, in my opinion, to develop a feeling of interhuman connection and togetherness.

[67] See Schlesinger's *The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society* (1991).

CHAPTER ONE

multiculturalism is, I believe, a deceptive project that conceals a conservative agenda. It might have proved historically true that, by defending the right to self-assertion of each particular form of identity, 'race', and culture, multiculturalism combats the assimilationist drive of the nation-state to homogenize its population, as it induces an awareness to difference and cultural heterogeneity within the political boundaries of the nation (Werbner 2003: 54). Yet, at the same time that it problematizes the dominant culture for its homogeneity, multiculturalism accommodates itself within the dominant culture. In its emphasis on cultural or racial specificity and difference, multiculturalism ironically becomes a homogenizing force that absorbs individual subjectivities within a 'collective identity', while it vindicates that individuals and groups that have been historically marginalized are represented within the system that has traditionally excluded them. Multiculturalism, therefore, does not constitute a threat to the existing power-mechanisms even though it has indeed been successful in changing some sociopolitical realities (e.g., segregation in U.S. Southern states such as Alabama or Tennessee after the 1960s). Michael A. Burayidi summarizes this tendency best:

> Multiculturalism is in line with the principle of *E Pluribus Unum*, that is, that a country is constructed from the diverseness of its population and cultures and that people should have equal rights to express their culture, language, and ways of life without any inhibitions. Multiculturalism is an acceptance of the fact that one does not have to give up his or her heritage culture in order to be part of the dominant culture. (1997: 374)

In general traits, individuals and groups within the multicultural spectrum ask for an opening up of the dominant culture –its transformation from homogeneous to heterogeneous–, and for a place within it, but they may not necessarily problematize the power-structures by which such dominant culture is sustained and which continue engendering several types of oppression at different fronts. Strongly influenced by

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Nancy Fraser's arguments on redistribution,[68] Zygmunt Bauman remarks how, behind the celebration of cultural diversity, inequality is refashioned as cultural difference, shifting thus the focus of attention away from inequality onto cultural pluralism:

> The moral ugliness of deprivation is miraculously reincarnated as the aesthetic beauty of cultural variety. What has been lost from view in the process is that the bid for recognition is toothless unless sustained by the practice of redistribution – and that the communal assertion of cultural distinctiveness brings little consolation for those who, courtesy of the increasingly unequal division of resources, have their 'choices' made for them. (*Community* 2001: 107)

Bauman radically compares the underlying principles of multiculturalism to those of racism, arguing that the racist tendency of explaining inequality on grounds of racial inferiority has been transformed into "an apparently humane representation of starkly unequal human conditions as the inalienable right of every community to its own chosen form of life" (2011: 108). Inequality, therefore, is fossilized into 'culture' and consequently legitimized as such.[69] This derives into a discourse that not only does not problematize but actually perpetuates inequality on grounds that it should not be interfered with, because not only would any possible interference defy the cultural principles of a particular community, but even violate its free capacity to choose. Also radically, Slavoj Žižek has defined multiculturalism as a "disavowed, inverted, self-referential form of racism, a 'racism with a distance' – it 'respects' the Other's identity, conceiving the Other as a self-enclosed 'authentic' community towards which he, the multiculturalist, maintains a distance rendered possible by his privilege universal position" (1997: 44). To this observation, Žižek bluntly adds that

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[68] Nancy Fraser's arguments on redistribution are analyzed on pages 104-105 of this chapter.

[69] In the introduction to his collection of essays *Multicultural Status. Rethinking Difference and Identity*, David Bennett further underlines the critique of multiculturalism "for its 'culturalism', or its tendency to translate racial, ethnic and sexual difference as cultural diversity, inequality as multiplicity" (1998: 6).

> Multiculturalism is a racism which empties its own position of all positive content (the multiculturalist is not a direct racist, he doesn't oppose to the Other the *particular* values of his own culture), but nonetheless retains this position as the privileged *empty point of universality* from which one is able to appreciate (and depreciate) properly other particular cultures—the multiculturalist respect for the Other's specificity is the very form of asserting one's own superiority. (44)

While predicating tolerance for cultural diversity and recognition of oppressed population groups, multiculturalism, then, does not demolish the structures of sociopolitical oppression and inequality that have for centuries marginalized and invisibilized the very groups whose cultural distinctiveness is, nonetheless, celebrated under the multicultural(ist) program. This leads to an ambiguous and problematic situation: even though multiculturalism has proved valuable as a subversive movement that diversifies and pluralizes hegemonic culture, it has left intact –and actually reinforced– the oppressive mechanisms by which hegemonic cultures are maintained, serving thus the interest of national unity as predicated by the nation-state model. As Julio Cortázar radically claimed: "nothing can be denounced if the denouncing is done within the system that belongs to the thing denounced" (*Hopscotch* 1966: 446); in other words, one cannot dismantle the master's house with the master's tools.

Nancy Fraser has overtly denounced that the politics of recognition vindicated by multiculturalism silences socioeconomic problems and social injustice, and she has claimed that mainstream multiculturalism is complicit with socioeconomic oppression:

> Demands for "recognition of difference" fuel struggles of groups mobilized under the banners of nationality, ethnicity, "race," gender, and sexuality. In these "post-socialist" conflicts, group identity supplants class interest as the chief medium of political mobilization. Cultural domination supplants exploitation as the fundamental injustice. And cultural recognition displaces socioeconomic redistribution as the remedy for injustice and the goal of political struggle. (1995: 68)

Fraser argues that Charles Taylor's views on multiculturalism[70] constitute an example of how recognition has been emphasized at the expense of redistribution within the multiculturalist political agenda; or, in other words, how the multiculturalist movement has disregarded social inequality in order to favor cultural difference. Instead, Fraser vindicates the need to combine the demands for recognition with a politics of social justice, in a political movement that underpins the frequent interrelation between economic and cultural oppression and advocates both redistribution and recognition in the struggle for social justice. Fraser notes the challenge to integrate both redistribution and recognition in the political agenda, due to the contrary directions the two movements pursue: recognition aims to stress cultural specificity and difference, whereas redistribution subverts it in favor of social justice (74). These opposing inclinations produce a paradoxical situation: "People who are subject to both cultural injustice and economic injustice need both recognition and redistribution. They need both to claim and to deny their specificity" (74). Aware of this dilemma, Fraser inclines the balance in favor of redistribution as the most operative way to fight against social injustice and class exploitation, as well as to "restructur[e] the political economy so as to alter the class distribution of social burdens and social benefits" (76) which may create the conditions for social equality. Fraser's arguments against a 'pure' politics of recognition such as the model defended by Taylor has not passed without critiques.[71] However, I believe that class needs to be an important starting point grounding any struggles for the sociopolitical and democratic equality of different population groups. Zygmunt Bauman has also denounced not only how class has been left out of identity movements, but also how social justice has been abandoned in favor of a frequently

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[70] See Taylor's *Multiculturalism and "The Politics of Recognition"* (1992).

[71] The volume *Theorizing Multiculturalism. A Guide to the Current Debate* (1998), edited by Cynthia Willet, actually reprints Fraser's essay (pp. 19-49) followed by other scholars' responses to it.

abstract way of thinking about human rights (2000: 61-62). Peter McLaren's critique of multiculturalism is similar to Bauman's and Fraser', in his vindication of a "resistance multiculturalism" that affirms diversity "within a politics of cultural criticism and a commitment to social justice" (1994: 53). Pnina Werbner too has noted how, through its celebration of cultural diversity and claims of tolerance and cosmopolitanism, multiculturalism dodges economic and political inequalities oppressing the very communities whose cultural distinctiveness it celebrates: "[…] the state funds multicultural festivals and turns its back on real problems of deprivation, prejudice and discrimination. We celebrate cultural hybridity as an expression of tolerance and cosmopolitanism, but what about the high rates of black youth unemployment" (2003: 52). Thus, while recognition is a crucial human right in the political struggle for democracy and togetherness, it is only the first step, since recognition alone, in the form of mere assertion of difference bears a monoculturalist component that runs the risk of becoming totalitarian. As Bauman points out, the promotion of pure particularism fosters that different cultural or racial/ethnic groups enter into "recognition wars" which, instead of generating intercultural contact, encourages "the combatants to absolutize the difference" that is being asserted (*Community* 2001: 77), consequently solidifying the markers of 'race', ethnicity, or 'culture' that are taken as distinctive of the particular group, and turning them into untrespassable and dividing walls. It also neglects the individuals within these particular groups. Ernesto Laclau has also criticized the separatism that characterizes the multiculturalist project, noting, moreover, that no particular identity is ever constituted without some form of universal principle: "The question can be formulated in these terms: is a pure culture of difference possible, a pure particularism which does away entirely with any kind of

universal principle?" (1995: 147).[72] Eric Lott also subscribes to Laclau's vindication of universalism as a movement that, though repressed, is already present in particularisms, and should necessarily be present if the sociopolitical democratization of society is to be pursued:

> Basing your politics on difference […] doesn't make it antagonistic to anything, just different from all other positions. It's the moment of what [Walter Benn] Michaels calls "disagreement" that constitutes politics, and disagreement is not a differential or particularist category but a "universal" one. By which Michaels means that you believe your position is right not because of your group's particular difference from others but because (politically speaking) of its assumed sameness: you believe what is right is right for everyone, not just your particular movement or group. (2000: 668)

Therefore, while it is unquestionable that recognition is a fundamental component, multiculturalism,[73] I believe, cannot be a fully democratic movement unless it incorporates claims for social justice, together with a universalist component that goes beyond tolerance toward the potential achievement of mutual understanding and sharing built from the creation of democratic dialogue that connects, and abridges the distance between, different particularisms. Quoting Laclau again: "[…] the particular can only fully realize itself if it constantly keeps open, and constantly redefines, its relation to the universal" (1995: 164). I believe that the commitment to social justice, as well as the interconnection and mutual interdependence of the particular and the universal, needs to be incorporated into the intersubjective universalism that I will defend in succeeding chapters of this dissertation as a project with potentially

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[72] Laclau's critique of pure particularisms and his articulation of a plural universalism is analyzed in Section 8.3 of this chapter.

[73] In *Community*, Bauman remarks that recognition does not mean "an *a priory* acceptance of the form of life for which recognition has been or is to be claimed", it instead is "an invitation to a dialogue in the course of which the merits and demerits of the difference in question can be discussed and (hopefully) agreed" (2001: 80). Multiculturalism is, therefore, I believe with Bauman, the first step toward a universalist politics that accommodates plurality, and which is constructed *from* and *by* the very plurality it accommodates. This is why, as soon as multiculturalism becomes a political movement that is unable to transcend particularisms, it places itself in a dead-end which blocks the possibilities of universalism and, even, of the very democracy it advocates.

democratizing ethical and political implications to the ways how we conceive our relationships with others.

A second critique of multiculturalism underlines the problematic conception and celebration of 'culture' or 'race' as monolithic and stable 'essences', which are both confining and non-realistic regarding the ways in which each individual develops his/her subjectivity, which transcend the 'parameters' of any one, exclusive, and fix definition of neither 'culture' nor 'race'. In a similar way as with 'identity', as has been noted in earlier sections of this chapter, postmodernism has liberated 'culture' from this constraining essentialist dimension. In 1993, Fredric Jameson, for example, noted how culture is not a "substance" that a given group possesses but a construction that emerges from the contact between at least two different groups of people: "[…] culture is the nimbus perceived by one group when it comes into contact with and observes another one" (33). Culture is, therefore, a relational construct, and it is in this relational and non-essentialist way that (multi)culturalism should need to be conceived. Culture is also always a hybrid concept, as postcolonial critics Homi Bhabha and Edward Said, among others, have argued.[74] This hybridity is not only determined by the reciprocal influence and blending of cultures throughout history, or in the cohabitation of different cultures within an individual or common location, but also by the ways in which questions such as class, sexuality, gender, etc. intersect within a 'culture', and how a given individual perceives culture from his or her own singular point of view. Cultures are, thus, in perpetual transformation; fluidly altering and being altered; inevitably mixing, blending, clashing, also jettisoning each other; this is why it is artificial to confine them within well-delimited boundaries. In this respect, some have accused multiculturalism of reifying cultures, 'marketing' them as homogeneous and

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[74] Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* (1994) and Said's *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) are important in this respect.

static substances, with well-marked limits that 'distinguish' them from other cultural forms.[75] Jonathan Friedman, for example, criticizes that multiculturalism 'museumises' cultures (1997: 82), while David Bennett remarks that it "address[es] ethnic and racial difference as a question of 'identity' rather than of history and politics, […] translat[ing] alterity as cultural diversity, treating difference (a relation) as an intrinsic property of 'cultures' and as *value* (a socially 'enriching' one) to be 'represented' as such" (1998: 4). Similarly, Jon Stratton and Ien Ang have remarked how multiculturalism fixes and separates 'cultures' in different "ethnic boxes" (1998: 158), in a classification that, Beryl Langer notes, is artificial in its pretension that each 'culture' or 'cultural community' is an internally coherent whole (1998: 175). Such reification has provoked, not only a concealment of class oppression and social injustice under the recognition of 'culture' or 'race', as I noted earlier, but also a social reality of separation between such different cultures, races or ethnicities, which is a consequence of a politics that, while claiming tolerance and political correctness towards each unique and distinguished cultural form or ethnic group, does not foster the conditions that allow for inter-personal and inter-cultural togetherness amongst different human beings and population groups.

This anticipates the third critique of multiculturalism that I want to underline, and which I think is of especial relevance to my articulation of intersubjective universalism, both theoretically, as I present it in the following sections of this chapter, and as applied to literary interpretation, in my analysis of Herman Melville's *Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land* (1876), in Chapter Two: multiculturalism reinforces inter-human 'walls' by 'classifying' human beings according to specific categories that enforce a communitarian (self-)segregation (from/)of humanity. As I pointed out in the

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[75] It is also important to note that it is always communities that are other to the group considered 'normative' that are conceived as 'different' and in need of being 'recognized' and 'tolerated', frequently falling into an objectification of the culture of these groups as something more or less 'exotic'.

quotations introducing this section, Susan Mathieson and David Attwell radically compare multiculturalism to apartheid:

> What is identity politics […] but an apartheid thinking in another guise? Apartheid's ruse was to use ethnicity as a way of deflecting claims of power at the centre; in this context, identitarian agendas could easily be, and were co-opted under a constitutional arrangement which protected white interests. To those opposing such hegemony it seemed as though the kind of multiculturalism frequently seen in the liberal democracies was deeply conservative, concerned more with achieving access to an existing constitutional order than with fundamentally changing it. Indeed, multiculturalism and apartheid are not such antithetical visions. (1998: 112)

In its celebration of the distinctive identities of different groups, multiculturalism presents a conservative view of communitarianism constructed by cultural, racial or ethnic versions of 'the common' that, as I have analyzed, may both ultimately and paradoxically reproduce the same hierarchical structures and oppressing mechanisms of the dominant culture against which the group had constituted itself, reinforcing separatedness between communities as well as an 'Us' vs. 'Them' conception of society and of human relationships. Like identity politics groups, multiculturalism, I have tried to demonstrate in this section, fails to promote togetherness and interpersonal/intercultural dialogue beyond –and often also within– identity-based borders despite its appeal to a reality of diversity, plurality, and polyphony. I agree with Zygmunt Bauman that, under multiculturalism, "indifference to difference is theorized as recognition to 'cultural pluralism'" (*Community* 2001: 107). Tolerance does not necessarily imply a sense of human togetherness in most cases, neither does it generate or translate into a dialogue nor into a reciprocal negotiation of life in common which may engender democratic contexts that transcend communitarian (cultural, ethnic, racial, religious, national etc.) walls: "When mutual tolerance is coupled with indifference, communal cultures may live alongside each other, but they seldom talk to

each other, and if they do they tend to use the barrel of a gun for a telephone. In a world of 'multiculturalism', cultures may coexist but it is hard for them to benefit from a shared life" (Bauman, *Community* 2001: 135). Such a "shared life", I believe, is one key factor to the development of a growing mutual understanding and negotiation of life in common, which may potentially deconstruct the binary we/them, us/strangers, national/foreign, familiar/threatening, all of them generators of fear and which block any potential possibilities of interpersonal dialogue. Bauman criticizes that, through its fostering of a competitive struggle for recognition based on the assertion of pure difference, multiculturalism has segmentalized society, promoting the creation of what he refers to as 'voluntary ghettos' which delimit the boundaries between inside(rs)/outside(rs), enforcing separation instead of togetherness, dialogue, and conscience of mutual interdependence, and being, thus, detrimental to the creation of life in common.[76] These voluntary ghettos are, according to Bauman, the sedimentation of pure communitarianism; that is, they constitute the materialization of the divisive

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[76] It is necessary to differentiate these voluntary ghettos –born from the communitarian impulse of 'fencing up' in a desire for homogeneity, (the dreadful word) 'purity', and security, and therefore resulting from communities' own choice for separation– from real ghettos, frequently born as direct products of social, political, or economic deprivations of certain (racial, ethnic, religious) communities by hegemonic powers, which lock certain sectors of population in a particular space. Bauman further marks the distinction between 'voluntary' and 'true' ghettos, "Voluntary ghettos differ from true ghettos in one decisive respect. The real ghettos are places from which their insiders cannot get out […]; the prime purpose of voluntary ghettos, on the contrary, is to bar outsiders from going in – the insiders are free to go out at will. […] The real ghettos mean denial of freedom. Voluntary ghettos are meant to serve the cause of freedom"; however, "Voluntary ghettos share with the genuine ones an awesome capacity for letting their isolation self-perpetuate and self-exacerbate" (*Community* 2001: 116-117). Despite sharing –though inspired by different motivations– in a segregationist impulse, it is important to note that voluntary ghettos do not carry the stigma of real ghettos. Therefore, while –problematic as these are– voluntary ghettos are direct materializations of communities articulated upon notions of sameness, real ghettos may constitute the impossibility of generating communitarian bonding. Quoting Bauman again: "No 'collective buffer' can be forged in the contemporary ghettos for the single reason that ghetto experience dissolves solidarity and destroys mutual trust before they have been given a chance to take roots. A ghetto is not a greenhouse of community feelings. It is on the contrary a laboratory of social disintegration, atomization and anomie" (122). I do not agree with Bauman's claim that no communitarian bonding and sense of agency can emerge from real ghettos, since it is possible to find historical instances in which, by keeping strangers out, voluntary ghettos have promoted the creation of real ghettos which, in due time, have developed into a sense of community. The instances of cohered communities ghettoized by society on accounts of differences, peoplehood, 'race', ethnicity, religion, language… are innumerable.

consequences of identity-based community formation. In a similar way as traditional communitarianism, voluntary ghettos are articulated upon notions of sameness and homogeneity, being aimed at providing a sense of security and shelter to their insiders by locking out their walls to outsiders. Sameness, therefore, is the basic component upon which voluntary ghettos are constructed, and at the same time the basic ingredient that is believed to pave the way for security within their walls: "What looms therefore on the horizon of the long march towards 'safe community' (community *as* safety) is a bizarre mutant of a 'voluntary ghetto'", asserts Bauman in *Community* (116). Yet the quest for security is constructed on grounds of a homogeneity and separation that is enforced by the sameness that gathers the community/voluntary ghetto together. This enforced sameness is a result of the fear of the Other and, in practical terms, signifies the exclusion of the stranger, of everything that is conceived as alien: "the stranger is transmogrified into an alien, and the alien into a threat" (Bauman, *Community* 115). In their defense of community, voluntary ghettos, in the same way as individualism, signify the failure of togetherness, which has tragic consequences for the creation of democracy, democratic individuals, spaces, contexts, and dialogue. As Ernesto Laclau warns, the assertion of pure difference can dangerously pave the way to self-apartheid (1996: 32). These arguments are of especial relevance to my analysis of the Holy Land in Melville's *Clarel* as a context that, despite being presented as a microcosm of the world, is also a land in which communities have sedimented as ghettos, leading to a reality of segregation, separatedness, disconnection, misunderstandings, and often violence. The analogy between communities and voluntary ghettos, on the one hand, and individualism, on the other, is also central to my interpretation of *Clarel* as an analysis of both personal (individualism) and collective (communitarianism) forms of egocentrisms that perpetuate one-sided thinking and prevent the development of

intersubjectivity and, consequently, of universalism. This intersubjective universalism, I argue, is articulated by the poem as a political project that may be democratizing to human relationships.

Despite its unquestionable importance to give visibility to traditionally marginalized social groups, and even though it has succeeded in giving expression to diversity in its combat against monocultural national identities that neutralized all possible forms of difference, multiculturalism's emphasis on pure particularisms is, as has been analyzed, not exempt of problems. As Zygmunt Bauman ironically remarks:

> The invocation of 'multiculturalism' when made by the learned classes […] means: *Sorry, we cannot bail you out from the mess you are in.* Yes, there is confusion about values, about the meaning of 'being human', about the right ways of living together; but it's up to you to sort it out in your own fashion and bear the consequences in the event that you are not happy with the results. Yes, there is a cacophony of voices and no tune is likely to be sung in unison, but do not worry: no tune is necessarily better than the next, and if it were there wouldn't at any rate be a way of knowing it – so feel free to sing (compose, if you can) your own tune (you won't add to the cacophony anyway; it is already deafening and one more tune won't change anything). (*Community* 125)

The great challenge with which we are faced is how to turn this cacophony into harmony; how to set up a political and ethical project that critically transcends the conservative multiculturalist agenda in order to propose more fluid forms of bonding and togetherness, which not only move beyond, but also rip down the rigid, isolating, constraining, and oppressive (both to 'insiders' and 'outsiders') walls that communitarianism often enforces. Such a project must necessarily, I believe, be universalist in its very heart in order to be democratic; it must incorporate a concern for social justice, and it must struggle to lay bare the social, political, and economic mechanisms that continue perpetuating social injustice behind agendas that apparently celebrate racial/ethnic difference and cultural plurality, yet which neither interrogate the oppressive foundations of the nation-state model nor disrupt the exploitive language of

capitalism and the market. As Etienne Balibar claims, this is not a movement "trying to win particular rights for a 'community'" but, rather, a movement which creates "a *solidarity* without creating a *community*. […] Rather, this struggle virtually transforms the community. It is therefore immediately universalistic, which allows us to imagine that it could transform the very notion of politics, including forms of authority and representation, which suddenly appear particularistic (not to speak of the forms of nationhood, including their typical connection with warfare)" (Balibar 68). But, while I claim that this political and ethical project needs to stem from a universalist conception of humanity and politics, at the same time, I believe that it must move away from traditional universalism, in an effort to generate an interpersonal and intercultural dialogue which allows for the negotiation of life in common, rises above (cultural, 'racial', ideological, religious, generational, etc.) separation, and gives expression to each of the –unique and inevitably mutually intertwined– parts involved in this, as Bauman names it, "search for common humanity" (*Community* 141). As I will argue, I locate the possibility of transcending inter-personal walls, and therefore the possibility of universalism, in intersubjectivity. This is the type of human togetherness that Herman Melville was capable of imagining already in the nineteenth century, placing his literary production at the service of the exploration of the (im)possibilities to think beyond traditional community boundaries such as nation, 'race', ethnicity, religion, sex, sexuality, ideology, or age. Melville creates in his works characters who remain blind or completely abort the possibilities of establishing interpersonal bonds with other characters and who, thus, neutralize the potentiality of developing the universalism the author points at, clinging instead to their egos, communities, and one-sided visions of the world, and reinforcing interpersonal walls that, in many cases, end up destroying the lives and the possibilities of happiness of other characters and even their own. At the

same time, it is precisely because he attributes to them such imperfect nature that Melville humanizes his characters, making them appear human and flawed. As I shall analyze in Chapter Two, *Clarel* constitutes, I believe, a representative example of Herman Melville's universalist literary project. One of the most populated of all of Melville's works (Arvin 1950: 276), *Clarel* investigates the possibility of intersubjective universalism as a way to develop plural thinking and democratize human relationships, at the same time that the poem portrays the incapacity of characters to transcend their monolithic mindsets and thinking parameters. *Clarel*, I will claim, constitutes a lament at how human beings boycott the possibility of intersubjectivity and, thus, neutralize the potentiality of universalism. The previous sections of this chapter have provided the theoretical basis to approach Melville's critique, in *Clarel*, of identity-based communities on the grounds of their perpetuating inter-human segregation and monolithic worldviews. Those sections have also highlighted as well Melville's distance from a univocal conception of universalism. The next sections of Chapter One shall provide the theoretical tools to defend and analyze the intersubjective universalism (cf. cosmopolitanism or internationalism) articulated in Melville's *Clarel* and in Melville's oeuvre as a whole.

7. Citizens of the World

"You are not an isolated entity, but a unique, irreplaceable part of the cosmos. Don't forget this. You are an essential piece in the puzzle of humanity."
(Epictetus [55-135AD], *The Art of Living* 42)

"In the course of my life I have seen Frenchmen, Italians, Russians… I know, too, thanks to Montesquieu, *that one can be a Persian*. But as for man, I declare that I have never met him in my life; if he exists, he is unknown to me."

Chapter One opened with Ernesto Laclau's equation of universalism with democracy in

the claim that "[…] the abandonment of universalism undermines the foundation of a

democratic society" (1996: 122). Laclau's words accurately express the democratic

potentiality of the intersubjective universalism this dissertation defends as constitutive

to Herman Melville's literary project. Melville's exploration of the challenges and

potentiality of universalism to the creation of democratic human relationships was

continuous throughout his life. Melville located universalism and the democratizing

potentiality that universalism opened up in the intersubjectivity between human beings

who are inevitably different from one another. His exploration was always torn between

the democratizing potentiality he located in intersubjectivity and the bleak realization

that most human beings neutralized the possibility of developing interpersonal

relationships. As I shall argue, Melville's conception of universalism was far from being

that of an immutable ideal: he conceived universalism as a reality (the real

interconnection of human beings across the planet) to which human beings –trapped

by their egocentric behaviors and communitarian forms of belonging– remained blind.

Melville's universalism is also, in my opinion, different from cosmopolitan and

internationalist projects. The aim of this section is to provide an analysis of

cosmopolitanism and internationalism as worldviews which defend global alliances, yet

which, at the same time, continue to uphold communitarian affiliations such as the

nation-state. My intention is to eventually juxtapose Melville's intersubjective

universalism to these agendas. The section starts with an introduction to Kant's theory

of international federation, which has been appropriated by cosmopolitans and

universalists alike in their respective global articulations. The second part of this section

(7.2) engages in a critical analysis of contemporary cosmopolitan and internationalist projects theorized by renowned scholars such as Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins. In the final part of this section I examine more universalist conceptions of humanity beyond nationalism, patriotism, and 'race', by thinkers such as Martha C. Nussbaum and Paul Gilroy, which I regard as closer to the intersubjective universalism I interpret in Melville's *Clarel*. The following section is, thus, of importance in this dissertation, as it distinguishes intersubjective universalism from other global projects such as cosmopolitanism and internationalism.

7.1. Kant's Dream of a Federated Humanity

In his essay "Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch" (1795), Immanuel Kant envisions the union of humankind into a worldwide community of federated states co-existing in a relationship of interconnectedness, mutual dependence, and reciprocal influence. Kant's vision has been appropriated by cosmopolitans, internationalists, and universalists alike, to the extent that each of these groups has in its own particular way integrated Kant's thought within its particular project of imagining human unity. Kant, however, was not the first to express such dream of togetherness. Already in the 3rd century BC, the Stoics[77] developed a conception of a world community which regarded human beings as ethically obliged toward one another, independently of location and in spite of their cultural, ideological, political or religious differences (in other words, of their local ties and forms of belonging) (Kleingeld 2012: 2). Pauline Kleingeld notes

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[77] The first known person to use the word 'cosmopolitanism', however, was the Cynic philosopher Diogenes of Sinope (412-323BC), even though he seemed to have wished to evoke a more 'transitional' or vagrant quality rather than a feeling of communion with the world. As Pauline Kleingeld explains: Diogenes "defends a personal attitude of extreme individualism and disregard for social conventions. Traveling with his knapsack, clothed in rags, he is the perfect image of the unencumbered, ultra-mobile individual: 'Without a city, without a home, without a country / A beggar and a vagabond, living from day to day" (2). Diogenes, I believe, may be said to illustrate Hugo of Saint Victor's image of a man who conceives the world as a foreign land.

how the notion of world citizenship developed by the Stoics was conceived in moral rather than in political terms, arguing that this is the philosophy from which, centuries later, Kant's dream of unity of humanity would stem. Kant gave a political dimension to the Stoics' cosmopolitan views. While Kant's global vision constitutes to this day one of the most important sources informing (re)imaginings of a world community and of international relations beyond the nation-state, Kant was not the only defender of cosmopolitanism in the eighteenth century; as a matter of fact, Pauline Kleingeld explains how the practical (im)possibility of cosmopolitanism became a central debate occupying the texts of other German philosophers such as Christoph Martin Wieland.[78] Kant's vision, as Pheng Cheah notes, was articulated prior to the consolidation of nationalisms in Europe and the emergence of the nation-state as the political and economic form of state management (1998: 23-24). Many thinkers have interpreted Kant's project of perpetual peace as universalist in scope: it aims to bind human beings collectively beyond geo-political and cultural boundaries, proclaiming that peace among the different nations of the earth is "both a demand of right and a final end of the human race, which must therefore be of interest to its morally disposed members" (Wood 1998: 61). Nonetheless, even though it seemingly proclaims human equality, Kant's philosophy falls into the paradox of expressing sexist, racist, and also antisemitist views, as it endorses the belief that women are naturally inferior to men and that there is a hierarchy of races.[79] In spite of defending a universalist vision of a world community, Kant rejects the idea of creating a single world-state encompassing all others, as he believes this as a form of despotism directly endangering the freedom and

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[78] See Kleingeld 2012: 3.

[79] Kant's ethnocentric racism is expressed in texts such as "Lectures on Anthropology" (1781-82), or "Lectures on Physical Geography", in which Kant claims that "Humanity is at its greatest perfection in the race of the whites" (9: 316; qtd. in Kleingeld 2012: 93). Even though the philosopher seems to have abandoned his racist views in the 1790s, Kant never stopped believing in the rational inferiority of women.

independence of each state. This seems to be in tune with the general current of the period, since, in face of the French Revolutionaries' appropriation of cosmopolitanism for the annexation of territories, several German philosophers, including Wieland and Bouterwek, turned away from any political use, or misuse, of cosmopolitanism, arguing that cosmopolitanism was an ideal that was not intended to remake the international sociopolitical panorama, even though it might well be political in that it should avoid moral and social injustices:

> Wieland distances himself from the French effort to "organize the entire human race into a single brotherly democracy" (BLV 15:575), stressing that cosmopolitanism is a theory advocating moral regard for all human beings, not a proposal for international institutions. Bouterwek rejects what he calls "*cosmopolitics*," by which he argues that cosmopolitanism should be restricted to a moral attitude and not be translated into an international political agenda. It is a "dream […]". (Kleingeld 38)

Different from these philosophers' conception of cosmopolitanism as a moral ideal or dream, Kant avowed for a cosmopolitical project of "federation" (Kant's term) amongst different nation-states in the form of a republic the ultimate goal of which would be to ensure permanent peace among the nations, and at the same time encourage the advancement toward an Enlightened world culture. It is, however, at least intriguing that, in his articulation of international peace, Kant contemplates the possibility of war to ensure peace between different states (i.e., falling into the paradox of defending a 'pacifist/pacifying war'), and even as a useful means to preserve the independence of each of the different states. Kant places the bonds of such federation of states in commerce, which set transnational alliances between states that, in order to satisfy commercial mutual interests, need to be based on non-violent interactions:

> The spirit of commerce, which is incompatible with war, sooner or later gains the upper hand in every state. As the power of money is perhaps the most dependable of

> all the powers (means) included under the state power, states see themselves forced, without any moral urge, to promote honorable peace and by mediation to prevent war wherever it threatens to break out. They do so exactly as if they stood in perpetual alliances, for great offensive alliances are in the nature of the case rare and even less often successful.
>
> In this manner nature guarantees perpetual peace by the mechanism of human passions. Certainly she does not do so with sufficient certainty for us to predict the future in any theoretical sense, but adequately from a practical point of view, making it our duty to work toward this end, which is not just a chimerical one. (Kant 1795)

Peace is, according to Kant, the common interest of all the states, and it is for this reason that states will be moved to promote it. Both Allen W. Wood and Pauline Kleingeld have noted that Kant does not specify the mechanisms that will be used in order to implement such federation or league of states, that is, how it will *work* (Wood 67; Kleingeld 67).[80] Wood roots Kant's conception of a 'world community' upon the belief in the natural capacity of development of humans as a species, based on Rousseau's notion of "perfectibility",[81] which is developed through human contact and interdependence (68). The unity envisioned by Kant, therefore, represents, as Wood claims, the "*historical* task" envisioned by the Enlightenment (71), since, in the same way as human beings, states would 'perfect' themselves and form a federation. Such a voluntary association of states defended in "Toward Perpetual Peace", however, is different from the more coercive international federation that he proposes in his earlier text "Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Perspective" (1784), in which he argues that it is actually "the hardship resulting from their rivalry and conflict

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[80] Kleingeld claims that a sketchy explanation is provided in *Metaphysics and Morals* (1797): "Here, Kant conceives of the league on the model of a 'congress of states,' where the ministers of courts and republics present their complaints and reports of hostilities in order to submit their conflicts to arbitration […]. This means that the league of states would create a permanent institutional structure for conflict mediation, opening up channels for communication and offering structures for neutral arbitration and negotiation that would otherwise not exist or would have to be arranged on an ad hoc basis" (68).

[81] As Rousseau exposes in his *Second Discourse* (1754), 'perfectibility' is the capacity that allows human beings to improve themselves by developing reasoning and acquiring knowledge, which turns them into fit members of society. For an extended argument on the philosophy of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, see Victor Gourevitch's edition of Rousseau's discourses and political writings (1997).

[of/between states] [that] forces them to give up their 'wild' or 'brute' freedom, for the sake of their own interest (IaG 8: 24). […] *states* will ultimately be forced, by the hardship resulting from the rivalry and wars between them, to exist the state of nature and enter a juridical condition" (Kleingeld 45-46).[82] Kant's project of/for an international federation both embodies and expresses the very contradictions of universal fusion, as well as the paradox that war or inter-national conflict may be the only means for its materialization. Yet, in "Toward Perpetual Peace" he offers a different view of how the federation of states should be accomplished, vindicating a republican union –in the form of a "loose league of peoples" (Kleingeld 48)– as the only compatible political form that simultaneously promotes union and respects individual freedom. Some detractors have noted the contractions in Kant's unifying project, most significantly the fact that, as Pauline Kleingeld explains, "If states were to join in a state of states they would have to relinquish their sovereignty and hence cease to exist *as* states in the proper sense of the term. Abolishing their statehood in the act of joining, the states would actually form only *one* state, and not a state *of states*" (59). Kleingeld also notes how Kant's league of states does not necessarily establish a practical difference if translated politically: "[…] Kant already acknowledged […] that the constant threat of hostilities would exist even with a league […]. Moreover, not having coercive power, the congress could not enforce its decisions" (68). Such federation, thus, becomes a United Nations-like institutional formation, which, even though it certainly cannot guarantee the 'perpetual peace' for which it was originally conceived, may have a role in political and economic development, trade regulations,

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[82] Kleingeld traces the evolution of Kant's views on federated humanity: "Kant's views on the nature of an international federation underwent fundamental changes during the Critical period. During the 1780s, Kant defended the ideal of a world-wide federation of states with the power to enforce its laws; in *Toward Perpetual Peace*, he inserts a voluntary non-coercive league between the international state of nature and the ideal international federation with coercive powers" (70).

and international cooperation, among others (Kleingeld 68). It is also important to note that Kant's cosmopolitan project was largely Eurocentric and that it was used to legitimize cultural superiority and imperialist expansion.

Kant's vision of federation has been appropriated by different philosophical traditions and thinkers, most notably, those within the line of cosmopolitanism, internationalism, and universalism. While none of these projects is in itself homogeneous or univocal, the next section of this chapter shall analyze the ways in which cosmopolitanism and internationalism have envisioned the project of imagining the unity of humanity.

7.2. Nationalist Citizens of the World: Cosmopolitans and Internationalists

> "The cosmopolitan does not go to Sarajevo."
> (Bruce Robbins, *Feeling Global. Internationalism in Distress*
> 1999: 18)

> "I am a citizen of the world."
> (Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* 1925:
> 6:63)

Influenced by Kant's vision of a federated world community, both cosmopolitanism and internationalism are rooted in a global conception of humanity that claims to be in tune with cultural pluralism. Kant himself referred to cosmopolitanism as a sense of belonging to two worlds: the 'cosmos' and the 'polis' (Beck 2002: 18). More recently, David Miller has defined cosmopolitanism as "the view that we are citizens of the world, members of a common humanity, and that we should pay no more regard to the claims of our co-nationals than to those of any other human beings regardless of where they happen to reside" (1995: 3). As I noted in the previous section, Kant, as a matter of fact, is not the father of cosmopolitanism, which finds its origins in the Cynic

philosopher Diogenes of Sinope, who, in being asked where he was from, answered "I am a citizen of the world" (1925: 6:63), enlarging the scope of his ties beyond any specific local affiliation or citizenship.[83] It was, however, through Kant that cosmopolitanism became influential in Western thought. Due to its connection with Kant, cosmopolitanism became associated with the Enlightenment, and therefore also with imperialism and Western ideology (De Kloet and Jurriëns 2007: 10). Peter Van der Veer summarizes this best when he claims that "Cosmopolitanism is the Western engagement with the rest of the world and that engagement is a colonial one, which simultaneously transcends the national boundaries and is tied to them" (2002: 10). Derived from the Greek words *kosmo* ('world') and *polites* ('citizen'–which, in turn derives from the term *polis* in its root), cosmopolitanism has for centuries been perceived as an attitude toward the world that was politically detached, a kind of 'view from above' that embraced the world's cultural diversity which, while philosophically articulating philanthropic feelings, was too abstract to develop into a political movement. Scott L. Malcomson has pointed to this 'political paralysis' of cosmopolitanism noting that, even though the main interest of cosmopolitanism is its concern for humanity without overlooking human beings' particularities (that is, without falling into an abstract category of the Human), cosmopolitanism is "more method than conclusion", eventually claiming that "What do they *do*?" is the most appropriate question to ask cosmopolitans (1998: 234).

Scholars such as Bruce Robbins have also recognized the lack of political activism of which cosmopolitanism has been traditionally accused, and have vindicated a cosmopolitanism that is able of global attachments, yet which does not renounce local

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[83] Pauline Kleingeld explains this episode in the introduction to her volume *Kant and Cosmopolitanism* (2012), also noting the classical philosophical tradition from which Kant's conception of cosmopolitanism developed.

ties and acknowledges the particular context from which it emerges (1998: 2-3).

Robbins defends a cosmopolitanism/internationalism that is not opposed to but, on

the contrary, preserves nationalism or national forms of belonging. He conceives both

cosmopolitanism and internationalism as interdependent movements, the former

constituting the ethical and/or cultural aspect and the latter the political transformative

side of such global type of "feeling" (borrowing Robbins's own term[84]) (1999: 17).[85] In

one of his defenses of internationalism and cosmopolitanism, Robbins recognizes that

cosmopolitanism is not "as politically ambitious as the word *internationalism*", but he

argues that, if cosmopolitanism is incapable of prompting a political program, it does

constitute an important step toward an internationalist political education, since it helps

to conceive the form in which internationalism might best develop (1998: 261). Other

scholars such as Kwame Anthony Appiah or Phengh Cheah have also provided

arguments in support of this view, arguing that love of country is not incompatible with

love of humanity. Cheah, for example, has noted how cosmopolitanism, as ultimately

articulated in Kant's project of perpetual peace, is prior to the emergence of the nation-

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[84] Robbins uses this phrase in the very title of his volume *Feeling Global. Internationalism in Distress* (1999), which argues that such global forms of feeling are not in opposition to nationalism but "continuous with forms of national belonging" (6).

[85] According to this, internationalism, as defined by Robbins, supplements the "aesthetic spectatorship" (Robbins 1999: 17) that characterizes cosmopolitanism with a political agenda that encompasses ethical, political, and cultural matters. In this respect, it is relevant to remark that the cosmopolitan attitude of 'standing above' cultures and peoples is not only a fallacy, but also the manifestation of the privilege (frequently Western privilege) that informs the cosmopolitan gaze, which often determines its capacity to 'think global'. In this respect, anthropologist James Clifford has noted how "The privilege of standing above cultural particularism, of aspiring to the universalist power that speaks for humanity […] is a privilege invented by a totalizing Western liberalism" (1988: 263). Thanks to scholars within the field of postcolonial studies such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Homi Bhabha, Edward Said, and others, such Eurocentric gaze has been questioned, enabling the incorporation into the debates on cosmopolitanism of voices that the Western subject of the Enlightenment neutralized under its totalitarian and imperialist universalist worldview. The question that remains unanswered is to what extent cosmopolitanism can generate a political agenda that does not become an internationalist attempt to develop UN-like supranational institutions which continue to be very much influenced, and limited, by national interests, nationalist power-hierarchies, and inter-national power-struggles. As I vindicated in my critique of multiculturalism, claims for social justice and class equality need to be incorporated to any global political project, and these are claims that often move beyond the parochial communitarianism of nationalism, which, I believe, constrains and actually blocks the democratic potentiality of any cosmopolitan or internationalist agenda that aims to be both globally political and ethical.

state, and cannot, therefore, be opposed to national belonging but to statism, in that it

presents a world community "that falls somewhere between the political community of

the state in its lawful relations with other states […] and a world-state" (1999: 22). This

world-state or world-community, according to Cheah, would "[…] make rightful claims

on its constituent states with respect to their treatment of individuals and other states in

the name of humanity—even though it does not possess the coercive means of

enforcement available to a world-state" (22-23). While transcending the nation-state as

the ultimate form of belonging, cosmopolitanism, Cheah claims, is not in any ways

opposed to the nation: it is *cosmopolitical* because, in pointing to the *kosmos*, it also

embraces the *polis*, while engaging in a political global force that does not reject other

more local forms of belonging (32). Similarly, Kwame Anthony Appiah has claimed

that it is possible to be a "cosmopolitan patriot", that is, a person who loves humanity

as much as s/he loves his/her country.[86] While this national(ist) inclination provides

cosmopolitanism and internationalism with a way to reconcile the tension between the

local and the global, it eventually reinforces nationalism and the nation-state model.[87]

Martin Heidegger best exposes this paradox when he claims that "Nationalism is not

overcome through mere internationalism; it is rather expanded and elevated thereby

into a system" (1993: 244). Neither cosmopolitanism nor internationalism, therefore,

move away from, or challenge, the nation-state world model: it is not in their agendas

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[86] Appiah uses this term in his chapter "Cosmopolitan Patriots" (1998), defining it thus: "the cosmopolitan patriot can entertain the possibility of a world in which *everyone* is a rooted cosmopolitan, attached to a home of his or her own, with its own cultural particularities, but taking pleasure from the presence of other, different, places that are home to other, different people" (91).

[87] As Etienne Balibar has noted, nationalism demands the sacrifice of individuality to become a national subject that embraces normality to be representable within the nation. National subjects, therefore, develop a subjectivity that "is compatible with normality. […] For normality is not the simple fact of adopting customs and obeying rules or laws; it means internalizing representations of the 'human type' or the 'human subject' […] in order to be recognized as a person in its full right, to become *presentable* (fit to be seen) in order to be represented. To become *responsible* (fit to be answered) in order to be respected. […] whoever is not ['normal'] has to be segregated or repressed or excluded, or to hide himself, or to play a double game one way or another" (1995: 63).

to look for sociopolitical alternatives to transcend the view of a world divided into separate nation-states, the boundaries of which are not 'natural' but have been delimited through territorial expansion and war; their aim is to accommodate such 'global feeling' within the existing world-order. In this respect, despite their global aspirations, and in the same way as multiculturalism, both cosmopolitanism and internationalism endorse a communitarian view of the earth and humanity that allows little space for critical and political contact among human beings. As with multiculturalism, boundaries of nation, 'race', ethnicity, class, even culture remain too high to trespass despite the cosmopolitan professed love of humankind. In his vindication to use "[…] the machinery of the nation-state to try to control the predatoriness of global capital", a tactics which –he says– is both nationalist and internationalist, Robbins does in fact reinforce nationalism and the power of the nation-state in his internationalist project. While he struggles to find a middle ground between the national and the international that may allow for a political form of global activism that does not neglect the local, Robbins's defense of internationalism, I believe, leaves space to little more than supranational UN-like type institutions, internationalist in scope but deeply grounded and highly protective of national interests. I need not explain the failure of these institutions (themselves supporting certain state powers over others) to control the abusive power of individual nation-states on a global level, especially in times of conflict (as I write this, UN secretary Ban Ki Mon, again, unfruitfully tries to 'persuade' Syrian President Bashar al-Assad that he should abandon the massive, institutionalized killing of his country's population). The effectiveness of such supranational institutions to grant international human rights is questionable, precisely because it clashes with the nationalisms they assert and embrace as constitutive. Cosmopolitanism and internationalism, it seems to me, need to be rethought postnationally (if 'nationally' at all), and from a universalist

perspective. Quoting Cortázar again: "nothing can be denounced if the denouncing is done within the system that belongs to the thing denounced" (446). It is for this reason that I conceive universalism, and not cosmopolitanism or internationalism, as the project that best corresponds to Herman Melville's capacity to conceive the interconnectedness of human beings whose "ancestry is lost in the universal paternity" (Melville, *Redburn* 1849: 185), beyond divisive national borders and patriotic discourses. It is, I believe, interesting that Melville himself would complain about the "great grievance" of passports –connecting the traveler's coming face to face with national borders with the "thousand times worse extorsions" suffered by immigrants– in his 1858 lecture "Traveling", written after his trip to the Holy Land, which constituted one of the foundations for the 1876 *Clarel*:

> A great grievance from first to last is the passport. You soon learn by official demands, what becomes to you an adage,—Open passport, open purse; and its endless crosses at the close of your travels remind you of the crosses it has cost you all the way through. The persecutions and extortions of guides, not only the rough and robber-like, but those who combine the most finished politeness with the most delicate knavery, are another serious drawback on your pleasure, though when we think of the thousand times worse extorsions practised on the immigrants here, we acknowledge Europe does not hold all the rogues. There is one infallible method of escape from this annoyance: full pockets. Pay the rascals, laugh at them, and escape. Honest and humane men are also to be found, but not in an overwhelming majority. (422)

It is true that Robbins, Cheah, and other defenders of cosmopolitanism acknowledge the necessity of nourishing cosmopolitanism and internationalism with a postnational turn.[88] However, their arguments remain "loose" (Robbins 1999: 63).[89] Jonathan Rée also notes the need of a postnational turn in cosmopolitanism, but he

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[88] Cheah summarizes some of the main features of the postnational in his introduction to *Cosmopolitics. Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation* (1998).

[89] Robbins's asserts the need to take cosmopolitanism and internationalism away from their historical connection with Kant, since he claims that this association has turned them into "loose" concepts (1999: 63).

acknowledges the question of whether this turn is at all possible: that is, if cosmopolitanism can at all be rethought outside and beyond the nation and the parameters of national belonging:

> […] perhaps we may look forward to a future in which people could interpret themselves without any reference to the idea that their nation is their self, in fact without any essential reference to nationality at all. We can perhaps imagine a world where local peculiarities are no longer subsumed under national types; a postnational and postinternational world, which would no longer make a fetish of political form; a new cosmopolitan world, which could put the illusions of internationality behind it, for good. (1998: 88)

Rée's imaginative exercise actually remains abstract as well, but it is interesting that, in the postnational world Rée imagines, cosmopolitanism has left internationalism behind and moved closer to universalism. Robbins, on the other hand, does not dissociate cosmopolitanism from internationalism, yet his articulation of the political potentiality of cosmopolitanism and internationalism remains vague, and even endorses a surprising conservatism that defends pluralism in what I interpret as a multiculturalist-like agenda:

> In the midst of the short-term politico-educational crisis in which we now find ourselves, it [cosmopolitanism] can designate a teaching of culture capable of mobilizing the energy and enthusiasm of a broad front of people who are not all or even predominantly leftists, whatever the right may think. As a practice of comparison, a range of tolerances and secularisms, an international competence or mode of citizenship that is the monopoly of no one class or civilization, it answers the charges of 'particularism' and 'loss of standards.' As a positive ideal of interconnected knowledge and pedagogy, it elevates rather than lowers existing educational standards. It presents multiculturalism as both a common program and a critical program. (1998: 261)

The impossibility to imagine a world politically organized in ways other than the nation-state, to think of other forms of belonging beyond nationality, may after all indicate the overpowering success of nationalism in preventing us from escaping the system of thought and the power parameters in which it finds legitimacy. In *After the Nation-State.*

Citizens, Tribalism and the New World Disorder (1994), Horsman and Marshall, for example, note how proceedings toward an international community are in our days tainted by a stronger competition for power among the very same nations that are so internationally united, as well as by the incapacity to generate a system of values and ideas that would legitimize such international community (1994: 166), and –I add– to turn this global community into a context for democratic negotiation and collaborative instrumentalization of the expansion of human rights, above economic interests and (national) individualisms. While I agree with Bruce Robbins in his critique that Kantian universalism is both abstract and dangerously absolutizing, I also believe that it is in rethinking universalism as a democratic project, and not in cosmopolitanism or internationalism, that the possibility of conceiving democratic ways of relating and of thinking human connectedness beyond the nation-state needs to be invested. This is, I claim, the project undertaken by Melville's *Clarel*. Pheng Cheah poignantly asks about the political potential of, what he calls, this "popular global consciousness": "[…] even if a popular global consciousness exists, is it or can it be sufficiently institutionalized to be a feasible political alternative to the nation-state form? Or is it merely a cultural consciousness without political effectivity?" (1998: 36). Noting the difficulties to provide a political alternative to nationalism, Cheah sees cosmopolitanism as "the obvious choice" because it is, he claims, "an intellectual ethic or political project that can better express or embody genuine universalism" (21). It seems at least strange that it is through cosmopolitanism that universalism should find expression or 'embodiment'. While I am aware of the complexities of Cheah's question, it is hard for me to conceive a potentially political(ly transformative) force in cosmopolitanism, even though I do believe that the cosmopolitan awareness or global feeling defended by Cheah and Robbins (among others) is not necessarily different but an actually

constitutive energy within a plural universalism as well. I also believe that any form of cosmopolitanism that claims to be democratic needs to incorporate concerns of class, gender, and sexuality which are often obliterated under the focus on 'race', ethnicity and culture. This obliteration has even lead to the paradox of homophobic attitudes among the very cosmopolitans who profess love for humanity yet who conceive homosexual love as 'morally wrong', thus falling, in my view, into a hypocritical 'global' allegiance that clashes with the very principles they profess. I do not remain blind either to the challenge of rethinking traditional universalism and articulating such plural universalism. More difficult is, as Cheah notes, to turn it into an "institutionalized" force that can become an alternative to the nation-state without losing its democratic potentiality in the process. My articulation of universalism places its creation or destruction at the social level, upon the (non-)development of intersubjectivity. It is, thus, at the interpersonal level that I locate the political and the ethical,[90] since no relationships, negotiations or processes between two or more individuals are free of politics or of moral obligations. Intersubjectivity, therefore, the 'space' in which the particular and the global come together on an individual level, carries the democratizing, transformative, potentiality of a plural universalism. It is, thus, in the development of this interpersonal bond that, I contend, is located the potentiality for the problematization and undoing of the oppressive mechanisms that permeates relationships between individuals both on an interpersonal and societal level, and for the dialogic creation of meaning beyond individual and community walls.

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[90] See the concept in "Sexual Politics".

7.3. Beyond Patriotism and Nationalism, Against Race. Martha C. Nussbaum's and Paul Gilroy's Critical Cosmopolitanisms

> "'I am willing,' he said, 'to serve my country; but my worship I reserve for Right which is far greater than my country. To worship my country as a god is to bring a curse upon it.'"
>
> (Rabindranath Tagore, *The Home and the World* 1916: 29)

> "Becoming a citizen of the world is often a lonely business. It is, as Diogenes said, a kind of exile—from the comfort of local truths, from the warm, nestling feeling of patriotism, from the absorbing drama of pride in oneself and one's own."
>
> (Martha C. Nussbaum, "Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism" 1996: 15)

If cosmopolitanism is a conception that claims alliance to the human community and the equal respect among all members of that community, it is also a perspective that poses both theoretical and practical issues that are extremely difficult to tackle. Some of these difficulties emerge, as has been analyzed, with the cosmopolitan defense of patriotism and other communitarian forms of belonging based on identitarian affiliations, frequently clashing with the very alliance to humanity that cosmopolitanism takes as its basic principle. The alternative, nonetheless, is not to substitute a patriotic and nationalist cosmopolitanism in favor of a universalism that absorbs specific or 'local' forms of belonging and bonding (e.g., nation, religion, 'race', ethnicity, language, traditions, sexuality, etc.) under a universalized particular. As earlier sections of this chapter emphasized, traditional universalism enforced an ideal of the universal as white, Western, male, Christian, heterosexual, and Enlightened.[91] It is certainly not a return to it that I intend to vindicate in these pages, since such a return would signify the universal enforcement of a cultural supremacist and ethnocentric view. Judith Butler

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[91] See Section 2 in this chapter.

poignantly criticizes such universal when she asks "What kind of cultural imposition is it to claim that a Kantian may be found in every culture?" (1996: 52). My articulation of intersubjective universalism in the following section moves away from cosmopolitanism and internationalism, and from any monolithic conception of 'the universal'. To this defense of intersubjective universalism are relevant the arguments against patriotism and nationalism, on the other hand, and against 'race', on the other, proposed by theorists such as Martha C. Nussbaum and Paul Gilroy, respectively. Even though both thinkers place themselves within the line of thought of cosmopolitanism, they propose a critical rethinking of cosmopolitanism which is informing to my own analysis of intersubjective universalism as a democratizing political project in Melville's *Clarel*, based on the premise that the interpersonal is political.

Martha C. Nussbaum's essay "Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism", first published in the October/November 1994 issue of the *Boston Review*, has stimulated a great deal of controversy due to her claim that patriotism overshadows –if not entirely suppresses– the possibility that human beings feel an allegiance with humanity, beyond any nationalist feeling or state boundaries. Nussbaum's essay has been strongly criticized[92] by scholars, among whom, some of the cosmopolitan and multiculturalist intellectuals mentioned in earlier sections of the present chapter: Kwame Anthony Appiah, Bruce Robbins, Amy Gutmann, Charles Taylor, among others, as well as, though in a different direction, as I shall explain, by Judith Butler. In her essay,[93] Nussbaum criticizes patriotism as a system that undermines the possibilities of generating a global sense of

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[92] A sample of this criticism is compiled in the volume *For Love of Country* (eds. Nussbaum and Cohen, 1996), which includes the essays by Appiah, Gutmann, Taylor, and Butler that I refer to here. Robbin's critique of Nussbaum is contained in his volume *Feeling Global. Internationalism in Distress* (1999), as well as in his introduction to *Cosmopolitics. Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation* (1998). Appiah's chapter in this latter volume is a revised version of his chapter in *For Love of Country* and is also relevant in this respect.

[93] All references to Nussbaum's essay are made to the volume *For Love of Country* (1996), which reprints her original 1994 essay.

belonging and bonding between human beings across the earth, based on their common humanity and sharing of the world, and which transcends the particular location in which these human beings experience their existence and through which they have access to the world and humanity. Nussbaum's argument is that, while patriotism promotes unity among citizens *within* the nation-state, it also prevents citizens from realizing the bonds of mutual responsibility and obligation *without* the nation-state, which all human beings have in relation to one another. Nussbaum prioritizes, thus, interhuman bonds independently of nationality, before national bonds, claiming that "We should regard our deliberations as, first and foremost, deliberations about human problems of people in particular concrete situations, not problems growing out of a national identity that is altogether unlike others" (1996: 7). National identity, according to Nussbaum, is just one component of every individual's sense of self, and it should not therefore be taken as the only determining one, even less when it poses borders and is thus used to separate humans beings around the globe. This argument has been intensely criticized by scholars whose cosmopolitan or internationalist arguments verse upon the defense of patriotism –Appiah and Robbins, for example–, and who claim that the Kantian vision that thinkers such as Nussbaum propose is incompatible with pluralism and, therefore, falls into the impossibility to accommodate diversity within their cosmopolitan vision of humanity. It seems evident from these critiques that Nussbaum's claims may appear to cosmopolitans and internationalists as 'too universalist'. However, her attempts to reconcile local and global affiliation does not deny the nation(al) or other forms of communitarian belonging despite the fact that she vindicates that these forms should not confine our thinking and distract us from our more global bonds.

Nussbaum's arguments –rightly, in my opinion– warn against political projects (multiculturalism is certainly one of these projects) based on ethnic, racial, or cultural difference, which ultimately reinforce national identity, and the ultimate concern of which is where to situate and how to redraw the boundaries of the nation or nationality (i.e., to 'stretch' the rigid definition of nationality in order to include all 'national subjects', however different they are to who/what has been constructed as the 'national [hetero]norm'). Such nationalist and patriotic projects, Nussbaum claims, defeat the very principle of cosmopolitanism to which they claim to adhere, since they fail to connect specific countries and their citizens transnationally and even run the risk of becoming ethnocentric projects (4-5).[94] Criticizing defenders of patriotism, Nussbaum poses the following questions:

> Why should we think of people from China as our fellows the minute they dwell in a certain place, namely the United States, but not when they dwell in a certain other place, namely China? What is it about the national boundary that magically converts people toward whom we are both incurious and indifferent into people to whom we have duties of mutual respect? (14)

The movement Nussbaum proposes implies leaving nationalism aside yet without rejecting one's country as a form of belonging, in order to conceive ourselves as exemplars of humanity in specific situations determined by family, class, nationality, sexuality, religious belief, ethnicity, ideology, gender, etc. To this end, Nussbaum claims, it is not sufficient that we learn that we should respect other people and that we all have the same inalienable human rights; we need to incorporate other human beings as "part of our community of dialogue and concern" (9). This does not imply, according to

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[94] It is important to note, however, that not all forms of nationalism are ethnocentric: e.g., Herman Melville's full contemporary poet and fellow-citizen Walt Whitman's conception of U.S. nationality, as he would proclaim in *Leaves of Grass*, in the nineteenth century, or, more recently, Indian nationalism (as Hindu as it is Muslim or Sikh), Paraguayan nationalism (latino, German, Guarani), Chilean nationalism (both white and Mapuche), etc.

Nussbaum, that we have to renounce the more local forms of belonging (family, ethnicity, nationality, social class, sexuality, religious belief, etc.) which inform and construct our subjectivities, but that we "should not confine our thinking" (13) to those local attachments, but on the contrary be able to engage in the difficult exercise of examining a given matter from as many different perspectives as possible, and looking at ourselves with the eyes of others (10-11). Such exercise, Nussbaum believes, may have a larger transformative, democratizing, impact in political and economic terms. This is why the philosopher sees in education an essential tool to, in her own words, "educate children to cross those boundaries in their minds and imaginations" (15). Largely restricted by the national boundaries it aims to overcome, Nussbaum's project defends a universalism that continues to be based on nations and countries and, therefore, looks suspiciously similar to other cosmopolitan outlooks. Her efforts not to reduce international relationships exclusively to relationships between nations, however, makes her agenda more inclusive than that of internationalism or cosmopolitanism, as it allows for the consideration of those peoples and spaces not only 'inter-' or 'in-between' nations, but even outside national spaces at all.[95]

In a similar line of thought as Nussbaum's critique of nationalism and patriotism, Paul Gilroy has vindicated in his volume *Against Race* (2000) the need to move away from the divisive concept of 'race' in order to embrace a planetary or universal type of humanism. Noting the importance of postmodernism to re-thinking identity and subjectivity, Gilroy underlines the constructedness of identity, by marking how identity is made to become "a thing to be possessed and displayed" (2000: 103) which categorizes and, therefore, separates human beings into different identity groups. This classification of human beings within different and separate particularisms, he

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[95] Nussbaum's project, however, does not explicitly mention refugees or stateless peoples.

claims, limits "the possibility of communication across the gulf between one heavily defended island of particularity and its equally well fortified neighbors, between one national encampment and others" (103). It is thus particularly on the construction of 'race' and racial difference as hierarchical, exclusive, and excluding categories that Gilroy centers his attention. He radically vindicates the renunciation of the category 'race', and claims such an abandonment as a both politically and ethically liberating strategy that may disrupt the inherent essentialism of "race-thinking" (14) and embrace a more global, planetary, conception of a common humanity. Gilroy notes the homogenizing and assimilationist impulse in the fabrication of the 'nation' and nationality, the creation of a political body in the nation-state that integrates "the people as one" (Claude Lefort, qtd. in Gilroy 62) and that sacrifices the individual in order to reinforce the collective.[96] Gilroy also sees this same homogenizing impulse in racial counter-nationalist movements. Noting how nationalism reinforces "hypersimilarity" and homogeneity, he underlines that, although nationalism may invite a celebration of absolute difference that does not suppose a challenge, that celebration may be used in the interests of the existing power-structures of the nation-state (104). This melts the agency of the individual within the collective, and sustains the oppressive mechanisms of the nation-state while allowing for the nation's apparent recognition and celebration of plurality "in a parody of pluralism which perversely endorses segregation" (253). As a consequence, shared identities become platforms for "absolute and eternal division" (101), which is not only enforced between insiders and outsiders to each of these identity groups, but also within each of these communities, since social class, patriarchy, heterosexuality, etc. continue oppressing individuals inside each of these groups, which

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[96] Melville's thorough analysis of the sacrifice of the (innocent) individual to the militarized and disciplining forces of the nation-state is perhaps best voiced in the novella *Billy Budd, Sailor*, the last text Melville wrote and which, left unfinished at his desk in the moment of his death, was published posthumously in 1924.

often end up constituting hierarchically organized societies. Gilroy's agenda is to vindicate a conception of planetary humanism that stems from the cosmopolitan dream of the unity of humankind[97] which, he claims, has been eliminated from the black political imaginary traditionally articulated on the category 'race' as a differential identity (356). This exercise, he claims, is different from the political articulation of racial activism that has been carried out until the present, and which constituted counternationalist movements aiming to fight against national(ist) racism. Gilroy's project does not avow the forgetting of past suffering, struggles and history; what he emphasizes are the possibilities that thinking beyond 'race' may open up for African Americans' collective consciousness, if they join in the exercise of imagining their identity not merely as a racial group or as pure particularism, but as human beings, with a particular history, connected to a larger conception of humanity on a planetary level, which may have liberating effects to the imaginings of an identity that is not constrained by 'race' or ethnicity. Gilroy succeeds in presenting us with a frank critique of raciology and race-thinking in *Against Race*, and provides us with an invitation to transcend 'race' in order to think of ourselves as human beings connected on a planetary level, thus supporting the cosmopolitan dream for the unity of humanity. However, Gilroy's articulation of planetary humanism remains to a certain extent abstract in terms of the political and ethical potentiality that such universal vision of humanity may potentially have.

Both Nussbaum's and Gilroy's arguments against nationalism, patriotism, and raciology or 'race' problematize essentialist views on morality and universality and move away from the parameters which constrain human thinking and prevent the development of more global consciousnesses and interhuman bonds beyond

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[97] Gilroy, however, emphasizes the racism in Kant's cosmopolitan vision for the unity of mankind which, he criticizes, could not include black people (see Gilroy 58-59).

community-based borders. Nussbaum and Gilroy's concern for transcending local attachments in order to enter into dialogic relationships with others, beyond identity borders of any type, constitutes an important foundation to the intersubjective universalism through which I interpret Herman Melville's *Clarel*. Although I remain aware that the actual political abandonment of such national communities (and, consequently, of the nation-state boundaries and stateless realities they create) might not be possible in the present world-order, my belief is that it may be possible that these boundaries are transcended on an interpersonal and social level, which makes me move away from both cosmopolitanist and internationalist upholdings of patriotism and nationalism, and in the direction of a plural (poststructuralist-like) universalism that, in turn, rejects traditional universalism. As Etienne Balibar claims:

> […] a moment has also come when *utopian* figures of universality have become obsolete by their very nature. By utopian figures I mean any intellectual plan of establishing universality by connecting humankind with itself, creating a "cosmopolis"—which was always imagined at the same time as an implementation of some moral values, precisely "universalistic" values. This impossibility did not arise because it proved impossible to connect the world as a single space, but exactly for the opposite reason; because this connection of humankind with itself was already achieved, because it was *behind us*. […] [This] marks the end of "cosmopolitic" utopias. Because it involves acknowledging that real universality, or globalization, already achieves the goal which was conceived as "the unification of mankind," albeit certainly not implementing most of the moral (or "humanistic") values which utopias believed should be either a pre-condition or an immediate consequence of this unification. (Balibar 1995: 50)

Balibar remarks that universalism has translated from a utopian dream for the unity of humanity to the actual reality of the world, brought about by the phenomenon of globalization (56). This globalization, Jacques Derrida observes, is not a new phenomenon:

> Everything I have said up to now was referring to what you called "globalization", what we call in French "mondialisation". That's the only thing I've said; but why didn't I use the name "globalization"? Because today it's a confused concept and it's the screen for a number of non-concepts and sometimes of political tricks and political strategies. Of course something like globalisation is happening – not only today of course, it started a long time ago – but today there is an acceleration of this mondialisation. (1997)

Globalization has contributed to make more evident the interconnection of human beings and nation-states, yet it has also become characterized by an imperialist incorporation of different 'peripheries' to a particular 'center', with the consequent subjection of societies for the acquisition of both natural and human resources, as well as for the 'civilization' of so-called 'primitive' peoples through the exportation of language, religion, institutions, etc. (Balibar 52). Rather than increasing interhuman or inter-national responsibility, globalization has promoted some nations' uses of others' resources, thus contributing to economic inequality and exploitation, yet without eliminating inter-national borders or allowing the free circulation of people. From a more culturally-oriented level, on the other hand, Laura L. Adams has regarded globalization as a positive movement generating a cultural dynamics that enables the mutual influence of different cultural forms:

> globalization scholars who take a more culturalist approach have argued that what we see empirically is that as culture globalizes, it both homogenizes on the dimension of form and diversifies on the dimension of content (Appadurai 1990; Hannerz 1997). This, as Appadurai argues, means that globalization allows everyday life to embrace a plurality of imagined communities, "a space of contestation in which individuals and groups seek to annex the global into their own practices of the modern" (1996: 4). Global forms transform content so that local culture is not just reproduced but infused with new, locally determined meanings that diversify the meaning available in comparison to "traditional" culture. [...] "a taking out of one context and putting in another ... consequently implies that cultural elements are invested with new

signification but also that those who appropriate are being transformed" ([Schneider] 2003: 224). (Adams 2008: 616)[98]

Even if I agree with Adams that the positive side of globalization is that it makes it possible for us to connect our local experience of reality to other communities we may "imagine" from a broader perspective, the sociopolitical and economic consequences of globalization prevents me from championing it as a positive movement that is bringing human beings around the world together. Frequently, this 'positive' exercise of establishing connections between the local and the global, which takes place under the prism of globalization, is based on stereotyped conceptions of the other and homogenizing perceptions of 'culture', even as a commodified reality. It is due to these reasons that, I believe, this exercise of intercultural relatedness cannot be considered an intercultural dialogue or an intercultural act of translation, as, most of the times, it does not even imply a direct interaction with the other. As a matter of fact, at present, globalization has not translated in deeper communication among human beings but in further exclusions, conflicts, segregation, "mixophobia" (to borrow Zygmunt Bauman's term), and, as Balibar notes, distorted images of the other "either as 'kins' or as 'aliens'" (1995: 56). From an economic perspective, globalization has widened economic inequalities and enforced unequal distribution of wealth through economic practices that assert and maintain the economic superiority of certain countries (and certain classes of citizens) over others. At the same time that regional and supranational institutions (e.g., NATO, European Union, Mercosur, UN…)[99] have been established, these institutions have been inefficient in finding a solution to economic inequalities and the growing numbers of displaced people and refugees around the world –human

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[98] All the works Adams refers to, or cites from, in this fragment (Appadurai 1990, Appadurai 1996, Hannerz 1997, and Schneider 2003) are included in the bibliography section to my dissertation.

[99] It is important to remember at this point that economic models such as the EU or the Mercosur are regional economic unities which continue to be based on the nation-state model.

realities resulting from nationalisms and violence justified upon patriotic premises–,[100] perhaps because, while endorsing an inter(-)nationalist agenda that aims to promote dialogue between nations, such supranational institutions are unable to act in relation to those that are nowhere at all in terms of national identity, because their internationalism is still too constrained by nationalist parameters.[101] Economic interests, serving the same social classes in the same countries, are, of course, behind these supranational institutions as well, and even behind the type of inter-national communication that globalization makes possible. In face of the effectiveness of capitalism in permeating international, even interpersonal, relationships across the planet, the question seems to be "How do we think about an alternative to capital in such a context [the context of the globalization of capital]?" (Chakrabarty 2000: 654). If, as Dipesh Chakrabarty wonders, it is impossible to think of the "beyond capital", that is, economic systems such as socialism or communism, as completely opposed to capitalism nowadays, "Does it even make sense to think of such a 'beyond' when everything in the world seems to be coming more and more under the sway of capital itself?" (654). Zygmunt Bauman claims that "Human solidarity is the first casualty of the triumphs of the consumer market" (2003: 76). In his 1876 poem *Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land*, Melville, in my opinion, already anticipated a lament for the impracticality of human solidarity and togetherness. Reflecting on the Holy Land as a land of inter-

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[100] Hannah Arendt analyzed the conditions of statelessness suffered by refugees in works such as *The Human Condition* (1958), among others. Etienne Balibar has also underlined the fact that minorities (and refugees) are products of nationalism and of the creation of the nation-state with delimited borders, claiming that globalization has increased the number of minorities, at the same time that it has made it more difficult for many individuals to be classified according to the identity-based parameters established by the nation (1995: 70). Moreover, Balibar notes, globalization has blurred the very distinction between what is considered to be a 'majority' and a 'minority', since, not only are certain individuals unable to 'fit' in these categories, but, from a global perspective, certain national, linguistic, religious, etc. 'majorities' may even appear small (55-56). However, whether such minorities/majorities are smaller or bigger is not so much of a problem, as long as they are given due recognition.

[101] An effort to do so in the past was the creation of the state of Israel in 1948 for the refugees, which gave a 'home' to many Jews yet generated new refugees and displaced in the process.

communitarian animosities and human segregation which, as Chapter Two analyzes,[102] bears close resonances of postbellum United States as a land of segregation and divisions, at the same time that it evokes a universal degradation of democratic values and human togetherness, Melville critically exposes in *Clarel* how consumption, materialism, and even corruption, impulsed by rampant capitalism, were rapidly consolidating in the U.S. in the 1870s, the time Melville was living in New York City, working at the Customs House, and writing *Clarel*. This historical, sociopolitical and economic reality certainly informed, I claim, Melville's analysis of the potentialities of universalism in *Clarel*, and, at the same time, his painful awareness that universalism may never find a social expression because human beings are both blind and unwilling to embark in such a demanding project.

8. The Politics of Intersubjective Universalism

> "And you know why I can love English? It is because I love my mother tongue equally."
>
> (Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Nationalism and the Imagination* 2010: 76)

> "The ultimate measure of [nationalism's] success is the difficulty that people have everywhere in envisaging an alternative political form to that of the nation-state."
>
> (James Mayall, *Nationalism and International Society* 1990: 25)

> "[…] this is why there is no universal 'we': on the one hand, 'we' is said each time of some configuration, group, or network, however small or large; on the other hand, 'we' say 'we' for 'everyone,' for the coexistence of the entire universe of things, animals, and people that is mute and without 'us.'"
>
> (Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural* 1996: 76)

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[102] See Section 3.5 in Chapter Two.

> "[…] some kind of universalism is politically necessary to advance a politics of social movements beyond the recognition of pure difference […]. Just what this universalism is supposed to look like is the burning question."
>
> (Eric Lott, "After Identity, Politics: The Return of Universalism" 2000: 668)

In *Nationalism and the Imagination* (2010), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak argues for the need to 'think without nation', to de-transcendentalize nationalism through an exercise in equivalence which, in her own words, "rid[s] the mind of the narrowness of believing in one thing and not in other things" (72). Grounding this concept on the notion of comparativism, Spivak conceives 'equivalence' as the exercise of being aware that all human beings in all parts of the world feel as connected as each of us is to their own "corner of the world" –their languages, lands, families, (non-)religious beliefs, cultural affiliations, sexual identities, etc.–, and that, therefore, each of these smaller or larger personal 'spaces' deserves to be equally respected, preserved, nourished. Spivak's definition of equivalence is much more captivating than any that I may provide in my own words:

> Here is equivalence. It is not equalization, it is not a removal of difference, it is not cutting the unfamiliar down to the familiar. It is perhaps learning to acknowledge that other things can occupy the unique place of the example of my first language. This is hard. It's not an easy intuition to develop, yet this need not take away the comfort in one's food, one's language, one's corner of the world. Although even this the nomad can give up. Remember Edward Said quoting Hugo of St Victor: 'The man who finds his homeland sweet is still a tender beginner; he to whom every soil is as his native one is already strong; but he is perfect to whom the entire world is a foreign land.' […] What a comparativism based on equivalence attempts to undermine is the possessiveness, the exclusiveness, the isolationist expansionism of mere nationalism. (31-32)

Spivak locates this comparativist movement in the infant impulse to negotiate the private and the public through the acquisition of the mother tongue, which inscribes

the child in the past, present, and future (public) history of that language, at the same time that s/he appropriates, interiorizes, and invents the language, making it private and unique. Even though Spivak specifically refers to the multilingual reality of India in order to explain her views on equivalence, I believe that the comparative move is not limited to the linguistic domain but filled with a wider dimension that can be translated into ways of relating –inter-personally, inter-nationally, inter-culturally– which may develop into more democratic relationships, not only by moving away from self-enclosing nationalism toward "the complex textuality of the international", as Spivak claims (21), but also by de-transcendentalizing nationalism in itself, which is the project Spivak vindicates in *Nationalism and the Imagination*.

The challenge of transcending or 'de-transcendentalizing' nationalism is great indeed; as James Mayall has noted, nationalism has proved successful as a system which thwarts people from imagining an alternative to the nation-state (1990: 25). So has, in a similar way, 'race', as Paul Gilroy argued in his 2000 *Against Race* vindicating a movement away from the concept of 'race' in order to embrace a planetary or universal type of humanism. While, as the previous sections have defended, both cosmopolitanism and internationalism ultimately reinforce nationalism at the same time that they declare a global conscience for an affiliation with humanity, it is in universalism that I locate the possibilities for the transcendence of nationism. This universalism, however, as I conceive it in Melville's *Clarel* regards the particular and the global as inseparable and mutually constitutive of one another. It also places in intersubjectivity the possibility of its development, considering the intersubjective level as political and as the 'space' of ethical relationships and action. According to this view, universalism, therefore, is not a totality to be realized or a system of knowledge made universal. I regard universalism, as I interpret it in Melville's *Clarel*, as a social process of

collaborative interpersonal dialogue which may have democratizing effects to human relationships, and contribute to creating human bonds beyond the rigid boundaries and segregationist-thinking imposed by communitarianisms, including nationalisms. This political and ethical democratizing potentiality of intersubjective universalism certainly transcends any cosmopolitan or internationalist claims for affiliation with the 'world' that are still deeply rooted in nationalist and patriotic allegiances.

Jacques Derrida pointed toward this direction in a 1997 lecture at the University of Sussex, noting the potentiality of interpersonal relationships to the creation of democratic contexts. While he proclaims it a positive understanding of human relationships, Derrida considers that cosmopolitanism is a limited concept to think democracy and the political, because it is constrained by nation-state boundaries, as well as by the status of citizenship. If, as Derrida notes, traditional cosmopolitanism, from the Greeks to Kant, perceived human beings as sharing a condition of brotherhood as citizens of the world (therefore, not being strangers to the world or to one another), the conception of cosmopolitanism inherited from Kant limits the relation of hospitality toward the other through a series of conditions, most importantly the fact that "you should of course welcome the stranger, the foreigner, to the extent that he is a citizen of another country, that you grant him the right to visit and not to stay" (Derrida 1997). As a matter of fact, the role reserved for friendship in cosmopolitan politics is limited by both nation-state boundaries and clear-cut definitions of citizenship. Derrida vindicates that, while there is still much work that needs to be undertaken within the limits of the cosmopolitical, we also need to move beyond the nation-state and citizenship, toward a conception of democracy that "re-define[s] the political not only beyond the nation-state but beyond the cosmopolitical itself" (1997). Derrida claims that friendship can lead to a politics that rethinks democracy beyond such limits, in a

political task that is of urgency to present-day societies. This argument is of importance

to the intersubjective universalism I interpret in Melville's *Clarel*. Noting the

complexities of such a task, the philosopher vindicates its unquestionable necessity

(perhaps, I claim, now even more than in the late 1990s, when he gave his lecture or

wrote *The Politics of Friendship* (1994), on which his 1997 lecture is based):

> That of course looks like a utopian or very distant perspective. I don't think so. Of
> course there is an enormous distance if we think that these things have to be reached
> and concretely embodied, but we know today as soon as we open a newspaper that
> these problems are urgent and prevalent in everyday life. In everyday life we see that
> the classical concept of democracy, the way it inhabits all the rhetoric of politicians and
> parliament, is shaken, that we need something else. We see that the concept of
> citizenship, the concept of the border, immigration, are today under a terrible seismic
> displacement. We not only feel this: we can analyse this every day, so what seems to be,
> and is, very far ahead of us, is also very close to us every day, and it is an urgent task to
> re-elaborate, to re-think, to re-engage and to be committed differently with these
> issues. (1997)

It is not a 'world community' based on a common essentialist –and almost always

imperialist or supremacist– identity ('human') that I aim to vindicate in the next

sections of this dissertation; neither is it a claim for an abstract universalism that

neglects plurality in an imperialist endeavor to unify such plurality. I conceive

universalism as a political and ethical project that is permanently in progress and

differently shaped in every intersubjective encounter, both imperfect and subjected to

the capacities and limitations of the human beings who might create it. This is a

decentralized process constructed from plurality and polyphony. As sociologist Jeffrey

Weeks claims:

> The task of the radical humanist project, then, is to tease out of the multiple forms of
> difference, rooted in contingency and a radical historicity, those common strands
> which can make the human bond […]. Humanity is not an essence to be realized, but a
> pragmatic construction, a perspective, to be developed through the articulation of the

variety of individual projects, of differences, which constitute our humanity in the broadest sense. (1993: 199-200)

Weeks's conception of humanity is in tune with Hannah Arendt's arguments on humanizing the world, which this section shall analyze, according to which humanity is constructed from and through the continuous dialogue and negotiation of meaning among different human beings who engage in a dynamic exploration of different worldviews from their very difference and plurality. Every 'answer' in such a dialogue is never conclusive but a partial interpretation or way of 'making sense' of the world, not an end but a starting point for further negotiation. In this respect, I disagree with Bruce Robbins's claim that "Common humanity is too weak a force to generate sufficient solidarity" (1998: 4), believing, on the contrary, that the development of intersubjectivity may have democratic effects upon human relationships, despite the difficulties and obstacles that such a process is sure to encounter. It is relevant, in this respect, that, throughout history, all genocidal practices, wars, cultural and religious persecutions, slavery, colonialism, racism, discrimination, have been sustained –are sustained– through systematic dehumanization; in other words, it was because the "Other" was deployed from the humanity that s/he shared with his or her victimizer and turned into an 'inferior' human being or a 'non-human' at all, that this victimizer could oppress, colonize, enslave, murder, or inflict any possible form of violence upon another human being. In these cases, common humanity has been neglected in favor of dehumanization: it was only because the other was *not* like me, because he was my human inferior and I his/her human superior, that I felt myself with the right to exercise violence upon him or her. Precisely because universalism aims to be a democratic project it has to turn away from essentialist notions of the Human and Humanity; yet it is just for that very same reason that it cannot forget the common

humanity of every human being, a humanity which, as Levinas argued, imposes upon us an inborn ethical obligation to others.[103] And it is in this common humanity that, in my opinion, the possibilities for intersubjective bonding emerge, as Melville already pointed out in his oeuvre (yet portraying the eventual incapacity of human beings to develop interpersonal bonds with other human beings, as I shall analyze in Chapter Two).

The present section consists of a theoretical articulation of the intersubjective universalism I interpret as constitutive to *Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land* in Chapter Two. It aims to provide a defense of the democratic potentiality of intersubjective universalism to human relationships and to the development of plural thinking that may transcend monolithic conceptions of 'Meaning'. The section opens (8.1) with an analysis of intersubjectivity and of the potentiality of interpersonal relationships and dialogue to the creation of universalism, from theorizations by Hannah Arendt, Zygmunt Bauman, Martin Buber, or Jean-Luc Nancy, among others. Section 8.2 analyzes the ethical dimension of intersubjective universalism, defending the need of an ethics based on interpersonal responsibility which is universalist in scope and which breaks through the walls imposed by individualist and communitarian thinking and ways of belonging. This interhuman responsibility, I claim, is the ultimate guiding principle upon which universalism needs to be grounded. Finally, Section 8.3 analyzes the political potentiality of intersubjective universalism for the construction of democratic politics, from Ernesto Laclau's conception of the universal as a "site of multiple significations" (Zerilli 1998: 8). Section 8, overall, serves as a theoretical introduction to articulate the intersubjective universalism in Melville's *Clarel* which I shall study in Chapter Two.

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[103] See Levinas's arguments on interpersonal ethics in Section 8.2 in this chapter.

8.1. The Interpersonal Is Political. The Potentiality of Intersubjectivity for the Democratization of Human Relationships

"Not out of the world: out of our action comes unity."
(Martin Buber, *Daniel: Dialogues on Realization* 1964: 124)

"[…] the common world […] remains 'inhuman' in a very literal sense unless it is constantly talked about by human beings. For the world is not humane just because it is made by human beings, and it does not become humane just because the human voice sounds in it, but only when it has become the object of discourse. However much we are affected by the things of the world, however deeply they may stir and stimulate us, they become human for us only when we can discuss them with our fellows. […] We humanize what is going on in the world and in ourselves only by speaking of it, and in the course of speaking of it we learn to be human. The Greeks called this humanness which is achieved in the discourse of friendship *philanthropia*, 'love of man,' since it manifests itself in a readiness to share the world with other men."(Hannah Arendt, "On Humanity in Dark Times" 1955: 24-25)

"Loving our neighbour may require a leap of faith; the result, though, is the birth act of humanity."
(Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Love* 2003: 78)

"I feel that the Godhead is broken up like the bread at the Supper, and that we are the pieces. Hence this infinite fraternity of feeling."
(Herman Melville, Letter to Nathaniel Hawthorne, [17?] November 1851, *Correspondence* 212)

"So we are neither one nor the other, we are really both. […] We are implicated in each other's lives."
(Gloria Anzaldúa, "Interview with Gloria Anzaldúa by Karin Ikas," *Borderlands / La Frontera* 1987: 243)

It may seem obvious to claim that the interpersonal is political. Nevertheless, in our present-day society of individualisms and interpersonal divisions, I believe it is important to remember so, and to grow aware of the potentiality of intersubjectivity to

develop democratic relationships and democratic thinking. In this dissertation I have conceived intersubjectivity as a space of "shared understanding" between individuals (*SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods* [2008: 468] and *Encyclopedia of Identity* [2010: 402]) or of "meaning between subjects" (*Blackwell Dictionary of Sociology* [2000: 161]) who engage in a collaborative creation of communication and meaning, by means of their dynamic interactions. Intersubjectivity, thus, is the space created *between* individuals when their minds or hearts 'touch' in a dialogic process of reciprocal awareness of one another's difference and yet common bond. Herman Melville best portrays intersubjectivity when he narrates the development of Ishmael and Queequeg's feeling of togetherness in the first chapters of *Moby-Dick* (1851), from Ishmael's first fearful encounter of the unknown Other in Queequeg (a pagan Polynesian cannibal with yellowish skin) to the American's realization not only of Queequeg's noble nature but also of the fact that his friendship with Queequeg has a redeeming power upon him:

> I began to be sensible of strange feelings. I felt a melting in me. No more my splintered heart and maddened hand were turned against the wolfish world. This soothing savage had redeemed it. There he sat, his very indifference speaking a nature in which there lurked no civilized hypocrisies and bland deceits. Wild he was; a very sight of sights to see; yet I began to feel myself mysteriously drawn towards him. And those same things that would have repelled most others, they were the very magnets that thus drew me. (62)

It is only through sharing –both the sharing of physical space (a room and a bed) and the sharing of their respective beings and cultural practices (Ishmael joins Queequeg in his prayers to the little idol Yojo, Queequeg attends with Ishmael the Chapel where Father Mapple delivers his sermon, etc.)–, through constant interaction (verbal and non-verbal, for Queequeg communicates with Ishmael through gestures and sentences in broken English), that the bond between Ishmael and Queequeg is developed and

materialized in the symbolic wedding of their hearts, which has the power to give peace to them and stretch their thinking parameters. Though I shall analyze in Chapter Two the centrality of intersubjectivity to *Clarel* and to the creation of the universalist project Melville points at, I find it important to anticipate here a Melvillean instance of intersubjectivity that may better allow the understanding of the ways in which I intend to appropriate the concept in my articulation of intersubjective universalism. What derives from the previous *Moby-Dick* example, thus, is that intersubjectivity is not the fusion of individuals, neither is it the colonial act of appropriating the other or of transforming his or her 'strangeness' to make it seem less strange. Like Derridean hospitality, intersubjectivity does not assimilate the other in one's space but opens up one's space to incorporate the other as other. Martin Buber uses the image of the 'double cry', in which two cries (cor)respond to each other, modifying one another, yet without merging into an identical voice, to explain intersubjectivity:

> But then, somewhere, far away, another cry moves towards me, another which is the same, the same cry uttered or sung by another voice. Yet it is not the same cry, certainly no "echo" of my cry but rather its true rejoinder, tone for tone not repeating mine, not even in a weakened form, but corresponding to mine, answering its tones—so much so, that mine, which at first had to my own ear no sound or questioning at all, now appears as questions, as a long series of questions, which now all receive a response. The response is no more capable of interpretation than the question. And yet the cries that meet the one cry that is the same do not seem to be the same as one another. Each time the voice is new. ("The Nature of Man" 42)

This image of the cry is relevant to my analysis of Melville's portrayal in *Clarel* of a universal wail which the young Clarel *feels*[104] in his ramblings around Jerusalem in Part 1, and which he becomes a part of by the end of his pilgrimage.

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[104] It is important to note that this is a silent human wail which Clarel *feels* as if emerging from the earth itself. In this regard, Martin Buber notes that intersubjectivity does not always necessitate language to become possible, commenting, on his description of the double cry that "If I were to report with what I heard it [the cry] I should have to say 'with every pore of my body'" (43). It is 'with the

Jean-Luc Nancy's conception of Being as being-with, I believe, is fully connected to the notion of intersubjectivity articulated in this section. As I analyzed in an earlier section of this chapter,[105] in *Being Singular Plural* (1996), Nancy argues that meaning is the very *sharing* of Being, and Being –and therefore meaning– is nothing but being with one another. Meaning is not communicated, Nancy explains, but "put into play" (27) *as* and *in* the 'with', which is exposed and reformulated through the act of dialogue every time that Being is staged and shared. This relational conception of existence as being-*with* is a notion from Nancy's thinking that is central to my analysis of intersubjective universalism: Nancy's conception of Being is enabling to rethinking interpersonal relationships, interpersonal bonds, and interpersonal responsibility beyond egocentrisms and communitarian forms of identification, including nationality and the nation-state. In a similar way, Martin Buber has theorized a conception of community that turns away from identitarian and community-based models, since, the philosopher argues, not only does community "enclose" and "contain" (the verbs Buber uses) the existence of each individual within that of the group, but it also does not promote individual relationships between its members, even suppressing the personal to favor the collective ("The Social Dimension of Man" 68). Buber locates 'community', instead, not in a uniting feature but in the *communal disposition* of the individual, claiming that "a people is community to the extent that it is communally disposed" ("Community" 99). It is, thus, in this 'communal disposition', in the interpersonal or intersubjective –which, I believe, can be related to Nancy's 'being-with', Agamben's 'adjacency', or Derrida's 'hospitality'–, that bonds may be formed between people, without limiting such bonds to identitarian commonalities or questions

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pores in his body' that Clarel too hears the wail described in *Clarel*. See the passage from the poem in which this universal wail is depicted on page 382-383 of this dissertation.

[105] See Section 5.2.

of sameness. Buber's notion of 'community' or 'communal disposition' opens up the way for an intersubjective universalism that is created interpersonally, as individuals negotiate meaning through dialogue. It is here that, I argue, the potentiality for both ethics and politics lies. These interpersonal bonds, I believe, are also deeper than the global yet patriotic consciousness claimed by cosmopolitans, and definitely more democratic than traditional conceptions of universalism. This potentiality of intersubjectivity, which may break through inter-human boundaries posed by the nation-state and other forms of communitarian affiliation, I believe, may be related to the 'coming community' articulated by Giorgio Agamben. In this 'coming community', the 'whatever singularities' that reject identity and traditional forms of belonging become enemies to the State.[106] Agamben's notion of adjacency –disruptive of, notions of the 'common' or sameness (i.e., common identity) upon which traditional communities are built– might be taken as equivalent to Nancy's 'being-with', an intersubjective space of possibility in which Agamben's 'whatever singularities' can circulate and get in close contact with one another, without affirming an identity. Agamben defines adjacency as "*exiling oneself to the other as he or she is*" (1990: 23); this 'exile' into, or reception of, the other may contribute to the development of a sense of belonging together in the world.

As S. N. Eisenstadt notes, intersubjectivity is rooted in social interaction and continuous dialogue (1992: 27), by which meaning may be sought out, explored, challenged, constructed, undone, made anew. According to Hannah Arendt, dialogue is the instrument by which human beings make sense of their experiences of the world both to themselves[107] and to others: "whatever men do or know or experience can

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[106] See Section 5.2 in this chapter.

[107] In "Some Questions on Moral Philosophy" (1965), Arendt also emphasizes the dialogue that takes places within ourselves, referring to such "being-with-myself" as 'solitude': "To be with myself and

make sense only to the extent that it can be spoken about. […] Men in the plural, that

is, men in so far as they live and move and act in this world, can experience

meaningfulness only because they can talk with and make sense to each other and to

themselves" (1958: 4). By making sense of the world, according to Arendt, human

beings "humanize" reality: "We humanize what is going on in the world and in

ourselves only by speaking of it, and in the course of speaking of it we learn to be

human" (1955: 25). Arendt claims openness to others as the *conditio sine qua non* of

humanity (15). In a similar way as Derrida and Buber, she locates in interpersonal

relationships, particularly in friendship, a fundamental political potential, claiming that it

may restore human beings's relationship with the world and with their fellow human

beings. Dialogue, thus, is central to intersubjectivity, since it develops the 'space'

between individuals (or 'inter-human' space, as Buber terms it) and enables plural

thinking which, in turn, allows the transcendence of monolithic conceptions of

Truth,[108] since "[T]ruth", Arendt claims, "as soon as it is uttered, is immediately

transformed into one opinion among many", which is immediately and inevitably

"contested, reformulated, reduced to one subject of discourse among others" (27).

Arendt uses the phrase 'critical judgment' to refer to this intersubjective engagement in

the negotiation of meaning through the creation of dialogue, arguing that critical

judgment stimulates the development of an "enlarged mentality" (241), by placing

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to judge by myself is articulated and actualized in the processes of thought, and every thought process is an activity in which I speak with myself about whatever happens to concern me. The mode of existence present in this silent dialogue of myself with myself, I now shall call *solitude*. Hence, solitude is more than, and different from, other modes of being alone, particularly and most importantly loneliness and isolation. Solitude means that though alone, I am together with somebody (myself, that is). It means that I am two-in-one, whereas loneliness as well as isolation do not know this kind of schism, this inner dichotomy in which I can ask questions of myself and receive answers" (97-98).

[108] Arendt includes Kant's among those projects that reinforce a particular Truth, claiming that "Whatever the merits of their arguments, the inhumanity of Kant's moral philosophy is undeniable" due to the fact that his philosophical teachings are based on the premise that an absolute Truth exists, and Kant imposes his truth about interhuman relationships as an absolute (1955: 27). Projects that uphold a single Truth, Arendt argues, are "inhuman" because, she notes, "a single truth, could there have been one, […] would have spelled the end of humanity" (27).

different individuals and their worldviews in conversation with one another. Arendt

defines critical judgment, which is the seed enabling politics and democratic political

thought, in the following terms:

> Political thought is representative. I form an opinion by considering a given issue from
> different viewpoints, by making present to my mind the standpoints of those who are
> absent; that is, I represent them. This process of representation does not blindly adopt
> the actual views of those who stand somewhere else, and hence look upon the world
> from a different perspective; this is a question neither of empathy … nor of counting
> noses and joining a majority, but of being and thinking in my own identity where
> actually I am not. The more people's standpoints I have present in my mind while I am
> pondering a given issue, and the better I can imagine how I would feel and think if I
> were in their place, the stronger will be my capacity for representative thinking and the
> more valid my final conclusions, my opinion. (It is this capacity for an "enlarged
> mentality" that enables men to judge; as such, it was discovered by Kant in the first
> part of his *Critique of Judgment*—who, however, did not recognize the political and moral
> implications of his discovery). (241)

Arendt's notion of critical judgment, I believe, can be related to Ernesto Laclau's theory

of 'hegemony'[109] in his articulation of universalism, which he defines as the relationship

that emerges from the dialogic interaction of different particularisms, in which each

individual element can temporarily occupy the space of the 'empty signifier' of the

universal. It can also be related to the dialogic process that Melville created in his

works. It is in such a dialogue, in the space that is formed between individuals through

their intersubjective conversation that, I defend, the possibility of plural thinking and of

the development of intersubjective universalism rests.

Buber places in intersubjectivity the possibility of both ethics and politics, as

well as the possibility to detranscendentalize 'Truth': the philosopher argues that,

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[109] Revising the Gramscian genealogy of the concept of 'hegemony', Laclau conceives the universal as an 'empty signifier' which is temporarily occupied by different particulars in a relationship of equivalence. Laclau calls this process of temporarily filling the function of the universal 'hegemony'. Hegemony, thus, according to Laclau is not an imposition of a certain meaning and the exclusion of another, but the fluid dialogic process of interaction between different particulars to construct the universal, while being aware of the elusiveness, incompleteness, lack of totality, provisionality, and partiality of such universal. See Section 8.3 in this chapter.

through interpersonal dialogue, human beings may learn that one's own "relation to truth is heightened by the other's different relation to the same truth—different in accordance with his individuation, and destined to take seed and grow differently" ("Social Dimension" 65). It is when we perform this active exercise of seeing the other approaching the same 'truth' as me from his/her unique perspective that we affirm the other as a self, as Ishmael affirms Queequeg in the passage from *Moby-Dick* I anticipated earlier in this section as a representative instance of intersubjectivity in Melville's oeuvre. It is also through this process, that we develop plural thinking that may challenge and transcend our monolithic assumptions. Intersubjectivity, therefore, goes beyond mere sympathy for, or tolerance of, the other, since it holds the other as a "partner in a living event" (69) not as an object upon which to propagate our 'identity' and way of thought. Both partners unfold to each other in the interpersonal space, the connecting space 'between' their two existences, through a dialogue which enables the sharing of each of their selves and which, Buber claims, constitutes the meaning of 'truth': "Whatever the meaning of the word 'truth' may be in other realms, in the interhuman realm it means that men communicate themselves to one another as what they are" (71). This communication does not simply imply the telling of a narrative but consists of a sharing of being and development of the inter-human space (72). Such openness to the other may establish the foundations for the possibility of democratic political and ethical human relationships. As Zygmunt Bauman notes, dialogue facilitates the development of universalism, which he argues, is not incompatible –as it has traditionally been regarded– with plurality. The following paragraph constitutes one of the most direct definitions in Bauman's works of what the philosopher understands as 'universalism':

Universalism is not the enemy of difference; it does not require "cultural homogeneity", nor does it need "cultural purity" and particularly the kind of practices which that ideological term refers to. The pursuit of universality does not involve the smothering of cultural polyvalence or the pressure to reach cultural consensus. Universality means no more, yet no less either, than the across-the-species ability to communicate and reach mutual understanding – in the sense, I repeat, of "knowing how to go on", but also knowing how to go on in the face of others who may go on – have the right to go on – differently. (1999: 202)

This already points to alternative political forms of belonging, attachment, and organization beyond the nation-state model. As Bauman claims: "Such universality reaching beyond the confines of sovereign or quasi-sovereign communities is a *conditio sine qua non* of a republic reaching beyond the confines of sovereign or quasi-sovereign states; and the republic doing just that is the sole alternative to blind, elemental, erratic, uncontrolled, divisive and polarizing forces of globalization" (202). Bauman's defense of universalism, thus, moves away from nationalism, as well as from cosmopolitan or internationalist agendas such as the ones I analyzed in earlier sections (i.e., Cheah's, Appiah's, Robbins's), which proclaim a global consciousness, yet, at the same time, cling to the very nationalist structures and patriotic feelings which prevent the emergence of such a universal attachment.

Intersubjectivity, I claim, may have transformative effects on our ways of thinking and of developing human relationships. On a more pessimistic note, the opposite may also occur, and it may be that intersubjectivity may never be produced, if one or both parties are unable to transcend their individualities and engage in the dialogue that is necessary to develop intersubjective communication, or if, even though they participate in such dialogue, they remain locked within their subjectivities and one-sided thinking parameters and are therefore deaf to the worldviews of others. This tension between the potentialities of developing intersubjective relationships while, at

the same time, the failure of human beings to open themselves to other human beings are central aspects of Melville's *Clarel* that I shall analyze in Chapter Two.

8.2. The Ethics of Intersubjective Universalism

"At first thought it may seem strange that the anti-Semite's outlook should be related to that of the Negrophobe. It was my philosophy professor, a native of the Antilles, who recalled the fact to me one day: 'Whenever you hear anyone abuse the Jews, pay attention, because he is talking about you.' And I found that he was universally right—by which I mean that I was answerable in my body and my heart for what was done to my brother. Later I realized that he meant, quite simply, an anti-Semite is inevitably anti-Negro."

(Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin/White Masks* 1952: 101)

"The idea of responsibility is to be brought back from the province of specialized ethics, of an 'ought' that swings free in the air, into that of lived life. Genuine responsibility exists only where there is real responding."

(Martin Buber, "The Nature of Man" 1992: 54)

"No cry of torment can be greater than the cry of one man.
Or again, *no* torment can be greater than what a single human being may suffer.
The whole planet can suffer no greater torment than a *single* soul."

(Ludwig Wittgenstein, qtd. in Bauman, *Liquid Love* 2003: 81)

"The tears of the world are a constant quantity. For each one who begins to weep somewhere else another stops. The same is true of the laugh."

(Samuel Beckett, *En Attendant Godot/Waiting for Godot* 1954: 103)

"The resurrection is not the rise of the dead from their tombs but the passage from the death of self-absorption to the life of unselfish love, the transition from the darkness of selfish individualism to the light of universal spirit."

"We are implicated in each other's lives", beautifully asserted Gloria Anzaldúa in a 1987 interview (243). This implication derives from the fact that human beings share the earth with one another, to the extent that actions in one part of the globe may have consequences, not only in the lives of those closest to us, but also in other parts of the globe. The Native American imaginary, for example, conceives the world as a web in which each of the parts sustaining the whole are interlaced: the pulling of one string would have immediate effects on other strings constituting the web. Human beings' interconnection and interdependence in their sharing of the world, thus, exposes our common vulnerability. It is because of this inevitable and inescapable interconnection with other human beings around the world that global ethical relationships based on interpersonal responsibility are so imperative. Zygmunt Bauman has argued that the need of morality cannot be discursively contended without turning such a call for humanity into an imperative or commandment, which is precisely what religious discourse does: from the moment religion prompts obedience to a commandment (i.e., to act moral or 'love one's neighbor', such a commandment absolutizes itself as a call to obedience that neutralizes free-will and makes individuals paradoxically irresponsible, instead of a call to humanity encouraging and potentially 'activating' our responsibility and responsiveness. In his analysis of philosopher Knud Ejler Løgstrup's arguments on the 'ethical demand', Bauman notes: "Were we told exactly what to do, 'the wisdom, insight, and love with which we are to act' would 'no longer be our own'; the command would not be a call to humanity, imagination and insight – but to obedience; Christian ethics, in particular, would be 'ossified into ideology'" (*The Individualized Society* 2001: 170). While not only Christianity but most –if not all– world religions certainly share in such a 'call for humanity', I want to point beyond any form of religious moral

imperatives, toward humanity in the Arendtian and Baumanian sense, in my articulation of the ethics of intersubjective universalism, even though I am aware that, to many (perhaps the majority of) people around the world, religion may be an 'access' to such ethical responsiveness. Ironically, I might have to discursively maintain the importance and need of universalist ethics in this section, and I believe in the necessity to do so, even though my articulation might risk to become, as Bauman points out, a 'moral imperative'. The only justification I can give in this respect, is that I believe in the need of such morality. Bauman himself has vindicated the necessity of such a task: "For this world of ours you cannot legislate perfection. You cannot force virtue on the world, but neither can you persuade the world to behave virtuously. You cannot make this world kind and considerate to the human beings who inhabit it, and as accommodating to their dreams of dignity as you would ideally wish it to be. *But you must try*" (2003: 83).

Zygmunt Bauman has pointed out how, in face of the consolidation of corporate capitalism, consumerism, market economy, and money-oriented society "human solidarity is the first casualty" (76), since the possibilities for values such as sharing, cooperation, and mutual help are rejected in favor of individualism, competition, and economic sovereignty. If, as Arendt argues, plurality is the essential condition for the existence of the common world, individualism is one of its greatest menaces, both as a form that is a consequence of "conditions of radical isolation, where nobody can any longer agree with anybody else", and under conditions of mass society (and also nationalism and, more generally, certain forms of communitarianism based on a common identity that coheres the group, as I argued in previous sections of this chapter), where people "act as though they were members of one enormous family

which has only one opinion and one interest" (1958: 39).[110] Globalization, too, I noted earlier, has enforced an unequal economic development between different world regions, widening economic inequality and increasing identity-centered projects which assert regionalisms, nationalisms, or particularisms in reaction against the homogenizing and absorptive tendencies of globalization. It is, I think, imperative to imagine ethical human relationships which are not only designed to preserve the (dignity of the) lives of our fellow human beings but also to restore individuals' connection with the world that so unites and separates them from other human beings at the same time.

This ethics –which, I argue, Melville conceived in his oeuvre– needs to be universalist in scope, breaking through individualisms or communitarian ways of belonging which are ultimately self-centered. According to my analysis of Melville's *Clarel*, it is through intersubjectivity that a conscience of interhuman connectedness and interpersonal responsibility, and therefore a universalist ethics, might be created. As Margaret Canovan claims in her introduction to Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition* (1958), "Only the experience of sharing a common human world with others who look at it from different perspectives can enable us to see reality in the round and to develop a shared common sense. Without it, we are each driven back on our own subjective experience, in which only our feelings, wants and desires have reality" (xiii). The sharing of the world, as Hannah Arendt has noted, is certainly horizontal or transnational, but it is also vertical or transtemporal (1958: 55), which expands our interhuman responsibilities not only for those people who cohabit the world with us at the present moment, but also with past and future generations. However, one might wonder, why should we be responsible for those we do not know, trans-spatially, trans-temporally?

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[110] This inability to transcend individualism and private subjectivities, and the incapacity to develop interpersonal relationships in face of the possibility of intersubjectivity with other fellow travelers, are dooming features among characters in Herman Melville's *Clarel*.

Philosophers such as Emmanuel Levinas noted that asking why one should be responsible for his or her fellow human beings already voices the death of morality, since the necessity to ask such a question indicates the deep individualism of contemporary societies, at the same time that it reflects how human beings have withdrawn themselves from the world and from their connection with other human beings. According to Levinas, our obligations to other fellow mortals are innate. Identifying the self and the other as inseparable and mutually constituent,[111] Levinas argues that moral responsibility for the other pre-exists individuals, that is, that the ethical demand is imposed upon each human being even before his or her existence, and that it is through this ethical demand for the other that each individual develops his or her own self. This inevitable, innate, interconnection with, and obligation toward, the other also exposes the vulnerability of the self, since the other may actually harm me in my attempt to approach him or her.[112] However, it is precisely this vulnerability too that, Cohen explains, "opens the human to the suffering of others" (2006: xxxiv): as Levinas remarks, I cannot not respond to the other; from the moment I am born I am bound to the other in my responsibility for him or her, even though I did not choose such interlacing of our existences (1970: 64). This responsiveness and responding to the other's ethical demand, Levinas claims, is completely disinterested (1968: 57).[113] The identity of the self, therefore, is its moral relationship with the other, which makes the self part of a human community bound together by individuals' reciprocal responsibility

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[111] Richard A. Cohen compares Levinas's conception of the self to Rimbaud's affirmation "I is another" (qtd. in Cohen 2006: 62). It is also important to note that Levinas does not capitalize the word 'other' in his volume *Humanism of the Other* (1972).

[112] In a similar way, and influenced by Levinas's thinking, Judith Butler has claimed that "Precarity names both the necessity and difficulty of ethics" since "It is surely hard to feel at once vulnerable to destruction by the other and yet responsible for the other" (2011: 14).

[113] Gayatri Spivak further argues that responsibility for the other is "a call to a relationship" (Spivak, Landry and MacLean 1996: 5) by which the other is welcome in the dialogic encounter and is allowed a discursive space within it. This implies, Spivak claims, that the responses in this dialogic encounter are not self-centered upon one or other of the participants but fluidly travel from one to the other, and among all: dialogue is, therefore, an "embrace, an act of love" (269-270).

for one another (1972: 6). Levinas's philosophy of interpersonal ethics is universalist in its articulation, and subscribes to a humanism which, in the same way as Hannah Arendt, critiques the conception of 'Man' in the abstract, as a naked face removed from history and culture.[114] This defense of humanism upholds a belief in the irreducible dignity and equality of each human being, and, in a similar way as Martin Buber, locates meaning precisely in this dimension of being, characterized, as we have seen, by interpersonal moral obligations and responsibility.[115] Levinas's thinking informs my articulation of the ethics of intersubjective universalism as I interpret it in Melville's *Clarel*, due to the philosopher's development of what might be considered a universalist ethics rooted in interpersonal responsibility and human beings' mutual interdependence. This interhuman responsibility or responsibility for the other, Richard A. Cohen argues, is the ultimate justification and guiding principle upon which universalism needs to be based:

> Justice derives not from the state, which must nonetheless institute and maintain justice, but from the transcendence of the other person, the "widow, the orphan, the stranger." It is in relation to this irreducible and immediate responsibility that, in the name of justice, culture, history, organized religion, the state, science, and philosophy take on their ultimate sense and have their ultimate justifications. The entire realm of the universal, in all its particular historically determined manifestations, emerges from and is guided by the imperatives of morality and is subject to moral judgment. (2006: xxvii-xxviii)

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[114] Theorists such as Judith Butler have criticized that Levinas's arguments on morality are problematic because they are inscribed within the Judeo-Christian tradition, and thereby exclude those outside such tradition from the very ethical relationship Levinas articulates in his philosophy as the basis of all human relationships (Butler 2011: 12). This implies, according to Butler, that Levinas's universalist philosophy of ethics eventually becomes parochial and excluding by being limited to certain religious and cultural traditions or sets of beliefs.

[115] As Richard A. Cohen notes in his foreword to Levinas's *Humanism of the Other* (2006), Levinas's philosophy is humanist in that it proposes "a conception of the humanity of the human" (xxvi).

It is according to this ultimate principle of interhuman connection and commitment to interpersonal responsibility that I conceive the ethics of the intersubjective universalism in Melville's literary production.

Following Levinas's arguments on interhuman responsibility and Hannah Arendt's notion of cohabitation, Judith Butler has defended a conception of global ethics that –together with Arendt, Bauman, Buber, Derrida, Levinas, Nancy, and other intellectuals who have theorized on the potentiality of interpersonal relationships and problematized the traditional notion of community– has been greatly influential to articulate the intersubjective universalism I defend in this dissertation. Butler places the possibility of a global bond in the recognition that, as she phrases it, we are all "unchosen together":

> For whoever "we" are, we are also those who were never chosen, who emerge on this earth without everyone's consent and who belong, from the start, to a wider population and a sustainable earth. And this condition, paradoxically, yields the radical potential for new modes of sociality and politics beyond the avid and wretched bonds formed through settler colonialism and expulsion. We are all, in this sense, the unchosen, but we are nevertheless unchosen together. (2011: 23-24)

Through the recognition of this bond, which exposes not only our common humanity –and therefore, as Butler, following Levinas, argues, our common responsibility–, but also our common vulnerability, ego-centered thinking may be trespassed in favor of the interhuman, in which, as I have argued, lies the possibility of universalism. Emphasizing Arendt's premise that no human being has the right to decide with whom to cohabit the earth, because such a choice would directly attempt against the very plurality of the earth on which each human being's own existence is directly dependent,[116] Butler states that belonging "must actually no know [sic] bounds and exceed every particular

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[116] Following Arendt, in this sense, Butler notes that human existence –and political life itself– depends on the heterogeneity and plurality of the earth and that, therefore, there is no individuality outside plurality, in the same way that no plurality can replace any individuality (17).

nationalist and communitarian limit" (20), which leads her to transcend any form of citizenship constituted by particular racial, religious, and national(ist) identitarian criteria and which often generate displaced subjects who are made to remain in a 'limbo-like space' between such strict forms of classification, or are even unclassifiable at all. Butler's ethical views are universalist in scope, as she criticizes nationalism for concealing the fact that our political existence depends on unchosen cohabitation of the earth with other human beings who share the earth with us and on whom the very preservation of our lives relies. Such unchosen cohabitation, combined with the inevitable vulnerability of our existences, constitute the basis of Butler's universalist ethics, which claims for the need to develop institutions that preserve human life without hierarchizing the worth of some lives over others. Vulnerability, Butler claims, is the common condition of human lives, both affirming and determining our existence as relational and dependent on others.[117] This conception of human existence is not very different from Nancy's 'being-with', Agamben's 'adjacency', or Derrida's politics of friendship. In this "unwilled adjacency", as Butler terms it (5),[118] we are inevitably connected, our lives mutually intertwined, not only with those who are near us but also to those in the distance (I find it important to evoke again here the Native American conception of the world as a spider web mentioned earlier in this section). This implies that our interhuman responsibility or ethical obligation is global in character, expanding beyond and disrupting both the 'local' physical space and the boundaries imposed by egocentric behaviors and communitarian forms of belonging:

> If I am only bound to those who are close to me, already familiar, then my ethics are invariably parochial, communitarian, and exclusionary. If I am only bound to those

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[117] Vulnerability is obviously not only the common condition of human beings as a species but also of other living beings.

[118] Butler's choice of the term 'adjacency' might be considered evocative of Agamben's terminology, yet Butler does not refer to the philosopher in her speech.

who are 'human' in the abstract, then I avert every effort to translate culturally between my own situation and that of others. If I am only bound to those who suffer at a distance, but never those who are close to me, then I evacuate my situation in an effort to secure the distance that allows me to entertain ethical feeling. But if ethical relations are mediated – and I use that word deliberately here – confounding questions of location such that what is happening 'there' also happens in some sense 'here' and if what is happening 'there' depends on the event being registered in several 'elsewheres', then it would seem that the ethical claim of the event takes place always in a 'here' and 'there' that are fundamentally bound to one another. (8-9)

This interconnection of human existences across the globe is, as Butler notes, "one that is irreducible to national belonging or communitarian affiliation" (13). The awareness of these intersubjective bonds in a project such as the one Butler vindicates, transcends, I believe, the communitarianism defended by multiculturalism or the nationalism which, as I analyzed in earlier sections, lies beneath cosmopolitan and internationalist agendas that, however, claim a global allegiance to humanity. It is in this global conception of human bonds that, I argue, is invested the possibility of a universalist ethics. This universalist ethics –the ethics of the intersubjective universalism I have been articulating in this chapter and which I will interpret as constitutive of Melville's 1876 *Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land* in Chapter Two– is ultimately based on the principles of interhuman connection and of commitment to interpersonal responsibility.

As I have analyzed, intersubjective universalism may lead to more democratic ways of conceiving ourselves and our relationships with others, which may have the potential to democratize human thinking and interpersonal relationships. Levinas's premise that the other is myself (which makes of 'myself' an other to the other as well), at the same time as the other is not myself because s/he has a face that is different from mine own, which determines his/her difference as well as my inborn responsibility toward him/her, informs the intersubjective universalism articulated in the present chapter. According to Levinas, I have analyzed, morality is innate in human beings. It is

relevant to my analysis of *Clarel* in Chapter Two to establish a connection at this point between this innate humanity or morality that Levinas defends, and the "Innate Depravity [...] from whose visitations, in some shape or other", Melville claimed, "no deeply thinking mind is always and wholly free" ("Hawthorne and His Mosses" 1850: 51). Melville continuously analyzed in his works this evil side of human nature, and admired in Nathaniel Hawthorne his capacity to explore what Melville would refer to as the "blackness, ten times black" (51). This interlacing of good and evil in the human soul ("Evil and good they braided play / Into one chord", says Rolfe in *Clarel* [1876: 4.4.27-28]) mirrors the tension between the potentiality of intersubjective universalism to the creation of democratic human relationships and the neutralization of such potentiality which, I argue, Melville analyzes in *Clarel*. Focusing on the positive potentiality of humanity at this point of my dissertation, I locate the potential development of democratic relationships "without the walls" (Melville, *Journals* 1989: 87) of 'identity' and 'community', in the realization of the interconnectedness between human beings, between hereness and thereness ("'here' is already an elsewhere", remarks Butler [2011: 31]), and in understanding that nobody is 'foreign', 'alien' or 'illegal' in a world where we are all interconnected strangers. Such awareness may place us, at the same time, in the humbling predisposition to embrace a critical plural thinking based on the acknowledgment that Universal Meaning is a fallacy because each 'meaning' is culturally, ideologically, etc. determined, mediated, constructed; and, therefore, constitutes a partial interpretive framework. As I analyzed in the previous sections, intersubjectivity enables individuals to develop an interpersonal bond that transcends identity and community-based boundaries through a dialogic process by which different human perspectives are brought to conversation and negotiated. This process resists fixed conceptions of meaning and opens up possibilities for democratic

political and ethical human relationships. This present section has analyzed the ethical

possibilities of intersubjectivity and universalism to the creation of more democratic

human relationships. This intersubjective universalism, which I interpret in Melville's

Clarel, locates the possibility of politics and ethics in the interpersonal level, by which, I

have argued, the particular and the global are made to converge. The next section will

analyze the political potentiality of universalism for the development of democratic

politics from Ernesto Laclau's theory of 'hegemony'.

8.3. Democracy and Universalism. Ernesto Laclau's 'Hegemony'

"The universal is incommensurable with the particular, but cannot, however, exist without the latter. How is this relation possible? My answer is that this paradox cannot be solved, but that its non-solution is the very precondition of democracy. The solution of the paradox would imply that a particular body had been found, which would be the *true* body of the universal. But in that case, the universal would have found its necessary location, and democracy would be impossible. If democracy is possible, it is because the universal has no necessary body and no necessary content; different groups, instead, compete between themselves to temporarily give to their particularisms a function of universal representation."

(Ernesto Laclau, *Emancipation(s)* 1996: 35)

"The very fact that commonalities must be *articulated* through the interplay of diverse political struggles— rather than discovered and then merely followed, as one follows a rule—means, first, that no group or social actor can claim to represent the totality and, second, that there can be no fixing of the final meaning of universality (especially not through rationality). The universal cannot be fixed because it 'does not have a concrete content of its own but is an always preceding horizon resulting from an indefinite expansion of equivalential demands.' Put it slightly differently, universal is just another word for placeholder of the

'absent fullness of the community.' It can never actually *be* that fullness—not even as a regulative ideal."
(Linda M. G. Zerilli, "This Universalism Which Is Not One" 1998: 11)

"In other terms we could say that it is no longer a question of *creating* 'The (True) World,' or the 'Unity of the World,' but of *transforming* it from within."
(Etienne Balibar, "Ambiguous Universality" 1995: 50-51)

"What I am asking for in this de-transcendentalization thing is a deeply positive thing – to rid the mind of the narrowness of believing in one thing and not in other things. That's what I'm asking about."
(Gayatri C. Spivak, *Nationalism and the Imagination* 2010: 72)

In the previous sections, I have argued for universalism as a political and ethical project that gives expression to the plurality of humanity, and have defended the necessity of universalism in an increasingly divided world. I have also located the possibility of universalism in intersubjectivity, in the collaborative negotiation of meaning between individuals who may pragmatically work to construct meanings and bonds beyond their identitarian or communitarian affiliations. This dialogic process, I have defended, has the potentiality of encouraging the development of more democratic human relationships, and to detranscendentalize monolithic views of Meaning, which may encourage plural thinking. Unlike traditional universalism, the project articulated in this dissertation, and which I claim is the project Herman Melville articulated in *Clarel*, as I shall analyze in Chapter Two, does not 'eat up' particularisms, but stems from the polyphony and heterogeneity of human beings who, in a joint creative and dynamic process, negotiate its construction and constant remodeling. This intersubjective universalism, therefore, is not exclusive of the particular; neither does it dilute the particular or plurality within an abstract and violently embracing 'Universal'. It conceives the universal and the particular as mutually connected and constitutive of one

another. This conception of the particular and the universal not as excluding but as inseparable opens up democratic possibilities since, Laclau has argued, the view of the universal and the particular as opposing poles that are in conflict to one another causes a permanent disconnection, scattering, and lack of dialogue between multiple local struggles that reinforce themselves and assert their difference separately. Such separation may generate a totalizing impulse by which a particular is universalized into an abstract 'Universal' that neutralizes the specificity and uniqueness of other particulars, and, therefore, the plurality of humanity.

Ernesto Laclau is one pricipal thinker who has theorized a plural and decentralized model of universalism that he considers enabling to the creation of democratic politics. Eric Lott has described Laclau's project thus:

> [Laclau] pursue[s] the prospect of a politically forceful universalism shorn of the dead weight of essentialism: serious theoretical rationale for new social movements. Laclau insists on the political necessity of universalism, but only as a category definitively decoupled from its classical philosophical basis, even a dialectical Marxist one. He proposes a return to the idea in a strictly political sense that has nothing to do with the quest for Truth or a true Subject of an end of historical contradiction in the rule of a universal class. (2000: 670)

Dwelling on the possibilities opened by poststructuralist theory, Laclau's arguments go beyond a mere deconstructionist theoretical agenda disconnected from political pragmatism.[119] In his article "Universalism, Particularism, and the Question of Identity" (1992), which would later become chapter two of his volume *Emancipation(s)* (1996), Laclau argues that universalism is not in opposition to particularism and that, therefore,

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[119] Some thinkers (e.g., Lott, Zerilli) have claimed that the present return to universalism demonstrates the failure of poststructuralism to generate a positive political agenda from its deconstructionism. In this respect, Eric Lott argues that "universalism's comeback follows the perceived political inadequacy of postmodern theory—with its focus on subject position, difference, and new social sciences—to draw up any account of an overarching collective or united front" (668). Lott marks the 1955 issue of *differences*, dedicated exclusively to universalism, as a proof of this tendency to make use of poststructuralist theory (and, at the same time, move away from it) to rethink universalism as an expression of "the desire for a politics worthy of the name" (668).

none of these two tendencies should exclude the other within itself. Noting the wide proliferation of identity-based movements and the multiplication of particularisms asserting their difference due to, what he terms, "the reemergence of the subject as a result of its own death" (1992: 84), Laclau expresses the need to articulate a universalist political project that gathers particular struggles together –now separated and even confronting and competing with each other– while preserving the particularity of these struggles, and without falling into an abstract and homogenizing Universal that negates plurality. Laclau's project for universalism and democratic politics is, thus, of importance to my analysis of the intersubjective universalism in Melville's *Clarel*, especially in relation to the dialogic character of the poem, through which construction Melville places a plurality of characters and worldviews under critical evaluation.

Laclau's democratic model is more extensively and powerfully articulated in *Emancipation(s)* (1996), where the philosopher vindicates the deconstruction of liberal democratic theory in order to build up a new democratic theory, from the possibilities opened up by poststructuralism, that is based on the plurality of contemporary societies and which truly gives voice to such plurality. Laclau's project conceives the 'universal' –which he names an "empty signifier" (1996: 36)– as an "absent fullness" (15): a missing totality that is each time anew –provisionally, temporarily– 'filled up' by a specific particular which, through this process, gets access to a position of 'hegemony' (Laclau's term).[120] This universal is, thus, according to Laclau, an empty 'place' unifying multiple equivalential demands (56). Revising the traditional concept of 'hegemony' (i.e., rule, dominance, competition), the genealogy of which was articulated in the twentieth century by Antonio Gramsci in relation to class, Laclau conceives hegemony as a pragmatic collaborative process by which particulars are given expression, and new

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[120] Laclau gives the name 'hegemony' to this process by which particulars temporarily 'fill up' the empty universal.

meanings –in breaking through the barriers of these particulars– may be created. Universalism, therefore, according to Laclau, is conceived as a "horizon" (1992: 90), the process of temporarily 'filling in' the constituent 'emptiness' of the universal. Through this process, the thinker claims, particulars enter into a hegemonic relationship with other particulars, which, in turn, will themselves occupy the space of the empty signifier as well. This implies that the universal and particular do not mutually exclude one another but are necessarily intertwined in the articulation of both. The universal, Laclau claims, can only emerge from the particular, which does not in any case imply that it is a particular fossilized into a monolithic 'Universal'. The absent fullness of the universal is, therefore, already present in the particular, constitutive of it: "Totality is impossible and, at the same time, is required by the particular: in that sense, it is present in the particular as that which is absent, as a constitutive lack which constantly forces the particular to be more than itself" (15). This empty signifier is only possible by the very impossibility of its totality (37), since, if it were constituted as totality, its "political grounding" would become "either a totalitarian closure or a pre-given unity […] waiting to be realized (Lott 2000: 666). In this respect, multiple differences are placed in, and find their expression through, a relationship of equivalence in which each of the particulars is as well split: "on the one hand, each difference expresses itself *as* difference; on the other hand, each of them *cancels* itself as such by entering into a relation of equivalence with all the other differences in the system" (38). It is in the split of signifieds or particularisms that universalism is made possible, in the subversion of the differential nature of particularisms and, at the same time, their placement into an equivalential logics in which both the logics of difference and of equivalence operate, and which enable the realization –or, rather, the impossible realization, in that it cannot be realized as a category characterized by totality or completion– of the empty signifier and the

universal (39). In the same way, the universal or empty signifier is characterized by "radical impossibility" (38).[121] As Nora Sternfeld explains, according to Laclau, "Universality is preserved as a dimension without any possibility of fulfillment by a particularism. It is the vacancy that facilitates politics. Thus, the universal becomes the 'incomplete horizon' of particular struggles, as impossible as it is facilitating", not an "end in itself, but with a view to actual political practice" (2007).[122] From Laclau's perspective, therefore, empty signifiers are not only central but constitute the very battleground upon which the possibility of politics and democracy is invested. Zerilli describes the universal articulated by Laclau as "the fragile, shifting, and always incomplete achievement of political action; it is not the container of a presence but the placeholder of an absence, not a substantive content but an empty place", it is, in other words, a universalism which "is not One" (1998: 15). Laclau's theory places particularisms within a system of equivalential relationships that empties them of their differential nature (yet does not absorb their differential nature within the system), and allows them to occupy a universal function in an equivalential relationship with other particulars which will also occupy this universal function. In this sense, for Laclau, hegemony results not in an imposition. Rather on the contrary, it consists of a constant negotiation of the relationship between the universal and the particular. Laclau's

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[121] Laclau further claims that: "It is in so far as there is a radical impossibility of a system as pure presence, beyond all exclusions, that actual *systems* (in the plural) can exist. […] the system […] cannot signify itself in terms of any positive signified. Let us suppose for a moment that the systematic ensemble was the result of all its elements sharing a positive feature (for example that they all belonged to a regional category). In that case, that positive feature would be different from other differential positive features, and they would all appeal to a deeper systematic ensemble within which their differences would be thought of as differences" (38).

[122] In her article, Sternfeld notes the non-essentialist, non-identitarian, universalist perspective of the Zapatistas in Mexico, which transcend their own local struggle and engage in solidarity with other struggles. This is, according to Sternfeld, an example of how a marginalized group may transcend their position as victims and generate solidary forms of bonding with other individuals, groups and struggles (2007).

conception of hegemony can be connected to Hannah Arendt's notion of 'critical judgment'.[123] As Linda M. G. Zerilli notes:

> What Laclau and Arendt share, despite their differences, is the view that intersubjective agreement is not there to be discovered in the universality of experience or the sameness of identity. There is nothing that we all share by virtue of being human or of living in a particular community that guarantees a common view of the world; there is nothing extralinguistic in the world that guarantees that we all share a common experience; there is no Archimedean place from which we could accede to a universal standpoint. But if Laclau (like Arendt) refutes the false universality of abstract rationality or common identity, he by no means rejects universalism "as an old-fashioned totalitarian dream" (26). Playing a different language game with the universal, however, Laclau does not come home to a universalism which is not One. Rather, he reinterprets universality as a site of multiple significations which concern not the singular truths of classical philosophy but the irreducibly plural standpoints of democratic politics. Even those who want nothing to do with this or any universal, says Laclau, can never quite escape the pull of its orbit. (1998: 8)[124]

Universalism, consequently, is not an essence but a political process that stems from the dialogic encounter of different particulars. The conception of politics that Laclau defends is different from strategic essentialism,[125] since, unlike the latter, the hegemonic relationships explained by Laclau are not grounded upon questions of identity in order to be politically articulated. The philosopher himself distances his project from strategic essentialism, explaining that:

> For a variety of reasons, I am not entirely satisfied with it, but it has the advantage of bringing to the fore the antinomic alternatives to which we have been referring and the need for a politically negotiated equilibrium between them. 'Essentialism' alludes to a

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[123] See page 155 in this chapter.

[124] The pagination of Zerilli's citations from Laclau's *Emancipation(s)* in this quote corresponds to the same edition of the text used in this dissertation and included in the Bibliography section.

[125] The phrase "strategic essentialism" was coined by postcolonial theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in the 1980s, in order to defend a provisional acceptance of 'essentialist' positions or identities (e.g., 'woman', 'gay', 'black', etc.) in order to engage in social and political action through the strategic politization of that particular identities. This position, as Nora Sternfeld claims, enabled the preservation of possibilities for political action in face of poststructuralism's deconstruction of identities. Nonetheless, already in the early 1990s, Spivak herself abandoned 'strategic essentialism' for a historicist analysis of subjectivity and political agency, claiming that her interests had developed in the direction of analyzing the interconnectedness and differences "among these so-called essences in various cultural inscriptions" (Spivak, in Spivak, Danius, and Jonsson 1993: 35). See sections 3 and 4 in this chapter.

strong identity politics, without which there can be no bases for political calculation and action. But that essentialism is only strategic – that is it points, at the very moment of its constitution, to its own contingency and its own limits. (1996: 51)

Despite her general appraisal of Laclau's articulation of universalism, Linda M. G. Zerilli has pointed out the fact that Laclau's concept of the empty signifier can be misleading to a certain extent, since "it is not always clear what the place of the particular is, finally, in the empty signifier. Is this particular overcome, left behind, transformed? Is the empty signifier, strictly speaking, empty?" (1998: 14). As a matter of fact, Laclau does claim that the universal is indeed empty; that it cannot be predicted in advance because it needs to be the result of the hegemonic operation that allows different particularisms to temporarily occupy the place of the universal, and negotiate this place with other particulars to which they are united in the relationship of equivalence. This equivalential relationship does not authorize all worldviews or particulars as equally valid, however. Zerilli notes how it is indeed a delicate matter to provide an answer to the question of why "not all claims to the universal are equally authorized; why the claims of some groups to represent the whole carry more cultural weight than those of other groups" (14), without seeming to fall into the paradox of restricting the very democracy we claim to be defending in our defense of universalism. And yet it seems so obvious that certain individuals and communities constituted upon, and defending, racist, sexist, homophobic, cultural supremacist, imperialist, colonialist, even genocidal agendas, in the name of racial/religious 'purity' or even of nationalism and the nation, should be rejected in the construction of universalism. Crucial to give an answer to this question are the arguments on ethics by thinkers such as Hannah Arendt, Judith Butler, or Emmanuel Levinas, which I have analyzed in previous sections of this chapter, and which vindicate the need to develop ethical interpersonal relationships that are based on the respect for the plurality of humanity and on the

mutual interconnection and responsibility of human beings for one another, both close and distant. To this exploration of the possibilities, challenges, limitations, and problems of democracy and universalism, Herman Melville's 'divings'[126] are valuable, as Chapter Two shall analyze.

Politics and ethics may be inseparable in the construction of democracy, in the same way that, as I have claimed, the universal and the particular are indissociable. The task of moving away from segregationism and individualism into intersubjectivity and universalism is not an easy one, yet this is no reason why the project should be abandoned. In this chapter, I have claimed for the potentiality of intersubjectivity to the creation of more democratic human relationships. These may break through individual and community-based boundaries and, thus, enable the construction of universalist politics and ethics. My conception of the 'universal', therefore, is not that of a utopian ideal but of a dynamic process. The intersubjective universalism articulated in this chapter may be generated –or destroyed– interpersonally (the interpersonal is political, I have remarked), as Melville reflects, at the level where individuals (themselves representatives of both the particular and the global) engage in –or prevent– the creation of democratic human relationships that may transcend the walls separating human beings. This dialogic process, I have argued, may have a transformative potential upon human relationships and human thinking: it may enable human beings to perceive their plurality and interconnection beyond the rigid parameters through which they conceive their identities and relationship with others, as well as contribute to the

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[126] The word 'divings' evokes Melville's own when, in a letter to Evert Duyckinck on 3 March 1949, writing about Ralph Waldo Emerson, the author declared: "I love all men who *dive*. Any fish can swim near the surface, but it takes a great whale to go down stairs five miles or more; & if he don't attain the bottom, why, all the lead in Galena can't fashion the plummet that will. I'm not talking of Mr Emerson now—but of the whole corps of thought-divers, that have been diving & coming up again with blood-shot eyes since the world began" (*Correspondence* 121). Art, as Shirley M. Dettlaff states, provides a vehicle for such 'divings', which produce pain (the "blood-shot eyes" Melville emphasizes in his letter): "art stimulates the imagination to begin and continue a lifelong search for truths which are painful as well as elusive" (Dettlaff 1982: 226).

development of plural thinking which may transcend egocentric behaviors and one-sided worldviews. The politics of intersubjective universalism, thus, lies on the democratization of human relationships and thinking, cutting through the "intervening hedge[s]" dividing human beings (Melville, "Hawthorne and His Mosses" 48), and remaining critical of present political systems of injustice, and of oppressing social structures, from a global perspective. If, as Levinas claims, morality is innate and pre-exists human beings, we have no choice to renounce our obligations to others. Despite the difficulty of the task, thus, we cannot renounce it: "It is not incumbent upon you to complete the work; yet you are not free to desist from it" (Rabi Tarbon, qtd. in Cohen 2006: xxxviii).

This first chapter has articulated, from a theoretical perspective, a conception of a plural and decentralized universalism the necessity of which, I claim, Herman Melville defended and expressed in his works. Melville's 17,863 line-long *Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land* (1876), in particular, as the next chapter shall analyze, points toward the potentiality of intersubjective universalism to the development of more democratic human relationships and thinking parameters in the midst of a context of communitarian segregation, inter-human divisions and egocentrisms. Placing the action in the mythical land of Palestine and the city of Jerusalem, which the poem portrays as lands of divisions and segregation, and in which –I claim– it is possible to find ressonances of postbellum United States (the period during which Melville was engaged in the writing of the poem), *Clarel* creates a context that serves the purpose of, on the one hand, analyzing segregationism, and, on the other hand, investigating the necessity, yet difficulty to, transcend such inter-human divisions. In the next chapter, I expose my interpretation of *Clarel* as a universalist poem which analyzes the necessity and potentiality of intersubjective universalism, and, at the same time, the difficulties

preventing its realization. This universalist project, both political and ethical, as I have argued, moves beyond cosmopolitan or internationalist claims for affiliation with 'the world' which yet continue to be deeply embedded in nationalist bounds. *Clarel* analyzes the "intervening hedge[s]" –or interpersonal walls– that prevent individuals from realizing the "wide landscape beyond" their particular mindsets and personal adherences ("Hawthorne and His Mosses" 1850: 48), that is, their universal belonging to a human race. *Clarel*, I aim to demonstrate in the next chapter, locates the possibility of universalism in the possibility of intersubjectivity, analyzing how interpersonal relationships may have democratizing effects upon human thinking, which may pragmatically translate in more democratic ways of conceiving human subjectivity and human relationships beyond the walls of individualism and traditional communities built upon 'race', ethnicity, culture, religious belief, nation, sexuality, etc. Yet, at the same time, I will analyze, the poem expresses a lament at how human beings –in whose hearts "Evil and good […] braided play" [*Clarel* 4.4.27]– neutralize such democratic project, choosing instead to remain locked within their selfish natures and one-sided thinking parameters. In *Clarel*, thus, Melville points to the possibilities 'beyond the walls' as he articulates a waling for how such potentiality is aborted.

"'And whose the eye that sees aright,

If any?' Clarel eager asked.

Aside Rolfe turned as overtasked;

And none responded." (Herman Melville, *Clarel* 1876: 2.22.129-132)

"Slowly crossing the deck from the scuttle, Ahab leaned over the side, and watched how his shadow in the water sank and sank to his gaze, the more and the more than he strove to pierce the profundity. But the lovely aromas in that enchanted air did at last seem to dispel, for a moment, the cankerous thing in his soul. That glad, happy air, that winsome sky, did at last stroke and caress him; the step-mother world, so long cruel—forbidding—now threw affectionate arms round his stubborn neck, and did seem to joyously sob over him, as if over one, that however willful and erring, she could yet find it in her heart to save and to bless. From beneath his slouched hat Ahab dropped a tear into the sea; nor did all the Pacific contain such wealth as that one wee drop."(Melville, *Moby-Dick* 1850: 475)

"His soul's ship foresaw the inevitable rocks, but resolved to sail on, and make a courageous wreck. […] With the soul of an Atheist, he wrote down the godliest things; with the feeling of misery and death in him, he created forms of gladness and life. For the pangs in his heart, he put down hoots on the paper. […] For the more and the more that he wrote, and the deeper and the deeper that he dived, Pierre saw the everlasting elusiveness of Truth; the universal lurking insincerity of even the greatest and purest written thoughts." (Herman Melville, *Pierre* 1852: 393)

CHAPTER TWO. TRANSCENDING THE LIMITS OF ONE-SIDED

IMAGINATIONS: INTERSUBJECTIVE UNIVERSALISM IN HERMAN

MELVILLE'S *CLAREL: A POEM AND PILGRIMAGE IN THE HOLY LAND*

(1876)

1. Introduction: "Beyond the Walls", "Without the Walls". *Clarel*, Intersubjectivity, and Universalism[127]

> "Men seek one another in their incondition of strangers. No one is at home. The memory of that servitude assembles humanity."
> (Emmanuel Levinas, *Humanism of the Other* 1972: 66)

> "There, still sensitive,
> Our human nature, deep inurned
> In voiceless visagelessness, yearned."

> "Lay flat the walls, let in the air."

> "Sects—sects bisected—sects disbanded."

> (Herman Melville, *Clarel* 1.26.6-9; 2.20.90; 2.25.103)[128]

After visiting Celio's grave in the Mounds up on Mount Zion, Clarel re-enters the city of Jerusalem before the gates close at sunset.[129] Having departed from his recently met traveling companions Nehemiah, Rolfe, and Vine at the entrance,[130] the young student reaches the top of the city's wall, getting from there an aerial view of a wagon train just arrived in Jerusalem. Clarel observes some of the passengers coming out of the train: two barefooted and humbly-dressed men –the face of one of whom looks to Clarel like "The visage of a doom-struck man / Not idly seeking holy ground" (*Clarel* 1.41.14-15)–

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[127] The two phrases I use in the title of this section are Melville's: "Beyond the Walls" is the title of canto 1.7 in *Clarel*, while "without the walls" is a phrase Melville uses to describe his routine in Jerusalem in his 1856-57 journal (*Journals* 1989: 86).

[128] All references to *Clarel* are to the Northwestern-Newberry edition of the poem (1991).

[129] The episode narrated here corresponds to canto 1.41 "On the Wall".

[130] Melville uses the word 'port', etymologically meaning 'entrance, passage'.

warmly welcomed by a group of Greeks; a laic Latin votarist "Sharing the peace of eventide / In frame devout" (1.41.32-33) who receives the curious gazes of the people he passes by as he enters the city; a group of Nazarene Jews; a Russian woman and her husband. Looking at the strangers, Clarel notes how "Like envoys from all Adam's race, / Mixed men of various nations pace, / Such as in crowded steamer come / And disembark at Jaffa's stair" (1.41.48-51). Like the ancient port of Jaffa, which has for centuries received the restless bodies and spirits of thousands of pilgrims and travelers –among whom was Melville himself twenty years before the publication of *Clarel*[131]–, Jerusalem is the mystical 'home' where an assorted variety of humanity gathers, and which means differently to each human being who sets foot in it. Clarel does not know how to interpret these newcomers: they may be devout believers, "rationalists" (1.41.59), or something else, he speculates; but his efforts to individualize each of these passengers with his description prevent the strangers from becoming indistinguishable in a uniform human mass, and at the same time allow them to preserve their ties to the human lot (and, therefore, though unaware, among themselves as they get off the train). In works such as *Moby-Dick*, Melville had already warned about the dangers of universalizing movements that absorb plurality within a whole, often expressing his consciousness of humanity and a conception of the earth's place within the universe that might be termed planetary: "Seat thyself sultanically among the moons of Saturn, and take high abstracted man alone; and he seems a wonder, a grandeur, and a woe. But from the same point, take mankind in mass, and for the most part, they seem a mob of unnecessary duplicates, both contemporary and hereditary" (*Moby-Dick* 1851: 408). At the same time, the writer had also toiled to individualize his characters and thus prevent them from being 'lost' within the human mass: "But most humble though he was, and

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[131] Melville visited Palestine in 1857, arriving in Jaffa on January 6. See Section 2.2.1 in this chapter.

far from furnishing an example of the high, humane abstraction; the Pequod's carpenter was no duplicate; hence, he now comes in person on this stage" (408). After the last new-comer enters Jerusalem the gate shuts,[132] enclosing the city and separating it from the 'wilderness' outside. Rolfe marks these inside/outside boundaries by hurrying his fellow travelers to get in before the gate closes: "Come, move we ere the gate they quit, / And we be shut out here with these / Who never shall re-enter it" (*Clarel* 1.40.80-82).[133]

Visions of 'human tides' are recurrent in *Clarel*; yet, rather than neutralizing human diversity and absorbing the individual within the 'mass', the poem is remarkable in its respect for human plurality and its efforts to individualize without objectifying, signaling that no human being or literary character can be fully 'known' or 'narrated'. Aware that "The books, the books not all have told" (1.1.83), the young Clarel is made to roam amidst humanity, and it will be this roving that shall enable the character's

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[132] 'Shut' is the verb Melville uses in the poem, as opposed to 'closes', for example, perhaps aiming to connote a more violent and abrupt sense of the act of closing and separation he describes, for the preposition in the title of the canto "On the Wall" attributes to it a double meaning, each of which generates a different protagonist to this particular canto: on the one hand, referring to Clarel's location 'on top of' the wall, from which he observes the new-comers, and on the other hand, making the wall the central subject.

[133] It is interesting to anticipate here the sequential juxtaposition of cantos 1.38 "The Sparrow", 1.39 "Clarel and Ruth", 1.40 "The Mounds", and 1.41 "On the Wall". While "The Sparrow" (1.38) describes a particular sparrow that is grieving the loss of its friend, and whose "lonely cry / No answer gets" (1.38.24-25), "Clarel and Ruth" (1.39) narrates the redeeming power that the young Clarel has upon Ruth and her mother's grief, and "The Mounds" (1.40) portrays both Celio's and Clarel's (both characters, sparrow-like loners) separate yearnings for a mate. The final canto in this sequence, "On the Wall", restores the boundaries or 'walls' that had been crossed in the previous cantos, through the literal closing of the connecting gates. Rolfe's words at the end of this last canto, I believe, may well be interpreted in a more global light. While his words literally distinguish the world of the living and the dead (the Mounds is the cemetery outside Jerusalem's walls), the inside and outside created by the city's walls also separate Jerusalem and its population from neighboring strangers outside the walls (Arabs, Bedouins) who are conceived as threatening by the city-dwellers. In a surprisingly and painful actuality to twenty-first century readers of the poem, the walls Rolfe marks in this passage would become even higher, and the gates locked, in contemporary Israel, as certain population groups would for decades be banned from entering Jerusalem or other cities in the country, as well as forbidden free circulation in the state of Israel. Thus, even though some of the walls have been physically displaced, others have been built; walls have expanded in extension, and the locks in their gates have become fortified. As Basem Ra'ad would claim in his opening remarks to the Seventh International Melville Conference "Melville and the Mediterranean", held in East Jerusalem in June 2009, *Clarel* dramatizes the dangers of religious fundamentalism, and […] anticipates the difficulties of the present" (qtd. in Obenzinger 2010: 37). The 'Holy Land' divided by hatred and fear today is, thus, much anticipated by Herman Melville's 1876 poem.

eventual maturation, a process that comes from the very unlearning[134] fostered by the pilgrimage and, above all, from Clarel's hopeful eventual understanding of the universal interconnectedness of human life and suffering. The interpretation of *Clarel* as a universalist poem that this dissertation defends is based on the premise that the text underlines the real, and complex, universal interconnection of human beings, trespassing and breaking through the walls that separate them, and moving beyond notions of community such as 'race', religion, or nation, yet without falling into a homogenizing universalism (what I referred to in Chapter One as 'traditional universalism') or upholding a uniform vision of 'world community' rooted in an essentialist view of 'humanity'. *Clarel* warns against discourses that segregate human beings into identity-based groups or communities, emphasizing that these create "intervening hedge[s]" ("Hawthorne and His Mosses" 1850: 48) that make individuals oblivious of their real interconnection, and perpetuate one-sided thinking. In *Clarel*, Melville also denounces communitarianism for establishing 'walls' that keep human beings apart in its creation of 'inside' and 'outside' forms of (non-)belonging, generation of 'foreign' and 'alien' human elements, and blocking off of the potential development of interpersonal relationships and communicative encounters. Exposing these interpersonal walls, *Clarel* points toward their necessary transcendence, incorporating not only the characters but the readers themselves in the pilgrimage the poem creates.[135] The poem also provides a model figure that is able to push through the barriers of the mind: the 'manysided'[136] Rolfe. And, above all, the poem reveals the incapacity of

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[134] In his report on the Seveth International Melville Conference "Melville and the Mediterranean" (Jerusalem, June 2007), Hilton Obenzinger quotes Basem Ra'ad's consideration of *Clarel* as an "anti-pilgrimage in which the main character is de-indoctrinated out of dominant, Protestant religious thinking about the 'Holy Land'" (Obenzinger 2010: 37).

[135] See Section 3.2 in this chapter.

[136] As I noted earlier, Melville uses the term "Manysidedness" (*Clarel* 3.16.236) in reference to Rolfe.

breathing within walls that block the circulation of air. *Clarel* successfully moves "without the walls" it critically portrays despite the generalized incapacity of characters to transcend them. Melville himself would write in his 1856-57 journal an entry that, I believe, is representative of the universalist project I conceive in *Clarel* and which this chapter shall analyze:

> In pursuance of my object, the saturation of my mind with the atmosphere of Jerusalem, offering myself up a passive subject, and no unwilling one, to its weird impressions, I always rose at dawn & walked *without the walls*. Nor so far as escaping the pent-up air within was concerned was I singular here. For daily I could not but be stuck by the clusters of the townspeople reposing along the arches near the Jaffa Gate where it looks down into the vale of Gihon […]. *They too seemed to feel the insalubriousness of so small a city pent in by lofty walls obstructing ventilation, postponing the morning & hasting the unwholesome twilight. And they too seemed to share my impatience were it only at this arbitrary limitation & prescription of things.* — I would stroll to Mount Zion, along the terraced walks, & survey the tomb stones of the hostile Armenians, Latins, Greeks, all sleeping together. — I looked along the hill side of Gihon over against me, and watched the precipitation of the solemn shadows of the city towers flung far down to the haunted bottom of the hid pool of Gihon, and higher up the darkened valley my eye rested on the cliff-girt basin, *haggard with riven old olives*, where the angel of the Lord smote the army of Sennacherib. And smote by the morning, I saw the reddish soul of Aceldema, confessing its inexpiable guilt by deeper eyes. On the Hill of Evil Counsel, I saw the ruined villa of the High Priest where tradition says the death of Christ was plotted, and the feild [sic.] where when all was over the traitor Judas hung himself. (*Journals* 1989: 87, my italics)

Melville's revulsion of walls in the previous passage is evident, and I believe these walls may importantly be read not only as the physical walls of Jerusalem but also as representative of the walls separating human beings and of which the author makes "the deicide town" (4.29.127) symbolic. As he does in his literary works, Melville radically transcends the walls in this passage; he rises and walks "without the walls"[137] "in pursuance of my object" in order to get rid of the oppressing feeling of saturation.

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[137] A double meaning of the preposition 'without' may also be possible here, since not only does 'without' mean 'outside' (Melville seeks the space outside the city's walls) but also 'not having' (Melville's thinking breaks through interpersonal walls). I am grateful to Dr. Timothy Marr (University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill) for calling my attention to this double meaning and to Melville's use of the phrase in this passage.

Equally interesting is his sensibility that he is not "singular" in this necessity to break free from the sickening air generated by walls; Melville realizes that "clusters of townspeople" also seek for gates or openings: "They too seemed to feel the insalubriousness" and "they too seemed to share my impatience at this arbitrary limitation & prescription of things". Melville transcends such "arbitrary limitation[s]" and "prescription[s]": he goes to Mount Zion only to find a space of freedom where individuals belonging to confronted religious congregations in life are "all sleeping together" in death. The shadow of the walls and towers continues to follow Melville in his wanderings without the walled Jerusalem, the "riven old olives" the author describes in this entry apparently evocative of the segregationism and divisions imposed by the walls that so much suffocate him. It is not accidental that the view of the valley awakes in Melville reminiscences of Judas's betrayal of Jesus (i.e., an instance of human beings' destruction of their possibility of salvation). This final biblical reference stresses the (self-)destructive[138] evil which neutralizes goodness in the human heart. The reference emphasizes, in my opinion, the inevitable interlacing of good and evil as inherent in the human condition, and exposes how the most negative side of human nature thwarts its positive potentiality, thus forever "postpon[ing] the morning & hast[ing] the unwholesome twilight". The previous entry of Melville's journal, I think, expresses in a remarkable way the universalist project this dissertation interprets in the 1876 *Clarel*.

Human tides also flood the Holy Sepulcher. Visiting the sacred Christian site, Clarel contemplates "Strangers […] of each degree" (1.5.13), and observes the ceremonial rites of the different "tribes and sects"[139] (Georgian, Maronite, Armenian, Greek, Latin, Abyssinian, etc.) trying to interpret some of these strangers' emotive

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[138] Judas is not only responsible for Jesus's death (the death of the possibility of human salvation) but also kills himself.

[139] I am referring here to the canto with this very title, number 1.6.

responses to the revered spot: "And each face was a book / Of disappointment. 'Why weep'st thou? / Whom seekest?'—words, which chanceful now / Recalled by Clarel, he applied / To these before him" (1.5.99-103). While Clarel reads disappointment in these anonymous faces, he nevertheless cannot know the reasons behind these individuals' disappointments, not to mention that, apart from being as plural as the individuals who experience them, such 'disappointments' are, of course, Clarel's interpretation. This already anticipates a recurrent concern in Melville's literary production, of which *Clarel* is not an exception: i.e., the impossibility of monolithic 'Meaning' and the incapacity to 'know' or 'narrate' the other. Melville was well-aware that each attempt to 'know' the other, to explain or capture a life or personality in words, or to 'grasp' a certain reality, will always inevitably constitute a partial interpretation of that individual or of that individual's reality. As the narrator reminds us in *The Confidence-Man*: "[…] no one man's experience can be coextensive with *what is*" (1857: 914). The narrator in *Billy Budd, Sailor* (left unfinished at Melville's death in 1891, and published posthumously in 1924) poignantly poses a similar question: "And what could Billy know of man except of man as a mere sailor?", adding that "innocence was his [Billy's] blinder" (484, 485): "Billy was like a young horse fresh from the pasture suddenly inhaling a vile whiff from some chemical factory, and by repeated snortings trying to get it out of his nostrils and lungs" (482). Melville is aware of the complexities of his very characters or literary individuals which live in the words that embody them, and which he develops with utter respect; his literary works becoming, in my opinion, 'inscriptions' to personalities that, the creator is aware, will always resist being fixed in language. As Babbalanja remarks in *Mardi* (1849): man has not "shown himself yet; for the entire merit of a man can never be made known; nor the sum of its demerits, if he have them. We are only known by our names; as letters sealed up, we but read each

other's superscription" (1051). We may never *know* others, yet this awareness should not stop us from regarding those with whom we share the earth with interest and respect. Leaving the sepulcher, Clarel remembers the fights between many of these different religious communities (and the nation-states behind them) for the sites they consider sacred in Jerusalem, wondering if it "Was feud the heritage He left?" (*Clarel* 1.6.41). The following canto (1.7) is significantly entitled "Beyond the Walls", a phrase which, in the same way as "On the Wall" and "without the walls", I believe, is deliberately ambiguous if not symbolic.[140]

Scholars such as Amy Kaplan (2010) have valued Melville's literary works as spaces that both represent and imagine ways of relating and collectivities that transcend national modes of belonging nurtured by oppressive power mechanisms, and which are sustained by economic interests and enforced by assimilatory, homogenizing, tendencies. I agree with Kaplan that Melville's works constitute spaces for the envisioning, exploration, and testing, of new socialities and human bonds that move beyond traditional communitarian ways of belonging posing inter-personal barriers. Conceived as a whole, Melville's literary production criticizes monolithic conceptions of knowledge and one-sided visions of reality and humanity, at the same time that it

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[140] This canto, 1.7, describes the space outside the limits of Jerusalem; yet, in my opinion, it also points to a reality or way of thinking beyond wall-reinforcing communitarianism. It is in this canto that the young Clarel expresses his yearning for a companion, "Some stranger of a lore replete" who "Would question me, expound and prove, And make my heart to burn with love—" (1.7.47, 50-51). Ironically, however, it is Nehemiah, an Evangelical good-willed simpleton who is unable to see beyond his religious conception of the world, who answers Clarel's longings. Joseph G. Knapp also notes that it is only when Clarel leaves the stony walls of Jerusalem that he can meet Nehemiah, his fellow traveler and particular 'guide', and Celio, whom Clarel conceives as his second self (1971: 29). As a matter of fact, it is significant that in 1.41. "On the Wall", Clarel eventually aborts the possibility of an interpersonal friendship with Celio in answer to the latter's yearnings, thus erecting an interpersonal wall which increases Celio's aloneness and desperation and precipitates his death.

proposes more fluid, plural, and democratic forms of thinking.[141] Hilton Obenzinger

also describes Melville's works as

> set[tting] up speculative situations with some creature, person, process, idea, or place
> that cannot easily be digested or explained or contained. The reader then contemplates
> the possibilities and impossibilities of these situations, and the inadequacies of all
> perception and representation, while the narrative pushes the reader to dive even
> deeper into self-reflective thought despite constant uncertainty and doubt. (2006: 181)

In *Clarel*, it is, as the present chapter will argue, at the intersubjective level that Melville

locates the possibility of creating universalism, through a dynamic dialogic process that

is constructed interpersonally, and which has the potentiality to transcend the walls that

human beings create, or are taught to believe as 'naturally' existing, between them.

Intersubjectivity is, I contend, presented in *Clarel* –as in so many others of Melville's

works[142]– as a force without which neither 'walls' may be trespassed nor monolithic

–often monomaniac–[143] conceptions of the world challenged. In the fictional world

created by the poem (as in real life), it is at the interpersonal level that characters (like

people) come together with one another and negotiate mutual understanding and

personal views in a dialogic process through which they may trespass the boundaries

between individual selves and communitarian forms of belonging, the 'I' and the 'you',

the particular and the global, 'here' and 'there'. This dialogic, interpersonal process may

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[141] Kaplan claims that *Clarel*, in particular, places in tension two modes of historical knowledge which are reflected in the understanding of the landscape as well: "One is vertical, […] representing the buried striations of violent historical chance, and the other is a horizontal axis through which multiple peoples circulate and exchange language, customs, and culture" (50).

[142] I will analyze intersubjective universalism in Melville's oeuvre in Section 3.7.1 in this chapter. As has already been pointed out in Chapter One (see 8.1), an example of Melvillean intersubjectivity, and of its democratizing potential, is Ishmael and Queequeg's 'bosom-friendship' in *Moby-Dick* (1851).

[143] The term 'monomania' is used twice in *Clarel* (by Ungar), and it finds clear precedents in other Melvillean works such as *Moby-Dick*, for example, where 'monomania' is applied to Ahab's obsession for the white whale, or *Mardi*, as applied to King Media. Over the nineteenth century, the term became popular in psychiatric discourse, to the extent that, as noted by the American Psychiatric Association, by 1880, monomania had been recognized as a category of mental illness (2000: xxv). My use of the term 'monomania' here intends to denote the attitude of clinging to a monolithic conception of the world and humanity, which reinforces one-sided, hierarchical, and therefore oppressive thinking, and perpetuates the rejection of the views of others in believing one's own superior.

have a democratizing political and ethical potential: it may enable the development of interpersonal bonds that cut through these inter-personal walls, and encourage those who come together to step out of their individual or collective types of egocentrisms becoming aware that 'you' is always an 'I', 'elsewhere' always a 'here', a 'past' or 'future' always a 'present'. *Clarel* reflects, creates, and analyzes this decentralized, plural universalism,[144] eliciting and constructing plural thinking through a process of character construction, dialogue and active exploration of meanings in which it invites readers to become critical participants, and presenting readers with a view of the world that conceives existence as both connecting human beings and allowing them to emerge as different individuals. Melville's universalist conception of the world, as expressed in *Clarel*, includes no foreign elements but human beings who are strangers to –and estranged from, due to their unawareness of their mutual connectedness– one another. *Clarel* points at intersubjective universalism as a possibility to bring these individuals to feel "less strange […], / less distant" (1.40.30-31), yet portrays how characters neutralize this possibility, at the same time.

Clarel resists monolithic meanings, and constructs plural thinking by placing a number of perspectives in dialogue and under critical evaluation, at the same time that the poem pictures the failure of most of its characters to embrace such dialogic disposition and manysided thinking. According to William Potter, "Melville was able to create a mercurial narrative in *Clarel* that constantly shifts focus and perspective, allowing a rich texture of disparate ideas, voices, and points of view—what Robert Penn Warren calls 'the shifting chiaroscuro of beliefs and doctrines presented in the

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[144] As has been noted in the analysis of Laclau's articulation of universalism in Chapter One (see Section 8.3), the 'universal' is not an essence to be reached but an impossible totality. In the same way as 'Meaning', therefore, the universal is forever imperfect as it will always be decentralized and split into as many interpretations of reality as human beings are on earth and will continue coming to form part of humanity.

poem'" (2004: 14-15). Similarly, Stan Goldman has also noted how *Clarel* "offers not a single answer but a combination of answers in dialogical relationship to each other" (1993: 17), all of which are submitted to evaluation and problematized in their (in)capacity as fix 'Meanings', for, as John Seelye has remarked, "Truth, for Melville, is a question, not an answer" (1970: 10). Using Bakhtinian terminology, *Clarel* would, thus, be a 'dialogic' poem, since it seems to fit the definition of a truly dialogic text:

> It is constructed not as the whole of a single consciousness, absorbing other consciousnesses as objects into itself, but as […] the interaction of several consciousnesses, none of which entirely becomes an object for the other; this interaction provides no support for the viewer who would objectify an entire event according to some ordinary monologic category (thematically, lyrically or cognitively) – and this consequently makes the viewer also a participant. […] everything in the novel is structured to make dialogic opposition inescapable. […] this means a new authorial position is won and conquered, one located above the monologic position. (Bakhtin 1963: 18)

This way, the poem itself emerges as a dialogic space or meeting ground (as in Hannah Arendt's image of the table that both unites and separates the people sitting around it)[145] for a great variety of characters, representative of "all kinds of that multiform pilgrim species, man" (*The Confidence-Man* 1857: 848), to discuss together their individual views of the world and personal interpretations in relation to a number of concerns that arise throughout their, both personal and collective, journey(s). *Clarel* gives expression to characters who are, in some way or another, exiles, rejected, outcasts, and political or social castaways, and who get together in Jerusalem/Palestine in their (in)condition of estrangement, unhomeliness,[146] and even homelessness, federating what scholars such

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[145] See Arendt's *The Human Condition* 1958: 53.

[146] My use of the term 'unhomeliness' here and in other sections in this dissertation corresponds to Homi Bhabha's theorization of unhomeliness as a estrangement of/from 'home' which, Bhabha claims, "is the condition of extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiation. […] In that displacement, the borders between home and the world become confused; and, uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting" (1994: 9). Unhomeliness, therefore, enables a capacity for a person to "step outside [of] him/herself" (3)

as C.L.R. James (1953) or Timothy Marr (2005) have named a crew of literary castaways or, in Melville's own words, of "ragged citizen[s] of this universal nation" ("Charles's Isle and the Dog-King" 1856: 125). Juxtaposed to one another, characters in *Clarel*, and the worldviews they represent, are incorporated into a dynamic dialogue by which they can express their individuality. Each worldview and interpretation of reality is, thus, placed in conversation with others and submitted to evaluation throughout the dialogic process. In a typically Melvillean fashion, *Clarel*'s critical and dialogic nature resists monolithic 'Meanings' since meaning, as Ishmael would mark on "the great Leviathan" in *Moby-Dick*, is forever "unpainted to the last" (1851: 240). Here comes to mind Amy Kaplan's affirmation that "Melville exposes the incompleteness of systems and single sources of knowledge", together with the ways in which knowledge travels transnationally (2010: 43) and, I believe, also intersubjectively. Through this dialogic exercise in plural thinking, in which diverse textually available interpretations of humanity and the world are invited to participate, Melville, most importantly, denounces monologic conclusions, forced silences, and one-sided thinking. The intersubjective universalism which, this chapter will claim, Melville constructs in *Clarel* is not something that 'is' or a 'totality' to be ultimately achieved, but a potentially political process that is constructed (or arrested) in interpersonal communicative encounters. This process may have a democratizing impact upon the consciousness of readers who have learned –or *un*learnerd– from it, which may translate in more democratic ways of conceiving human relationships based on human beings' awarenesses and understandings of their bonds to other human beings beyond the

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or to "dwell 'in the beyond'" (7), which produces a displacement or dislocation (personal, cultural, historical, social), which might be disorienting, even painful, yet also empowering precisely due to the radical transformations that the subject who experiences unhomeliness may undergo and the critical distance s/he may acquire in the process.

'walls' that separate them, and, thus, help rid their minds from totalizing, one-sided ways of thinking and self-centered ways of relating.

Nevertheless, at the same time that it reflects the potentiality of intersubjectivity for the construction of universalism, *Clarel* also portrays how most characters in the poem abort the communicative possibilities of intersubjectivity and dialogue with other characters, and therefore prevent the development of universalism. In *Clarel*, thus, the possibility of intersubjective universalism clashes directly with the multiple walls –physical (Jerusalem is a walled city with separate neighborhoods), individual, and inter-communitarian– that the poem makes evident, and which characters not only are unwilling to transcend but contribute to perpetuate. These walls not only segregate the land of Palestine into confronted communities and individuals –a context which, I argue, may be read as bearing resonances of postbellum United States in the 1870s–, but also block the possibilities of intersubjective communication either before dialogue is born or through ego-centric monologues that do not regard the opinions of others. These contrary forces, the potentially democratizing possibility of intersubjective universalism, on the one hand, and the neutralization of such potentiality on the part of characters who are unwilling to transcend their individualities or communitarian affiliations and trespass their one-sided type of thinking, on the other hand, coexist in the poem. However, it is my belief that the incapacity of characters to participate in the construction of the universalism that the poem generates neutralizes neither the democratizing exercise in plural thinking that *Clarel* encourages (and itself creates) nor the democratizing potentiality that Melville attributes to such political process. The political and ethical potential of Melville's universalist project remains latent in the text, in what seems a throbbing heartfelt authorial awareness that "Being human, we can neither fulfill the hope nor cease hoping" (Bauman, *Community* 2001: 5). Despite this

pessimistic dose of realism, which refuses to fall into the nihilism of some of the characters the poem portrays,[147] *Clarel*, as the present chapter analyzes, contributes to the hope.

The aim of the present chapter is to analyze the politics of intersubjective universalism in Herman Melville's *Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land*. Before studying the political dimension of the poem, however, I find it necessary to examine the material conditions in which *Clarel* came to being and historicize the political project I shall analyze in Section 3, by connecting the poem to the particular context of postbellum America and of the U.S. Centennial.

2. Earning and Diving: Customs House Inspector and *Clarel* Writer

> "As to what kind of work I'm doing now, I'm trying to write, and this is a hell of a task."
> (Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "An Interview with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak" 1993: 33)

> "One wants to tell a story, like Scheherezade, in order not to die. It's one of the oldest urges in mankind. It's a way of stalling death."
> (Carlos Fuentes, qtd. in Stanton and Stanton 2003: 77)

> "Remaineth to me what? the pen?
> Dead feather of ethereal life!
> Nor efficacious much, save when
> It makes some fallacy more rife."

> "Hired band
> Of laureates of man's fallen tribe—
> Slaves are ye, slaves beyond the scribe
> Of Nero"
> (Herman Melville, *Clarel* 1876: 1.12.87-90; 2.3.165-168)

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[147] *Clarel* portrays a series of dark monomaniacs who remain trapped by their gloomy pessimism and fall into (self-)destructive conceptions of the world. See subsection "iii" in "b" within Section 3.7.3 in this chapter.

"Melville could not keep from writing. He was not compulsive about it; he did not have to do it every waking hour or every day. Nor was he a spontaneous writer, who never had a block and could let it all just flow. Writing did not come easily, but he had to do it" (Bryant, "A Writer in Process" 2001: xvii). *Clarel* is a surviving proof that Melville *had* to write and that he could not write "the *other* way" (letter to Hawthorne, [1?] June 1851, *Correspondence* 191).[148] Ten years elapsed between the publication of *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War* in 1866 and that of *Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land* in 1876, a period marked by certain experiences in Melville's life that would influence the composition of the latter. William Potter has stated that *Clarel* demanded greater time and effort than Melville's other works (2004: xiii); the dedication, time and energies the poet invested in the creation of the 17,863 verses-long *Clarel* must have been large indeed. A contemporary review of the poem asserted that *Clarel* was a work of love.[149] I do not disagree with this review; yet, if *Clarel* was a work of love it was also a work of pain, in that it expresses a yearning for a project that Melville was well aware would possibly never materialize in a world of individualisms, egocentrisms, inter-personal walls, and separation. However, such realistic realization would not lead Melville to abandon the political project in which he had embarked since his earliest writings: the exploration of human connectedness and the democratic and democratizing potentiality of intersubjectivity; the analysis of the intertwinement of universalism and democracy, and of how human beings continuously abort the possibilities of togetherness and even of their own happiness. Melville pasted a strip of paper with the words "Keep true to the dreams of thy youth" to his writing desk, which was discovered at the moment of

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[148] In a letter to Nathaniel Hawthorne ([1 June?] 1851), Melville complains that "Dollars damn me; and the malicious Devil is forever grinning in upon me, holding the door ajar. My dear Sir, a presentiment is on me, — I shall at last be worn out and perish […]. What I feel most moved to write, that is banned, — it will not pay. Yet, altogether, write the *other* way I cannot. So the product is a final hash, and all my books are botches" (*Correspondence* 191).

[149] Chicago *Tribune* (1 July 1876), reprinted in Higgins and Parker 1995: 534.

his death in 1891.[150] Thought we cannot possibly know what those dreams were, Melville remained constant in his exploration of the (im)possibilities of intersubjective universalism to the development of more democratic human relationships throughout his oeuvre. An "ocean-waste / Of earnestness without a buoy" (Clarel 1.313.201-202), borrowing the author's own words describing Rolfe in *Clarel*, Melville would not abandon his commitment to the "great Art of Telling the Truth" ("Hawthorne and His Moses" 1850: 53), even though such earnestness would, in many cases, repel both contemporary readers and critics. Seeking a literary form that allowed him to reconcile his loyalty to honesty with his necessity to make a living by his writing, he rejected to follow his contemporary authors who sold themselves to the demands of the market and wrote in order to please the readership's desires for comfortable reading journeys. He would, in fact, criticize those writers through the infuriated words of Mortmain in *Clarel*: "Hired band / Of laureates of man's fallen tribe— / Slaves are ye, slaves beyond the scribe / Of Nero" (*Clarel* 1876: 2.3.165-168).

"Lord, when shall we be done growing?" (*Correspondence* 213), wrote Melville to fellow-writer and friend Nathaniel Hawthorne in November 1851, after the publication of *Moby-Dick*. Writing was a means of self-exploration to Melville, a process of self-development and growth. As John Bryant claims: "Often, Melville wrote to find out what he wanted to write about. He wrote in order to 'unfold,' as though the leaves he scrawled upon were the blank fabric of his being" ("A Writer in Process" 2001: xvii). The author himself would describe his creative maturation in another letter to Hawthorne:

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[150] This is explained by Melville's granddaughter Eleanor Metcalf in *Herman Melville: Cycle and Epicycle* (1953: 283-284). The sentence "Keep true to the dreams of thy youth" is a quote from eighteenth-century German writer and philosopher Johann Christoph Friedrich von Schiller (1759-1805).

> My development has been all within a few years past. I am like one of those seeds taken out of the Egyptian Pyramids, which, after being three thousand years a seed and nothing but a seed, being planted in English soil, it developed itself, grew to greenness, and then fell to mould. So I. Until I was twenty-five, I had no development at all. From my twenty-fifth year I date my life. Three weeks have scarcely passed, at any time between then and now, that I have not unfolded within myself. But I feel that I am now come to the inmost leaf of the bulb, and that shortly the flower must fall to the mould. ([1?] June 1851, *Correspondence* 193)

In Melville's extensive literary production, every work becomes a dialogic space where the author tests ideas and places opposing thoughts in conversation with one another in his fictional contexts. Melville's literary works, therefore, become diving spaces for the author as well as for the readers wishing to undertake the journey.[151] Melville was well aware that 'diving' produced pain (in the letter he sent to Evert A. Duyckinck on 3 March 1849, Melville notes that divers come back up to the surface "with blood-shot eyes" [*Correspondence* 121]), and that such pain might ultimately lead to dangerous extremes and self-destructive madnesses (characters such as Ahab in *Moby-Dick*, Pierre in *Pierre*, or Mortmain in *Clarel* are representative examples of this affirmation), yet he was also conscious of the intellectual poverty of those who, blinded by their respective one-sidednesses did not *dive* (King Media in *Mardi*; Delano in "Benito Cereno"; the lawyer in "Bartleby, the Scrivener"; Margoth, the Lesbian, perhaps also Derwent in *Clarel*; Vere in *Billy Budd, Sailor*). Melville would create in his works spaces for plural thinking which bring together in dialogue and place under evaluation a representative variety of worldviews and conceptions of humanity. As John Seelye claims, Melville was "an artist who regarded his art as a system of tensions produced by diagrammic contrasts, a symposium of opposed viewpoints" (1970: 137). *Clarel* constitutes one of such spaces, placing Melville in an intersubjective dialogue with his own, fragmented

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[151] The reference to 'diving' finds its origins in a letter to Evert A. Duyckinck, dated March 3, 1849, in which Melville wrote: 'I love all men who *dive*" (*Correspondence* 121). See footnote 126 on page 176.

self, and incorporating into the conversation multiple, often opposing, conceptions about humanity and the world, representative of the plurality of human beings. Yet if, on the one hand, *Clarel* is a private act of (self-)exploration, it also exposes a political project representative of the author's literary production as a whole. In this respect, the present chapter takes *Clarel* as continuing where the 1866 *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War* ends; that is, as engaging in the arduous task of not only evaluating the United States that had emerged from the Civil War (1861-65) at the time of the Centennial anniversary of the nation,[152] and of connecting such 'local' evaluation to a more global examination of Western societies, but also of exploring the im/possibilities of democracy and universalism in a world of segregation and walls. Already at this point, the particular and the global lose their separation, the boundaries between the individual and the universal start to dissolve: Melville connects the particular (in this case, the specific context of postbellum America) to the global (the specific setting of the Holy Land, both a particular and global context, as I will later analyze), bringing to the conversation an assorted array of characters of varied ethnic, religious, and cultural backgrounds, whose voices blend in continuous debate –and fade away in meaningful silences– as they explore the different sociopolitical, racial, sexual, religious, ideological, inter-national, and personal, issues that emerge throughout the pilgrimage. All things combined make of *Clarel* a complex and demanding poem, overwhelming yet appealing precisely due to these complexities.

Robert Milder has stated that "[w]ith Melville, conjecture is indispensable if we are to have anything beyond the canon itself and a life of bare facts" (2006: xii).[153]

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[152] In 1876, the year Clarel was published, the United States was celebrating its Centennial anniversary. For an analysis of *Clarel* in connection with the Centennial see Section 3.3 in this chapter.

[153] As a matter of fact, the subtitle of Milder's biography of Melville, "Melville and the Life We Imagine", underlines this necessity of conjecture to imagine 'Melville', both the author and the writer-creator. There is actually an important documental vacuum which hampers the reconstruction of

There are many uncertainties about *Clarel*. The lack of references to *Clarel* in Melville's

or in his closest relatives' letters, both before and after the publication of the poem, the

fact that Melville wanted to keep private (as he had also wished while writing *Battle-*

Pieces) that he was writing poetry throughout those years, and the lack of manuscript or

reading proofs to *Clarel* are some of the principal difficulties that we encounter when

studying the material conditions of the composition of the poem. Yet the fact that

Melville wrote *Clarel* at all in 1876, despite the deep disillusionment which, I will argue,

permeates the poem from beginning to end, makes evident that Melville needed to

continue analyzing the complex interlacing of good and evil in the human condition,

the madnesses, the challenges, the human limitations, the selfishness, the constructive

and destructive character, the potentiality, the impossibilities, the grief, and the

importance of such diving. On the other hand, we do have some information which

may help us hypothesize about the writing process of *Clarel* even though it is impossible

to determine its evolution with exactitude: we know from family letters when

approximately the poem was finished or almost finished, when it was ready for the

press, how Melville managed to pay for its publication, the effects that the correction of

such a monumental work seems to have had on the Melville household, and, most

significantly, the fact that Melville persisted in sustaining such a complex and extensive

project over years in which his day-long job at the Customs House left him little time to

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Melville's life from the late 1850s onwards. As a consequence, many questions about the author himself and the Melville poet and his works during the second half of his life remain unknown. These issues can only be approached through guessing, basing our conjectures in the few documents we do have, both literary and non-literary. Nevertheless, the fact that we cannot produce a 'true' Melville but merely our own interpretation of the author is, in my opinion, fully coherent to the literary project Melville left for us to interpret. Organic to his rejection of conclusive 'Meanings', Melville the author and Melville the man remain ungraspable and elusive, and very appropriately so. Humbly aware of the impossibility to 'know' a character or individual, to create a complete biography of him, or to capture a life in words (as he shows in "Bartleby", *Israel Potter*, or *Battle-Pieces*, for example), because, like Truth, all 'knowledge' of a person will always remain imperfect and inevitably partial, it is, in my opinion, not accidental (he probably left instructions to his wife Lizzie at his death) that Melville's tombstone consists of a blank paper and a quilt, inviting readers to 'write' their own 'Melville'. Even in death, Melville remains a democratically empowering interpretation.

write. It is important to consider this perseverance, more so if we regard the material conditions under which *Clarel* was made to survive, since Melville was not in the 1870s a full-time writer (not even an 'author', as he did not have a readership, and had long been forgotten), but, probably to his deep regret, a full-time laborer who had to prioritize his paying job over his existential need. Melville scholar Samuel Otter notes that "Melville toiled on *Clarel* for longer than on any other book he wrote" (2006: 467). According to Vincent Kenny, "It seems appropriate that much of the poem was written in what Vernon Parrington called 'his tomb in the Custom House where he was consuming his own heart'" (1973: 51). Perhaps it was not only Melville who sustained *Clarel* over those years; *Clarel* may well have sustained the author too. As Robert Penn Warren notes, the writing of *Clarel* may have constituted "a refuge, the 'other life,' the real life into which he might enter at night after the ignomity of the Customs House" (1970: 35), or, in Hilton Obenzinger's words, "a type of pilgrimage ordeal itself" (2006: 190). Be as it may, the fact that *Clarel* was completed and published despite Melville's awareness that the poem was "eminently adapted for unpopularity" (letter to James Billson, 10 October 1884, *Correspondence* 483), indicates its importance to a Melville who confessed to be "content beforehand with whatever future await[ed]" his poem (*Clarel* 1876: xiv). Melville knew that he had written no meek work, yet he could foresee the fate of the poem. *Clarel* has only recently started to slowly unfold, as new readers discover the poem and come up with new interpretive possibilities. Yet this is not to say that *Clarel* is not a political poem or that Melville wrote it only for himself. When read at all, *Clarel* was attacked, undervalued, ignored, and eventually forgotten not only at the time of its publication but also in its future, as it has not been until very recently that *Clarel* has been made to circulate in an accessible edition,[154] become the subject of

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[154] Although two different editions of *Clarel* had been previously published (i.e., the original

international conferences,[155] and, ultimately, been revalued. Despite this reappraisal, however, *Clarel* continues to be one of the most neglected of Herman Melville's works.

2.1. "[H]e strives earnestly to perform his duties": The Quiet Customs House Inspector

> "I know that I haven't powers enough to divide myself into one who earns and one who creates. And even if I had all the powers in the world, I would have to give *all* my powers to the important thing in me: […] the little and continual thought of every day and its most unimportant things confuse me so that I can no longer recollect my own…. Before I used to hear all my voices in me; now it is as if someone had closed the window toward the garden in which my poems live; far, far away I hear something and listen and can no longer distinguish it."
>
> (Rainer Maria Rilke, qtd. in Tillie Olsen, *Silences* 1965: 163-164)

Scholars such as Walter Bezanson and Hershel Parker have convincingly hypothesized about possible dates in which Melville might have started conceiving and writing *Clarel*. Nonetheless, it remains impossible to determine such a date because no manuscript of the poem or references to it in correspondence have survived which might provide more concluding information about the writing process of the 17,863 line-long *Clarel*. In this respect, following Milder's argument, conjecture with *Clarel* becomes necessary.

1876 Putnam edition in two volumes, on the one hand, and the 1924 Constable edition, on the other), it was not until the 1960s that the poem became properly available to readers through Walter Bezanson's Hendrick's House critical edition. Walter Bezanson's was the first complete study exclusively dedicated to *Clarel*. More recently, the poem has been reprinted in the Northwestern-Newberry 1991 critical edition, also reprinting Bezanson's work, and including a thorough critical analysis of the poem by editors Harrison Hayford, Alma A. MacDougall, Hershel Parker, and G. Thomas Tanselle. The Northwestern-Newberry edition of the poem also incorporates Melville's corrections to the original Putnam edition in his own copy of *Clarel*, today available at the Houghton Library of Harvard University.

[155] It is of importance to note here the Seventh International Melville Conference "Melville and the Mediterranean", held in East Jerusalem in June 2009, which centered on *Clarel* and Melville's 1856-57 trip to the Holy Land, and which offered an unprecedented opportunity for valuable debate on the poem in an outstanding, relevant, location.

Yet it is important to base such conjecture on the information that has transcended, the awareness that it is impossible to know when *Clarel* started to be imagined and composed, the exact number of years that Melville was working on the poem, and the process of development of text, plot, and characters in the different stages of its composition, from its earliest conception to its final publication. But, even though the writing process of *Clarel* remains impossible to be tracked, there is certain information that is important when approaching Melville's poem.

A principal fact to consider when conjecturing about the approximate period of composition of *Clarel* is that, after 1866, Melville would not be a full-time writer anymore, as he had been earlier in his career. He was not a professional author either, constrained by the pressures of the literary market and readers. According to Robert Milder, *Battle-Pieces* would be Melville's last attempt to attract a readership (2006: 186).[156] As I shall analyze,[157] Melville seems to have been initially willing to publish *Clarel* anonymously, which might have allowed him more freedom to 'dive' throughout the compositional process. Also of crucial importance is the fact that, by the time *Clarel* was published, Melville had been writing poetry for almost twenty years and, as a consequence, he probably did not think of himself anymore as a novelist only but mostly as a poet.[158] John Bryant has argued that the writer of *Clarel* "is not the Author who failed in the marketplace, but the Writer who never stopped writing, and never stopped growing" ("A Writer in Process" 2001: l). The fact that Melville never stopped writing indicates how important writing was to him; as Laurie Robertson-Lorant claims

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[156] Milder claims that Melville withdrew from his age after *Battle-Pieces* (2006: 186). While I agree with Milder that Melville gave up hopes to attract an American public and be recognized as author/poet, I do not think that Melville withdrew from the public world or renounced his connection to his times in the (mostly poetry) volumes he wrote and privately published after *Battle-Pieces*. *Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land*, I contend, proves a good example of Melville's not having renounced his contemporary society, as it is a text that, as I shall analyze, is engaged with the sociopolitical context of postbellum America

[157] See Section 2.4 in this chapter.

[158] See Parker's *Melville. The Making of the Poet* (2008).

in her biography: "for Melville, writing was as natural as breathing" (1996: 327). Very importantly, Melville's circumstances for writing in the 1870s changed, as in December 1866, the writer obtained a position as a deputy inspector of cargo at the Customs House in New York for $4 (later reduced to $3.60) per day (Kazin 1981: 84), which he kept until he was able to retire in 1885. As Vincent Kenny notes, "To a man who had sailed all over the world, the circumscribed area of a 'District Officer in the Customhouse' would seem to have been unbearable" (1973: 51). For almost twenty-years, Melville was forced to devote most of his waking hours to a job that possibly made him feel frustrated, yet was paid. The absorption that this job must have supposed to Melville may explain why the writer who had needed little more than a year and a half to complete the colossal *Moby-Dick* in 1851, or an average of one to two years to imagine, write, and publish the rest of his works of fiction, now needed an interval of ten years for (the also colossal) *Clarel* (1876) or twelve for *John Marr and Other Sailors* (1888), the latter a much shorter volume of poetry than *Clarel*.[159] The years Melville worked at the Customs House brought economic stability to the Melville household, yet they may have killed some of the author's literary projects as well. However, even if the time he could devote to his art was limited, Melville never abandoned his writing, which demonstrates how important such writing/diving was to him.

Melville may have felt frustrated over these years for not being able to dedicate his whole energies to the thing he most needed to do. However, some of the author's

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[159] With the only exceptions of *Israel Potter* and *The Piazza Tales*, which appeared serialized in *Putnam's Monthly Magazine* before being compiled into a volume, Melville's works of fiction were written in a year or little more than a year, sometimes even less: *Typee* (February [British edition], March [U.S. edition] 1846), *Omoo* (March [Britain], May [U.S.] 1847), *Mardi* (March [Britain], April [U.S.] 1849), *Redburn* (September [Britain], November [U.S.] 1849), *White-Jacket* (January [Britain], March [U.S.] 1850), *Moby-Dick* (October [Britain], November [U.S.] 1851), *Pierre* (August [U.S.], November [Britain] 1852), *Israel Potter* (March [U.S.] 1855, later distributed in Britain), *The Piazza Tales* (May [U.S.] 1856, later distributed in Britain), and *The Confidence-Man* (April [U.S. and Britain], 1857).

relatives generally failed to perceive such frustration and believed that the job at the Customs House was doing him good, since, his cousin Kate Gansevoort asserted, Melville was "much better since he has been compelled to go out daily to attend to his business", and that "intercourse with his fellow creatures seems to have had a beneficial effect [as] he is less of a misanthrope" (qtd. in Parker 2002: 627). While I have doubts that Melville was ever a 'misanthrope',[160] Kate's words indicate that she was unable to see beyond the author's economic needs and realize that such a job could not make a man gifted with artistic sensibility happy. Melville might not have dealt with as many people as his cousin suggests, since, according to Hershel Parker, his job as a discharging inspector consisted of examining the cargoes of the ships arriving in New York (2002: 694).[161] In *Clarel*, a Melville in his fifties would place in the young, misunderstood, and rejected Italian Celio some thoughts which, I believe, may strike as an important authorial self-referential meditation on the good intentions of his family:

> Remaineth to me what? the pen?
> Dead feather of ethereal life!
> Nor efficacious much, save when
> It makes some fallacy more rife.
> My kin—I blame them not at heart—
> Would have me act some routine part,
> Subserving family, and dreams
> Alien to me—illusive schemes." (1.12.87-94)[162]

Melville may have certainly mixed with his "fellow creatures" at the Customs House, yet the mere fact of inspecting cargoes and of interacting with whalemen and merchants

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[160] I am basing my affirmation here on the etymology of the word 'misanthrope', from the Greek term *misanthropos*, meaning 'someone who hates man'.

[161] For a detailed account of the particulars of Melville's job at the Customs House see Garner 1986.

[162] This passage may also be read in the light of Melville's fellow Americans, his "kin" who, throughout his career, continued demanding from him more novels of adventures while rejecting his deep divings.

may have also made him remember his traveling days more or less nostalgically, perhaps accentuating his present feeling of entrapment (Parker 2002: 626). Such feelings, however, may have looked secondary and insignificant compared to economic necessities which were real and pressing. Also importantly, the Customs House exposed Melville to a, by then, well-consolidated capitalist system dominated by high levels of corruption, even involving a political class which benefited from and promoted it. In his job Melville was in contact with corruption, yet he could not but face the realities he witnessed with restraint and impotence, being aware that he would lose his job were he to criticize them overtly. Nevertheless, even though there was no choice for Melville but to endure the corruption he witnessed (being, therefore, passively complicit within the system), he rejected to actively participate in it by trying to preserve his honesty and remain unnoticed:

> Proud, shy, sensitively honorable, – he had much to overcome, and has much to endure; but he strives earnestly to so perform his duties as to make the slightest censure, reprimand, or even reminder, –impossible from any superior – Surrounded by low venality, he puts it all quietly aside, – quietly declining offers of money for special services, – quietly returning money which has been thrust into his pockets behind his back, avoiding offence alike to the corrupting merchants and their clerks and runners, who think that all men can be bought, and to the corrupt swarms who shamelessly seek their price; – quietly steadfastly doing his duty, and happy in retaining his own self-respect. (Melville's brother-in-law John Hoadley, qtd. in Leyda 1951: 731)

Melville could not openly denounce the brutalizing and corrupting forces that he was watching in circulation at the Customs House; however, he would denounce this reality in *Clarel*.[163] Thus, if *Clarel* may have been a work of love and a poem of self-exploration, it was also a poem charged with sociopolitical criticism about the particular context of postbellum America. It is significant that Melville continued writing poetry after his

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[163] Melville's critique of postbellum U.S. society is analyzed in Section 3.3, 3.4, and 3.5 in this chapter.

poetic abilities were questioned, first by the potential publishers of a volume of poems rejected for publication in 1860, and later through the critical reception of *Battle-Pieces* (perhaps a work that Melville thought could re-launch his literary career as author, taking the opportunity that the Civil War offered) in 1866. It is also significant that he did not abandon the critical voice he had adopted in previous works, which contradicts the traditional conception of Melville as withdrawing into silence after the publication of *The Confidence-Man* in 1857, as well as the argument that he only turned to poetry because he felt defeated as a novelist.[164] Even though he would continue writing poetry after 1876,[165] Melville's evolution as a poet reaches its culmination in *Clarel*, which does not constitute "an extension of the lyric vein of his famous novels but is a wholly new mode of contracted discourse" (Bezanson 1991: 507). The composition of such an extended and complex poem, a process which was obviously different from the writing of shorter pieces in a volume of poetry as *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War*, indicates that, by the 1870s –the decade that Melville was engaged in the composition of *Clarel*–, if not earlier, Melville most likely thought of himself as a poet. Thus, to claim that Melville's adoption of poetry as the literary form for his writings was only due to his failure as a novelist, I believe, is ignoring the fact that Melville would be a poet longer than he had been a prose writer, that he constantly experimented with genre throughout his literary career (both as a writer of fiction and as a poet), and that he even experimented with poetry as early as in novels such as *Mardi* (1849). Melville did not lose his connection to society and to the reality of his times either, but continued

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[164] Tillie Olsen has pointed out that poetry is more sustainable than long prose when there is no time for "Full self" (1965: 13). However, Melville did not turn to poetry only when he saw the time he could dedicate to his writing reduced by his working hours at the Customs House, but had already started writing poetry over a decade earlier. As a matter of fact, by 1866, when he started working at the Customs House, Melville had already published *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War* (1866), and, before *Battle-Pieces*, had unsuccessfully attempted to publish another volume of poems in 1860.

[165] Melville continued writing poetry as well as prose after *Clarel*. For a thorough study of the period between 1877 and 1891 in Melville's life and career, see William B. Dillingham's *Melville and His Circle. The Last Years* (1996).

creating politically engaged writings despite being aware that the political potential of his works would probably remain undiscovered. The fact that, as John Bryant argues, he moved from author into writer allowed him more freedom to express his political voice as he wrote *Clarel*, without worrying about publishers' requirements or reception. This does not mean that he withdrew from the public world (as has often been considered), consequently abandoning his political voice. As Lewis Mumford notes, "Melville's retreat was not a withdrawal from his proper self [and, therefore, from his –universalist– lifelong literary project, I argue], but a withdrawal from the conditions that hampered its expression—the taste of the public and the predilections of publishers, the demand for warmed-over Peedee and Hullabaloo" (1929: 307).[166] Melville's intentions for the publication of *Clarel* as an anonymous poem, I believe, illustrate his wish to contribute his work to the public world, "content beforehand with whatever future awaits" his volume (*Clarel* 1876: xiv), without sacrificing the creative freedom (only constrained by the metrical demands of the poem) which, after many decades of struggle with the publishing and readership class in order to make a living by his writing, the author now managed to –finally– enjoy.

2.2. Writing *Clarel*

> "In placid hours well pleased we dream
> Of many a brave unbodied scheme.
> But form to lend, pulsed life create
> What unlike things must meet and mate;
> A flame to melt—a wind to freeze;
> Sad patience—joyous energies;

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[166] Melville twice used the expression 'Hullabaloo' or 'Fiddle-de-dee' in letters to express his discontent for being still regarded as the author of *Typee* and *Omoo*, and therefore associated to adventure narratives in exotic islands. In his instructions to his brother Allan concerning the publications of the, eventually unpublished, 1860 *Poems*, for example, Melville emphasized that he wanted the volume to be simply titled "*Poems* by Herman Melville" without mentioning "[f]or God's sake […] *By the author of 'Typee' Piddledee' & c* on the title-page" (22 May 1860, *Correspondence* 343).

> Humility—yet pride and scorn;
> Instinct and study; love and hate;
> Audacity—reverence. These must mate,
> And fuse with Jacob's mystic heart,
> To wrestle with the angel—Art."
> (Herman Melville, "Art" [ca. 1870], *Published Poems* 280)[167]

Melville kept private about the fact that he was writing *Clarel* during the many years he may have been engaged in its composition. This discretion has contributed to increase the silences surrounding *Clarel*, especially those related to when the poem started to be imagined and written, at which rhythm, and what Melville's regard for his work was. The author's wishes for secrecy even applied to the Melville household, to the extent that it may be possible that the author did not even tell his wife that he was involved in such a big poetry venture until the poem was already in an advanced state, for fear that news would spread, as it actually did. Living together, of course, Lizzie must have known that her husband was writing, but she was probably not acquainted with the details of Melville's project or its magnitude until much later. If secrecy was what he wanted, Melville was right in keeping *Clarel* to himself, as it was actually through Lizzie that the rest of the family discovered his secret. It is also, ironically, thanks to Lizzie's openness to share this news that we can know today some compositional details about the poem before its actual publication. Lizzie's letter to her stepmother in March 1875 (little more than a year before the poem was published) constitutes the first existing piece of evidence of Melville's being engaged in the writing of *Clarel*. In it, Lizzie assures that Herman is "pretty well and very busy", straightaway asking "pray do not mention to any one that he is writing poetry—you know how such things spread and he

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[167] Melville's poem "Art" was published in the volume *Timoleon* in 1891, a year before Melville's death. According to John Bryant, however, the poem may have been written in the 1870s, at the time Melville was writing *Clarel*, and was considerably revised afterwards. To an analysis of the different versions of "Art" see Bryant, "Versions of Art" 2001.

would be very angry if he knew I had spoken of it—and of course I have not, except in confidence to you and the family'' (qtd. in Parker 2002: 778). Lizzie's concern that her having gone against her husband's wish for secrecy be not discovered indicates the prevalence of Melville's wish still in 1875. But Lizzie's letter also reflects that her stepmother was not the first and only one to know: Melville's wife may have already mentioned it to her family before this letter, perhaps in person, as Hershel Parker speculates, when she joined them for the Thanksgiving celebration in Boston in 1874 (2002: 777). We do not know when Melville may have informed his wife, but judging from Lizzie's readiness to tell the rest of the family, it may not have been many months before she spread the news. The secret, thus, soon stopped being a secret among the Shaws, and also reached Melville's uncle Peter Gansevoort who, as I shall explain in Section 2.4, would willingly offer to pay for the publication of *Clarel*. The generosity of Peter Gansevoort enabled the publication of *Clarel* yet, by early 1876, Melville's wishes for the authorial anonymity he had initially intended for *Clarel* were truncated.

The present section is conceived as an analysis of the writing of *Clarel*. As such, the first subsection focuses on Melville's trip to Jerusalem and the Middle East –as part of his extended trip to England and the Mediterranean in 1856-57–, and the journal that the author wrote during this trip, both of which (i.e., trip and journal) constitute an important foundation to the composition of the poem, as well as to the portrayal of the Holy Land and of some of the characters in *Clarel*. Section 2.2.2 analyzes the twenty year interval between this trip and the publication of *Clarel*. The section closes with an analysis of some principal theories about the origins and the writing of *Clarel*, and eventually an exposition of my own hypotheses on this question (Section 2.2.3), before examining the publication process in the next section (2.3).

2.2.1. Melville's Trip to the Holy Land and the 1856-57 Journal

> "On way to Bethelam [sic.] saw Jerusalem from distance — unless knew it, could not have recognized it — looked exactly like arid rocks."
>
> "How it affects one to be cheated in Jerusalem."
>
> (Herman Melville, *Journals* 1989: 84, 85)

Melville's seven-month trip to Europe and the Middle East, from October 1856 to May 1857, should not be overlooked when analyzing *Clarel*, even though the poem would be published almost twenty years after this voyage. Travel was deeply influential to Melville's personal and literary growth throughout his life. In an autobiographical-like way, a thirty-year-old Melville would meditate through the voice of his character Wellingborough Redburn the ways in which travel democratized his way of thinking by exposing him to human plurality and making him unlearn previously assumed prejudices:

> Being so young and inexperienced then, and unconsciously swayed in some degree by those local and social prejudices, that are the marring of most men, and from which, for the mass, there seems no possible escape; at first I was surprised that a colored man should be treated as he is in this town; but a little reflection showed that, after all, it was but recognizing his *claims to humanity and normal equality*; so that, in some things, we Americans leave to other countries the carrying out of the principle that stands at the head of our Declaration of Independence. (*Redburn* 1849: 1423; my italics)

If, by 1849, travel had made a young Melville aware that equality was inseparable of human beings' rightful claims to the recognition of their humanity, the author would later confess in the lecture "Traveling: Its Pleasures, Pains, and Profits" (1859) his regard for travel as a means of teaching humility, enlarging the human heart, and empowering human beings to become independent thinkers who are aware of the plurality of humanity and the inevitable partiality of their own eyes and minds:

> For the profit of travel: in the first place, you get rid of a *few* prejudices. […]
>
> Travel to a large and generous nature is as a new birth. Its legitimate tendency is to teach profound personal humility, while it enlarges the sphere of comprehensive benevolence till it includes the whole human race.
>
> Among minor benefits is that of seeing for one's self all striking natural or artificial objects, for every individual sees differently according to his idiosyncrasies. […] It is important to be something of a linguist to travel to advantage; at least to speak French fluently. In the Levant, where all nations congregate, unpretending people speak half a dozen languages, and a person who thought himself well educated at home is often abashed at his ignorance there. (423)

Being largely monolingual,[168] Melville must have experienced such an abashment in the Middle East (the author actually lamented his incapacity to understand and communicate in Constantinople: "Great curse that of Babel; not being able to talk to a fellow being" [*Journals* 1989: 61], as much as he had earlier lamented in *Redburn* that "Sailors go *round* the world, without going *into* it" [1849: 148]). As he journeyed the different nations in his itinerary, Melville kept a journal –today preserved at the Houghton Library of Harvard University–, where he annotated his experiences, the impressions of the places he visited, and his thoughts on the people he encountered.

During this trip, the thirty-seven year-old Melville visited nine different countries. By that time, as Walter Bezanson remarks, "[t]here can be no question that the sturdy, bearded American who boarded the screw-steamer *Glasgow* on October 11, 1856 […] was a changed man from the young romantic" (1991: 510). After *Typee* (1846) and *Omoo* (1847), his first two successful novels of adventures, Melville had been working indefatigably on the works that would follow, frequently reaching the average of a published novel per year.[169] To this was added the harsh reaction and negative reviews that most of these works received. Keeping this pace, and having bitterly accepted that he would never earn a living by his writing if he persisted in clinging to

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[168] The maternal line of Melville's family was Dutch, but it is unknown whether Melville spoke or understood any Dutch at all.

[169] See footnote 159 on page 203 in this chapter.

"the great Art of Telling the Truth" ("Hawthorne and His Mosses" 1850: 53), it is no wonder that Melville felt exhausted and in need of a change of airs by 1856, before his voyage to the Mediterranean. Moreover, some of Melville's closest relatives, in the same way as his readers and reviewers, had started questioning the author's mental health.[170] His father-in-law, for example, Judge Lemuel Shaw, expressed his concern in a letter to his son Samuel (September 1, 1856):

> I suppose you have been informed by some of the family, how very ill, Herman has been. It is manifest to me from Elizabeth's letters, that she has felt great anxiety about him. When he is deeply engaged in one of his literary works, he confines himself to hard study many hours in the day,—with little or no exercise, & this especially in winter for a great many hours together. He probably thus overworks himself & brings on severe nervous affections. He has been advised strongly to break off this labor for some time, & take a voyage or a journey, & endeavor to recruit. No definite plan is arranged, but I think it may result, in this that in the autumn, he will go away for four or five months, Elizabeth will come here with her younger children, Mrs Griggs & Augusta will each take one of the boys, their house at Pittsfield will be shut up. I think he needs such a change & that it would be highly beneficial to him & probably restore him. (qtd. in Parker 2002: 289)

Shaw proceeded to make the arrangements for Melville's trip to the Mediterranean possible, and it was actually thanks to the economic support of his father-in-law that the author could embark on this trip. While it is impossible to know whether the voyage actually benefited Melville's health at all, it offered the author the opportunity to reencounter his former friend Nathaniel Hawthorne, whom he had not seen since 1851.[171]

Melville arrived in Liverpool in early November 1856, probably finding the city much changed since he last visited it in 1839 as a twenty-year-old sailor. There, he spent a few days with Hawthorne, also visiting Southport and Chester, before leaving for

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[170] It was not that long, after all, since the New York *Daily Book* had published a review of *Pierre* (September 7, 1852) openly assuring that Herman Melville was crazy. See Higgins and Parker 1995: 436.

[171] *Clarel* scholar Vincent Kenny has argued that it was not merely health recovery but above all the need to search for faith and belief that motivated Melville on his trip to the Levant (1973: 41).

London. Biographers have not been able to provide many details about the encounter between both authors, but the scarce evidence that has reached us seems to reveal that the former feeling of closeness and intimacy of the two old friends had diminished with distance, time, and the loss of the (literary and physical) space that they used to share in the Berkshires in the early 1850s (it is, I think, startling that, despite being with Hawthorne in Liverpool and after having spent some days with the Hawthornes at Southport, Melville should confess to feel a "Great disappointment" when the departure of his ship was delayed one day, adding that he was "Tired of Liverpool" in his journal [17 November 1856, *Journals* 51]). According to Hawthorne, Melville was "much overshadowed since I saw him last" (qtd. in Bezanson 1991: 510). He was "looking much as he used to do *(a little paler, and perhaps a little sadder), in a rough outside coat*, and with his characteristic gravity and reserve of manner" (qtd. in Bezanson 1991: 510-511). Hawthorne provided an extended report of one of their meetings in Liverpool:

> *Melville has not been well, of late; he has been affected with neuralgic complaints in his head and limbs, and no doubt has suffered from too constant literary occupation, pursued without much success, latterly; and his writings, for a long while past, have indicated a morbid state of mind….* I do not wonder that he found it necessary to take an airing through the world, after so many years of toilsome pen-labor *and domestic life,* following upon so wild and adventurous a youth as his was…. we took a pretty long walk together, and sat down in a hollow among the sand hills (sheltering ourselves from the high, cool wind) *and smoked a cigar.* Melville, as he always does, began to reason of Providence and futurity, and of everything that lies beyond human ken, *and informed me that he had "pretty much made up his mind to be annihilated"; but still he does not seem to rest in that anticipation; and, I think, will never rest until he gets hold of a definite belief. It is strange how he persists—and has persisted ever since I knew him, and probably long before—in wandering to-and fro over these deserts, as dismal and monotonous as the sand hills amid which we were sitting. He can neither believe, nor be comfortable in his unbelief; and he is too honest and courageous not to try to do one or the other. If he were a religious man, he would be one of the most truly religious and reverential; he has a very high and noble nature, and better worth immortality than most of us.* (qtd. in Bezanson 1991: 511)[172]

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[172] The italics in this passage are Bezanson's.

Despite the estrangement that may have arisen between the two friends, Hawthorne's report expresses great concern, appreciation, and admiration for Melville. It also reveals Melville's necessity to constantly wander over the complicated "*deserts*" of life and death, belief and unbelief, despite the suffering such "*wandering*" imparted him; this need to go back and forth in these explorations, Hawthorne realizes, is part of Melville's nature, his incapacity of fixing himself in a certain philosophical position, of either believing or not believing.[173] Yet it was this permanent restlessness, Melville's permanent desire to 'dive', which Hawthorne praises as constitutive of a "very high and noble nature" and "better worth immortality than most of us", even though it is also responsible for the "morbid state of mind" that Hawthorne perceives in Melville's latest works. Melville would have probably agreed with Shirley M. Dettlaff's claim that "art stimulates the imagination to begin and continue a lifelong search for truths which are painful as well as elusive" (1982: 226). More than ten years after this last meeting with Hawthorne, Melville continued his 'divings' in *Clarel*. As a matter of fact, *Clarel* is a wandering "to-and fro" with no definite answers, an exploration and critical evaluation of the plurality of interpretations of, and answers about, the world that human beings may provide, and of the attitudes toward existence which they may adopt influenced by their particular social class, cultural backgrounds, religious beliefs or lack of beliefs, ethnic or 'racial' consciousness, age, and, of course, their personal experiences. In Rolfe's words "Man sprang from deserts" and "at the touch / Of grief or trial overmuch, / On deserts he falls back at need" (*Clarel* 1876: 2.16.106-108). Perhaps, as I shall argue in section 2.2.3, it was the "touch of grief" after the death of his eldest son Malcolm that impelled Melville to "fall back" "on deserts" and write *Clarel*. Melville could "*neither believe, nor be comfortable in his unbelief*", Hawthorne had remarked, "*and he is*

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[173] For an analysis of Melville's religiosity (or lack of) and restless relationship with religion see Section 3.1 in this chapter.

too honest and courageous not to try to do one or the other". In *Clarel*, Melville brings this honesty and courageousness to practice, exploring belief and unbelief, faith and dogma, tradition, progress, learning, and democracy, and even evaluating the 'Holy Land' and the United States, as well as himself and some of the persons who had been influential to him throughout his life, perhaps also including Hawthorne.[174]

After this ten-day stop in Britain,[175] Melville set for the Mediterranean, traveling around Gibraltar, continuing to the Greek islands, Cyprus, Constantinople, and Cairo, before eventually reaching Palestine on January 6, 1857. Disembarking in the ancient port of Jaffa, Melville soon started for Jerusalem on horseback with a dragoman. Even though Melville's impressions about these places are recorded in his journal –which surely constitutes a crucial source for analyzing the topographic descriptions, as well as some of the characters[176] and thoughts he puts forward in *Clarel*–, the author did not write down his first impressions at his arrival in Jerusalem, where he stayed for eight days before proceeding to the Dead Sea and Mar Saba in a three-day expedition (Bezanson 1991: 515). It is only after a few days in the city that Melville does describe Jerusalem and some of his daily routines in his journal. Such descriptions of the 'holy' city inform some of the descriptions included in *Clarel*, where Jerusalem not only

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[174] *Clarel* scholars such as Walter Bezanson or Hershel Parker have argued that Melville turned Hawthorne into one of his fellow travelers in the pilgrimage the poem narrates through the character of Vine. After reading Hawthorne's report on his meeting with Melville, it is at least ironic, in my opinion, that Melville should incorporate Hawthorne to the poem and, thus, invite him to accompany him through such philosophical sandy deserts.

[175] Melville arrived in Liverpool on November 8 and departed from Liverpool on November 18, 1856 (*Journals* 1989: 50-51).

[176] Some of the characters Melville creates in *Clarel* are fictionalizations of people he actually met in that trip. See Bezanson 1991: 613-635 for a detailed explanation of each character in the poem. As the narrator remarks in a chapter that appears as an authorial interlude in *The Confidence-Man* (1857), the book Melville left ready for publication before embarking in his Mediterranean voyage: "Where does any novelist pick up any character? For the most part, in town, to be sure. Every great town is a kind of man-show, where the novelist goes for his stock, just as the agriculturist goes to the cattle-show for his" (1857: 1097). Melville would find some of the "stock" for his narrative poem in the 1857 Jerusalem.

inspires images of wrecks[177] –both to the narrator and to some of the characters (e.g., Agath)– but is also connected to notions such as waste, ruin, desolation, dearth, grief, oppressiveness, and even lack of air.[178] "In pursuance of my object, the *saturation* of my mind with the atmosphere of Jerusalem, offering myself up a passive subject, and no unwilling one, to its weird impressions, I always rose at dawn & walked without the walls" (*Journals* 1989: 86; my italics); these are the words Melville uses to describe in his journal the oppressive effect Jerusalem has upon him and upon many others who daily escape "the insalubriousness of so small a city pent in by lofty walls obstructing ventilation" (86). Probably feeling overwhelmed at the crowded atmosphere of what today is the Old City,[179] Melville preferred to ramble "without the walls", where he found the air less oppressive. As a matter of fact, his interest in Jerusalem, with the exception of the Holy Sepulcher, lay beyond its walls: the Vale of the Ashes, the Sepulcher of Kings, Gethsemane, the Mount of Olives, the Kedron Valley, the hill of Zion, etc. The traveler Herman Melville was both impressed and awed by the rocky geography of Jerusalem, a "Stony metropolis of stones" (*Clarel* 1876: 4.2.12) as grey in color as its inhabitants: "Judea is one accumulation of stones — Stony mountains & stony plains; stony torrents & stony roads; stony walls & stony feilds [sic.], stony houses

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[177] Jerusalem is referred to as a wreck, both by the narrator at the beginning of canto 1.10 ("Rambles"), and by Agath at the end of canto 4.1. ("In Saddle"), who, contemplating the city from the distance, exclaims "Wreck, ho! The wreck—Jerusalem!" (*Clarel* 4.1.187). In a similar way, Melville also uses images of wrecks and the sea in his description of Jaffa in the journal, which he claims produces upon him the "old — genuine, old Jonah feeling" (*Journals* 1989: 81). In *Clarel* 1.10 ("Rambles") the image of the wreck is used as suggestive of the many strata of Jerusalem "Where serial wrecks on wrecks confound / Era and monument and man" (1.10.3-4).

[178] Note the use and repetition of the words 'wrecks', 'ruin', 'waste', or 'grief', among others similar in meaning, in canto 1.10 "Rambles" and in the poem in general. See Larry Edward Wegener's *A Concordance to Herman Melville's* Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land, for textual instances (1997).

[179] In the nineteenth century, the city of Jerusalem was limited by its walls, being reduced to what today is called the "Old City". It was only from the 1860s, that Jerusalem would start expanding beyond its walls. When Melville visited the city in 1857, the territory beyond the city walls was still considered wilderness and associated to potential threat and danger ('wild' Arabs and Bedouins lived in the desert) from which the walls protected Jerusalem. Some European missionaries and settlers, however, were starting to build outside the walls (Ben-Arieh 1975: 263). See the analysis of walls in *Clarel* in Section 3.6 in this chapter.

& stony tombs; stony eyes & stony hearts. Before you, & behind you are stones. Stones to right & stones to left" (*Journals* 1989: 90). In a related entry Melville adds that "The color of the whole city is grey & looks at you like a cold grey eye in a cold old man" (90). Jerusalem, to the author, was suffocating and oppressive, dusty and "stony" as the hearts of its citizens, saturating due to its barrenness and dearth, and even devoid of religious meaning.[180] About this sacred place Melville ironically wonders: "Is the desolation of the land the result of the fatal embrace of the Deity? Hapless are the favorites of heaven" (91).

Was Jerusalem 'holy' to Melville? Basem Ra'ad claims that, in his trip to Palestine, Melville connected religious fervor to the barrenness of the landscape; according to Ra'ad, the author noted "how religion is generated by human response to harsh and empty aridity, motivated by the escape from emptiness and search for certainty" (2011: 12). Judging from his reflections in the journal and in *Clarel*, Melville was skeptical about the 'sacredness' of the Holy Land and even seems to have been repulsed by this notion.

While in Jerusalem, Melville stopped by the Church of the Holy Sepulcher almost every day, keeping mixed feelings about a place which inspired him both disgust and a certain kind of enthrallment. As Walter Bezanson claims, the Sepulcher and the devote visiting pilgrims constituted "a spectacle that held a peculiar fascination for Melville, encompassing many of the complex elements of his position as an objective, yet entangled, observer of Christianity" (1991: 518). But if he was somehow allured by the spectacle, the author would also comment that the Sepulcher was a "sickening

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[180] In an essay entitled "In Behalf of 'Dearth'" (1999), Robert Milder analyzes instances of dearth, barrenness and waste in *Clarel*, as well as the uses that Melville attributes to these three words, which emerge at many points in the poem. Milder notes how these three words (he explicitly refers to 'dearth', but I believe that the same can apply to 'barrenness' and 'waste') evoke "a drying up or hollowing out—an impoverishment of what had once been fertile… Judea, formerly the land of miracle, has become a land of 'dearth'" (67), emptied of its spiritual or religious signification.

cheat" where "All is glitter & nothing is gold" (*Journals* 1989: 88). "The Church of the Sepulcher is the thronged news-room & theological exchange of Jerusalem", notes Melville mocking the language of commerce and money (88) to comment on the 'territorial' fights between the many sects claiming property of the different chapels of the Sepulcher, "those boxes of the stock-auctioneers, which one sees in commercial Exchanges" (88). Instead of being an element of Christian (comm)union, the Sepulcher was in fact a place of confrontation and sectarian divisions where the language of religion blended with the language of business transactions. It also was, according to Melville, a place of decay:

> The Holy Sepulcher — ruined dome — confused & half-ruinous pile. — Laberithys [sic.] & terraces of mouldy grottos, tombs, & shrines. Smells like a dead-house, dingy light. — At the entrance, in a sort of grotto in the wall a divan for Turkish policemen, where they sit crosslegged & smoking, scornfully observing the continuous troops of pilgrims entering & postrating themselves before the anointing-stone of Christ, which veined with streaks of a mouldy red looks like a butcher's slab. — Near by is a blind stair of worn marble, ascending to the reputed Calvary where among other things the showman point [sic.] you by the smoky light of old pawnbrokers lamps of dirty gold, the hole in which the cross was fixed and through a narrow grating as over a cole-cellar, point out the rent in the rock! (87)

Melville presents the main places of Christian passion as empty of religious or spiritual meaning. The Holy Land in his descriptions, thus, becomes a decaying monument to spiritual barrenness, a place reflecting the absence of God. As the early critic of *Clarel* Henry W. Wells remarks on the use of sacred geography in Melville's poem:

> this universe […] enhances […] doubt and disillusionment. Arid Palestine figures the spiritual aridity of the modern world denuded of religious faith. Christ's urn in Jerusalem is the scene of an annual riot. The manger at Bethlehem is incrusted with jewels like a casket in pawnbroker's window. Where Jesus was baptized the pilgrims encounter a troup of robbers. Margoth […] geologizes on the Mountain of the Temptation and maliciously disproves biblical tradition regarding the Dead Sea. The most pious of Clarel's friends [Nehemiah] falls asleep, like Peter, in the Garden of

Gethsemane. All the scenes and monuments of the Holy Land seem decaying from the same insidious blight, becoming evil parodies of their former splendor. (1943: 482)

From Jerusalem, Melville took a three-day excursion to Jericho, the Jordan river, the Dead Sea, the monastery of Mar Saba, and Bethlehem (*Journals* 1989: 382).[181] This journey provided the setting and inspiration for Parts 2 "the Wilderness", 3 "Mar Saba", and 4 "Bethlehem", in *Clarel*. Melville's accounts of these places in his journal are speedy descriptions which condense much information and personal impressions in few words. The author narrated his trip from Jerusalem to Jericho and the Dead Sea thus:

On down into vallies [sic.] & over hills — all barren — Brook Kedron — immense depth — black & funereal — Valley of Jehosophat, grows more diabolical as approaches Dead Sea — Plain of Jericho — looks green, an orchard, but only trees of apple of Sodom […] — Where Kedron opens into Plain of Jericho looks like Gate of Hell. […] — Arabs on hills over Jordan — alarm —scampering ahead of escort — […] Arabs crossing the river — lance — old crusaders — pistols — menacing cries — tobacco. — Robbers — rob Jericho annually — &c — Ride over mouldy plain to Dead Sea […] — smarting bitter of the water, — carried the bitter in my mouth all day — bitterness of life — thought of all bitter things […] — nought to eat but bitumen & ashes with desert of Sodom apples washed down with water of Dead Sea. Must bring your own provisions, as well, too, for mind as body — for all is barren. (82-83)

His description of Mar Saba is similarly without elaborations, underlining the walled and rocky nature of the monastery and the solitary palm hovering over the precipice, which Melville would fictionalize in Part 3 of *Clarel*.

Melville spent approximately three weeks in Palestine, initiating his trip back to the United States in February 1857. This long journey offered him the opportunity to set foot on some other countries as different as Lebanon, Greece, Italy, Switzerland,

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[181] Walter Bezanson explains the details of the route Melville took: "a roughly rectangular route which led from Jerusalem northeast to Jericho (6 hours); from Jericho east to the Jordan (2 hours); from the Jordan south to the edge of the Dead Sea (1 hour); from the Siddin Plain southwest up the long ridge to the monastery of Mar Saba (4 ½ hours); from Mar Saba west to Bethlehem (3 hours); and from Bethlehem north back to Jerusalem (2 hours)" (1991: 518-519).

Germany, and Holland, before eventually reaching Britain again to ship back to New

York on May 20. Melville's fictionalized account of his trip to Palestine, however,

would take much more time to arrive, and it would do so in the form of *Clarel*. After his

arrival home, some family members expressed their surprise that Melville was not

inclined to weave his recent experiences into a book.[182] Such was the case of Melville's

uncle Peter Gansevoort, who would have to wait almost two decades for the book

based on this voyage, and could never see it completed because he died before *Clarel*

was published. Yet the book that Peter Gansevoort and other family members expected

in 1857 probably differed from the volume Melville would publish in 1876, since what

Melville's uncle had in mind was a book of adventures that "would not make a

requisition on his [Melville's] imagination" (qtd. in Bezanson 1991: 529); surely not a

poem but most probably a narrative account of his experiences in the exotic East, a

genre which, as I will analyze,[183] was rising in popularity at the time Melville returned

from his trip. There is no known explanation of why Melville finally chose not to write

a book on his trip in the late 1850s, but it is possible that the author did not want to

produce such an adventure narrative in the Holy Land in order not to reinforce –even

more– his contemporaries' classification of him as a writer of adventure narratives in

exotic faraway places, a label he had already gained by his two first novels *Typee* (1847)

and *Omoo* (1848), and which, to his regret, would continue following him until his

death. Moreover, it may have been that, by that time, Melville had been writing poetry

for so many years that he could not think of *Clarel* in another literary form. Most

importantly, as the descriptions in the journal make evident, Melville was not the type

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[182] "It would be a luxury to hear from him [Melville] a Narrative of his recent tour on the borders of the Mediterranean & Constantinople &c &c I am surprised [sic.] that he has not made his travels the subject of a Lecture, to be hereafter woven into a Book; which would be not only instructive to others, but very profitable to him" (Peter Gansevoort, qtd. in Parker 2002: 367). *Clarel*, however, was probably not the type of book that Peter Gansevoort had in mind.

[183] See Section 3.5 in this chapter.

of author who would write about the East in the idealized way his potential readers may have expected, since, as he remarked in his journal, he had been, above all, a critical observer, more than a 'pilgrim',[184] who managed to realize that the holiness of Palestine was a (religious, cultural, political) construction and not a reality. As Vincent Kenny has claimed: Melville's journeying of Palestine "only proved what he had tentatively concluded in 'The Piazza': just as there is no land of enchantment at the rainbow's end, so there is no more to be found of God in His Holy Land than at home in Pittsfield" (1973: 46). As Melville wrote in his journal: "J[esus] C[hrist] should have appeared in Taheiti [sic.]!" (*Journals* 1989: 154).[185]

2.2.2. From the Journal to *Clarel*; from 1857 to the 1870s

> "Nearby, saw a woman over a new grave — no grass on it yet. Such abandonment of misery! Called to the dead, put her head down as close to it as possible; as if calling down a hatchway or cellar; besought — 'Why dont [sic.] you speak to me? My God! — It is I! — Ah, speak — but one word! — All deaf. — So much for consolation. — This woman & her cries haunt me horribly. ———"
> (Herman Melville, December 1856, *Journals* 62)

Melville's 1856-57 journal of his trip to the Mediterranean is an important document when analyzing *Clarel*. Apart from providing descriptions of the places he visited, these notebooks –three of which have been preserved– capture the impressions each different place provoked on the author, which he annotated in the form of words or short phrases separated by dashes through which he could recollect his experiences and thoughts afterwards. It is possible that the author created poems after this travel, which he may have included in the volume he attempted to publish in 1860, the manuscript of

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[184] See footnote 223 on page 245 in this chapter.

[185] Similarly, Rolfe also notes in *Clarel* that: "Tahiti should have been the place / For Christ in advent" (*Clarel* 1876: 4.18.44-45).

which was destroyed after being rejected for publication by the Harpers. Some of these poems may have survived in the section "Fruit of Travel Long Ago" in *Timoleon* (1891).[186] Be as it may, *Clarel* gathers some of the 'fruits' of this voyage. Walter E. Bezanson carried out an excellent comparative study of the Journal and *Clarel* in his 1943 Ph.D. dissertation –an important landmark to anyone analyzing *Clarel*–, later published as part of the 1960 Hendricks House edition of the poem, and more recently incorporated into the section "Parallel Passages in *Clarel* and Melville's 1856-57 Journal" in the Editorial Appendix of the Northwestern-Newberry edition of *Clarel* (1991: 871-881), which reprints Bezanson analysis, revised and supplemented by Alma A. MacDougall's. These comparative analyses show how a great number of descriptions related to places, people he had met 'on the go', and even animals in Melville's journal resonate in those of *Clarel*, as well as how, in the poem, Melville also included narrations he heard from some of the people he encountered in his voyage, even using some of these narratives in his character-construction. It is not the intention of this section to develop a detailed comparison between the 1856-57 journal and *Clarel*, but to indicate the importance of this journal to the poem, since, more than ten years after his trip, Melville went back to the journal, remembered, re-imagined, and re-created places he had seen, some of the people he had met, and, most importantly, the personal crises he seems to have suffered in 1856, appropriating, fictionalizing, rethinking, and evaluating these elements retrospectively, from his perspective in the late 1860s and 1870s, when he was imagining or was already engaged in the actual writing of *Clarel*.

Some events had affected Melville's life, in particular, and the sociopolitical situation of the United States, in general, in the more than ten years since his Holy Land

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[186] It is, however, impossible to know how many of the poems in *Timoleon* were already written in 1857. Biographers such as Hershel Parker argue that some of the poems from Melville's Mediterranean voyage were integrated in the volume *Poems* which the author tried to unsuccessfully publish in 1860.

trip and the publication of *The Confidence-Man* in April 1857. *The Confidence-Man* would become Melville's last published novel in his lifetime, and would follow the same fate of each of the author's works after *Omoo* (1848): condemnation, undervaluation, and eventual neglect.[187] A few weeks before *The Confidence-Man* was published in the U.S., Melville was back in New York from his voyage to England and the Mediterranean. In 1857 and subsequent years, Melville took a job as a lecturer, combining the writing and delivery of occasional speeches in different cities around New England, New York, and even Canada with the writing of poetry.[188] It is a widespread hypothesis now in Melville Studies that –with the exception of the lectures– the author may have turned exclusively to the writing of poetry after his trip, so that he might have managed to have in a few years enough poems to weave them into a volume which he tried to publish around 1860.[189] Such volume, however, never saw the public light, and no manuscript of it has been preserved which may be indicative of its contents. After the rejection of *Poems* (the title that, according to Hershel Parker [2008: 129-130], Melville seems to have intended for it), Melville would not publish another work until *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War*, in 1866, Melville's poetry project on the U.S. Civil War as well as his first published volume of poetry. On the following years, on a national as well as on a personal level,[190] America(ns) would go through the tragic experience of a Civil War which many expected would restore the Union and even act as a cathartic agent to heal the divided nation. Nonetheless, when *Clarel* was published in 1876, eleven years after the end of the war, the United States continued to be fragmented, the conflict persisted in the

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[187] See the reviews of *The Confidence-Man* (1857) in Higgins and Parker 1995: 485-506.

[188] To an extended analysis of Melville as lecturer, see the Critical Appendix to the Northwestern-Newberry edition of *The Piazza Tales* (1995).

[189] See Hershel Parker's *Melville. The Making of the Poet* (2008).

[190] This national experience was also experienced on a personal level, since almost every American family at the time had a relative in the army (Kreiser and Browne 2011: xi), and many of them lost family members or close friends in the war (Foote 1994: 272).

South where sectarian and racial violence was frequent,[191] and the country was experiencing higher levels of corruption than before the war.[192] Witnessing this situation, if, during the Civil War years, Melville had any hopes of a potential sociopolitical transformation, in the 1870s he already learned that, if there had been any possibility of real democratization at all, the nation had irresponsibly rejected it. Being asked the question "who won the war?", Shelby Foote emphasizes the loss of human values in postbellum America:

> I can tell you who lost it — the South lost the war. But I'm not sure anybody won that war. It's a tragedy. The Centennial was called a celebration that should have been a time of mourning. If anybody won the war, it's […] the robber barons of late in the century. […] Capitalism went spread-eagle and diversity went out of our life. […] On the face of it, the North won the war. But the bill for winning it was huge in human values, not to mention human lives. (1994: 273)

This materialistic and still deeply divided America is the United States that Melville would critically analyze in *Clarel*, published precisely in the year of the Centennial anniversary of the nation.

2.2.3. Hypotheses about the Origins and Composition of *Clarel*

> "Lemsford was a poet; so thoroughly inspired with the divine afflatus, that not even all the tar and tumult of a man-of-war could drive it out of him.
>
> As may readily be imagined, the business of writing verse is a very different thing on the gun-deck of a frigate, from what the gentle and sequestered Wordsworth found it at placid Rydal Mount in Westmoreland. In a frigate, you cannot sit down and meander off your sonnets, when the full heart prompts; but only, when more important duties permit: such as bracing round the yards, or reefing top-sails fore and aft. Nevertheless, every fragment of time at his command

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[191] See Foner 1988: 119-123.
[192] See Trachtenberg 1982: 144.

> was religiously devoted by Lemsford to the Nine. At the most unseasonable hours, you would behold him, seated apart, in some corner among the guns—a short-box before him, pen in hand, and eyes '*in a fine frenzy rolling.*'
>
> […] Some deemed him a conjurer; others a lunatic […]. But well knowing by experience the truth of the saying, that *poetry is its own exceeding great reward*, Lemsford wrote on; dashing off whole epics, sonnets, ballads, and acrostics, with a facility which, under the circumstances, amazed me."
>
> (Herman Melville, *White-Jacket* 1850: 40-41)

If, as I will analyze,[193] *Pierre* (1852) may be considered one of the most autobiographical and metaliterary Melvillean reflections on the act of writing (as well as on the very act of writing *Pierre*, in particular), in *White-Jacket* the young protagonist and narrator describes his fellow-frigateer and friend Lemsford's 'wrestl[ing] with the angel" ("Art" [ca. 1870], *Published Poems* 280) expressing extreme sensibility toward the difficulties of pursuing the artistic creative endeavor of writing poetry in the midst of the busy life and permanent public exposure on board of the navy ship *Neversink*. He also shows deep understanding of the rewards of poetry.[194] In 1850, when *White-Jacket* was published, Melville had already been experimenting with poetry, as demonstrated, for example, by some of the poems he introduced in his novel *Mardi* (1849). By the time *Clarel* was published a quarter of a century later, Melville had long been a poet, experiencing the difficulties, rewards, and pains of 'pursuing' the "angel" ("Art" 280).

 Clarel was published on 4 June 1876, its complete title reading *Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land*. Ten years had passed since the publication of *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War* (August 1866), a period bringing some changes to Melville's life and transforming his hopes for the American society that had developed after the Civil War.

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[193] See Section 2.3 in this chapter.

[194] Very appropriately, in my opinion, the chapter which anticipates Melville's sensibility towards poetry as well as his understanding of the pains and pleasures it produces in the artist is entitled "The Pursuit of Poetry under Difficulties", number 11 in the novel.

If, as I shall analyze,[195] in *Battle-Pieces* Melville could still express, to a certain degree, hopes that the experience of the national tragedy of war might enable the maturation of the United States into a responsible country, in *Clarel* a more disappointed poet evaluates the society born from the war several years after the end of the conflict, connecting the postbellum context to a universal "slide into a degradation" (*Clarel* 2.8.40) or global waste beyond national boundaries.[196]

As I noted earlier, the end of the Civil War brought about an important change to Melville, who entered a full-time job at the Customs House in order to support his family economically; this reduced considerably the number of hours that the author could devote to his writing, and exposed him directly to the corrupt(ing) system he had so consistently criticized in his previous works and would again condemn in *Clarel*. Over the nineteen years that Melville worked at the Customs House, the only time available to concentrate on his literary projects was in the afternoons after his job, on Sundays, and during the weeks of annual holiday. With such a tight schedule, and considering the dimensions of *Clarel*, it was no wonder that there was an interval of ten years between the publication of *Battle-Pieces* (August 1866) and that of *Clarel* (June 1876). Besides, Melville experienced the deaths of several close relatives during these years, most importantly that of his eldest son Malcolm in September 1867, at the age of eighteen.[197] We cannot know the impact that Malcolm's death had upon Melville and his creative energies, and it is impossible to know whether, after the death of his son, the author experienced any paralysis of his creative energies (Walter Bezanson, for example, argues that, at that time, Melville may have already started the composition of *Clarel*, in which case he abandoned the manuscript of the poem for some time until he

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[195] See Section 3.4.
[196] See Section 3.4 and 3.5 in this chapter.
[197] On the evening of September 11, Malcolm was found dead on his bed with a bullet wound in his head. See Parker 2002: 642-646.

again felt prepared to return to it),[198] or if, on the contrary, this tragic event encouraged

him to take refuge in his writing and write even more frenetically. In whichever case,

young Malcolm's death was a crucial event in Melville's life and I think it cannot be

ignored when approaching *Clarel*.

Clarel is a monumental poem in size, the longest poem in U.S. literature and one

of the longest in English, with 17,863 lines divided in four parts which progress lineally

from one to the other in terms of plot, and are connected to specific locations that

characters visit in their pilgrimage in the city of Jerusalem and its surroundings.[199] As

has already been mentioned, we do not know the exact years in which Melville was

working on *Clarel*, yet the writing process of such a long poem may well have occupied

many years, especially considering the fact that, since 1866, Melville counted with

limited time to dedicate to his writing. As a matter of fact, Melville himself may have

evolved (psychologically, politically) throughout the writing of the poem. As he had

playfully written to Nathaniel Hawthorne back in 1851: "This is a long letter, but you

are not at all bound to answer it. Possibly, if you do answer it, and direct it to Herman

Melville, you will missend it — for the very fingers that now guide this pen are not

precisely the same that just took it up and put it on this paper. Lord, when shall we be

done changing?" ([17] November 1851, *Correspondence* 213). To this personal evolution

is added the socio-political transformations which New York, in particular, and the

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[198] Bezanson's opinion is that Melville might have started *Clarel* around 1867 (see Bezanson 1991: 531). On the other hand, Hershel Parker locates the beginnings of the writing of *Clarel* in early 1870, while Vincent Kenny believes that Melville started the poem after 1870. Nevertheless, other earlier critics such as Jean Simon defended that the first volume of the poem (it is important to remark again here that *Clarel* was originally published in two volumes) was written before *Battle-Pieces*, after Melville's trip to the Levant, whereas the second volume was written after the publication of Melville's Civil War volume of poetry. In my opinion, it is unlikely that, as Simon claims, the two volumes (or any of the parts in the poem) were composed with such a long temporal interval between one another.

[199] As a matter of fact, the plot is the only linear development or sense of 'progress' in the poem, since dialogue, stories, and even poetics disrupt teleology (see Section 3.3 in this chapter). Moreover, Joseph G. Knapp has noted how death is a significant motif to the structure of the poem, as it closes each of the four parts: Nathan's death closes Part 1, Nehemiah's Part 2, Mortmain's Part 3, and Ruth's Part 4 (1971: 34). Part 4, however, does not end abruptly with Ruth's death but with Clarel's grieving, which, as I shall analyze, is of significance to the universalist project I interpret in the poem.

United States, in general, underwent over the 1870s. Considering the different parts of such a long and complex poem as *Clarel* separately yet in a dialogic relationship to one another may be helpful when analyzing the textual evolution of the poem over the years Melville composed it, as well as the personal and national contexts in which each of the sections, in particular, and the entire poem, in general, might have been produced.

Melville might have sympathized with the following testimony by poet Hart Crane:

> I am not getting the needful hours to ripen anything in myself […]. I have had very little time left over from the day's work to give to it [poetry] […]. But a long poem like that ["The Bridge"] needs unbroken time and extensive concentration and my present routine of life permits me only fragments. (There are days when I simply have to 'sit on myself' at my desk to shut out rhythms and melodies that belong to that poem and have never been written because I have succeeded only too well during the course of the day's work in excluding and stifling such a train of thoughts […] & then there are periods when the whole world couldn't shut out the plans and beauties of that work— & I get a little of it on paper). (qtd. in Olsen 1965: 165)

It is impossible to know the pace Melville may have kept when writing *Clarel*, yet his job at the Customs House was certainly determinant to his rhythm of composition. No working drafts of the poem survive which may provide hints on the approximate time Melville might have taken to complete each part, neither can we deduce such information from the writing process of other previous works, as this was the first time in his life that Melville was combining literary creation with a full-time job, and that he was writing a literary work of such characteristics. Thus, the time Melville took to write poetry must have necessarily been different from the time he used to complete novels or short stories. The time dedicated to *Clarel* may have also been different from the time the author had invested in *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War*, also a volume of poetry, but containing short pieces that stand individually yet make sense within the

whole, and not a narrative poem of *Clarel*'s dimensions.[200] Melville worked on *Clarel* in his own way and at his own pace. Such a long poem as *Clarel* –both due to its extension and the number of years Melville took to complete it– should not be conceived as a linear project, but as a process through which, as he wrote on from Part 1 through Part 4, Melville also moved back and forth, not only doing corrections or rewritings of already completed cantos, but also perhaps introducing new characters as the poet saw it fit to incorporate them into the pilgrimage.

There are two major hypotheses as to when Melville may have begun his monumental poetry project.[201] On the one hand, Walter Bezanson argues that Melville may have started writing *Clarel* in 1867. Hershel Parker, on the other hand, connects the conception/writing of *Clarel* to the Melville and Hawthorne relationship,[202] claiming that the poem started to be conceived and written after the summer of 1869, which was the time when Melville traveled to Pittsfield and Lenox from New York City.[203] This return to the Berkshires, Parker claims, haunted Melville with memories of Nathaniel Hawthorne which propitiated the imagining and actual writing of *Clarel*: "A dozen years after his visit to the Holy Land, Melville had not put it to literary use, but his experiences at the Curtis Hotel [in Lenox] at last let him see his way clear to begin writing his epic poem about a pilgrimage in the Holy Land" (2002: 683). Nevertheless, the lack of personal documents, working drafts of the poem, or a final manuscript of the text make it impossible to determine which of these hypotheses is closest to reality.

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[200] Moreover, *Battle-Pieces* is of no help either since many uncertainties persist about the process of composition of that volume as well.

[201] See other hypotheses in footnote 198 on page 227 in this section.

[202] Nathaniel Hawthorne had died in New Hampshire on 19 May 1864.

[203] Other *Clarel* scholar, such as William Potter, on the other hand, do not position themselves in any particular hypothesis about the period of composition of the poem but broadly claim the late 1860s and 1870s as the temporal context for *Clarel*. Judging from the sociopolitical context that the poem addresses, I think it is unlikely that Melville may have started the poem in the late 1850s, immediately after his trip to the Mediterranean, as other earlier critics of the poem (e.g., Jean Simon) claimed. See footnote 198 on page 227 in this section.

In the same way as Bezanson's and Parker's, the considerations that the following pages will present are hypotheses. If, as Parker claims, it is true that during the summer of 1869 Melville experienced an intense "spectral encounter" with Hawthorne (2002: 683) in revisiting the places that reminded him of his former friend, this would only account for Melville's readiness to explore his relationship with the writer of *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) in *Clarel* (introducing the character of Vine, as Bezanson and Parker claim), but not for the more general pilgrimage-plot, since *Clarel* is not merely a literary exploration of Melville's friendship with Hawthorne (if we agree that Hawthorne actually resonates in Vine): if memories of Hawthorne contributed to Melville's writing of *Clarel*, this does not account for the subjects the poem addresses (e.g., Zionism, progress, democracy, etc.), the specific setting of the action in Palestine, the vast range of characters included, or its apparently 'central'[204] protagonist Clarel. Conversely, one could argue that in Lenox Melville was reminded of his last interview with Hawthorne, and of the mood in which he had departed from his friend in Liverpool when Melville was on his way to the Holy Land in November 1856. Besides, by the time he visited Lenox in the summer of 1869, Melville may have already decided on the general structure *Clarel* was to acquire, the issues he wanted to address, and the major characters the poem would contain. It is even possible that, by then, he may have actually already started writing the poem. *Clarel*, therefore, may not have started to be conceived in 1869, as a result of Melville's encounter with the past and remembrance of his relationship with Nathaniel Hawthorne.

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[204] As I shall analyze, the poem is not an exercise in 'centering' or 'centralizing' but, on the opposite, on de-centralizing and de-transcendentalizing fixed 'Meanings'. This is why I want to indicate here my estrangement for using the very word 'central'. As a matter of fact, although the young Clarel is the apparent protagonist of the poem, giving name to the text and opening the quest of this "poem and pilgrimage" (as the subtitle of *Clarel* indicates), it is not adequate to claim that Clarel is the 'central' character, as such a 'center' is scattered among each of the different characters, all of whom are at different stages given a 'central' position, at the same time that they are also removed from the 'center'. This exercise in de-centralization constitutes the grounds upon which the universalism that the poem articulates is built.

This 'encounter' with Hawthorne, nevertheless, may account for some of the motifs explored in Part 2 "The Wilderness". As a matter of fact, it is in this second part that the possible Vine/Hawthorne identification becomes more evident and that Clarel's attraction to the introverted stranger starts to be developed in the poem, particularly (though not exclusively) in a canto where Clarel exposes his longings for togetherness with Vine during their private encounter in canto 2.27 ("Vine and Clarel").[205] This may indicate that, more than inspiring the writing of *Clarel*, Melville's revisiting of his friendship with Hawthorne in Lenox may have motivated him to explore their relationship, once he was already engaged in the writing of the poem. Melville does introduce Vine in Part 1, as one of the earliest companions Clarel meets in Jerusalem, yet Vine remains mostly silent in this first Part, only occasionally addressed by other characters, and as a background presence in general despite attracting the attention of the young protagonist Clarel. Vine, however, is a character of importance in *Clarel*, and thus it is unlikely that he was a later addition forcing Melville to add new sections and rewrite already written cantos in order to 'fit' this character and the worldview that he is made to represent; Clarel meets Vine at the beginning of his pilgrimage and this character will accompany the young student until the end of his journey. Nevertheless, the main focus of Part 1 is not Clarel's relationship with the recently met Vine, but his impressions on Jerusalem, together with Nathan's Zionist story, the love-plot between Clarel and Ruth, and Clarel's magnetism with the Italian outcast Celio. Melville may well have decided to fictionalize his old friend in *Clarel* from the beginning, yet it is in Part 2 that the character of Vine is most powerfully unveiled, and that Vine's reactions toward other characters and toward the events they all experience throughout the pilgrimage either alone or collectively are given expression.

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[205] For an analysis of this canto see "a" in Section 3.7.3 in this chapter.

Perhaps it was precisely because he was already writing about Vine-Hawthorne that, as Parker argues, Melville needed to go back alone to Lenox at this stage, in order to revive his memories of the Hawthorne he had known in the early 1850s (perhaps juxtaposing him to the Hawthorne he had met in Liverpool in 1856 and remembering the possible feeling of distance he might have felt, by then, between himself and a person to whom he had once felt so close?).[206] It is, thus, my opinion that, when Melville went to Lenox in August 1869, he was already engaged in the writing of *Clarel*.

Aware that we cannot determine the date in which Melville started conceiving/writing *Clarel*, my argument in this section is that perhaps the presence of Melville's son Malcolm is more significant to the general plot of the poem and the character that gives its name than has been traditionally thought. Malcolm died untimely at the age of eighteen, in September 1867, probably committing suicide,[207] and

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[206] Following the Hawthorne-Vine identification first established by Bezanson and subsequently followed by scholars such as Hershel Parker, it is possible to read Clarel's moving away from his passionate inner cry "Give me thyself!" (2.27.70) to Vine, and desire to "wed / Our souls in one" (2.27.106-107), to his eventual, self-censoring, condemnation that "sick these feelings are" (2.27.139), as bearing resonances of Melville's friendship with Hawthorne, which, because of the fact that only Melville's letters but not Hawthorne's have been preserved (Hawthorne kept Melville's, but Melville destroyed all his correspondence with Hawthorne), has always been considered passionate on Melville's part and cold or unresponsive on Hawthorne's (Hawthorne, however, who was fifteen years older than Melville, kept the letters Melville sent him). This change in tone in the poem, from an open expression of what we may read as Clarel's longings for Vine to the repression of such desire, may be interpreted in the light of the two writers' last meetings both in Lenox in 1852 and in Liverpool in 1857, after which the two former friends seem to have distanced from one another. Despite this distancing, Hawthorne seems to have been capable of great understanding of Melville's nature, as reflected in his account of their meeting in Liverpool, when Melville was on his way to Palestine.

[207] John Hoadley –Melville's brother-in-law– described Malcolm's death thus: "There is no doubt indeed that he died by a shot from a pistol held in his own right hand; for when he was found dead, he lay asleep in his night clothes, and in his natural attitude on his left side, with his left hand under his knee, as had been his life-long habit, his right hand fallen across the boy holding the fatal pistol; calm, smiling, the eyes closed, the lips just parted, as they always were when he slept, a wound in his temple, his door locked, his watch, his money, his clothes, all disposed as he left them on retiring" (qtd. in Parker 2002: 643). Local newspapers in the state of New York at the time reported on Malcolm's death, attributing no doubts that it had been a suicide yet portraying a good image of Malcolm and the Melville family: "Coroner Wildey was yesterday called to the residence of Mr. Herman Melville, No. 104 East 26th street, to hold an inquest over the remains of Malcolm Melville, son of Herman, who committed suicide by shooting himself with a revolving pistol. From the facts as presented to the Coroner, it appears that the deceased was absent from home nearly all of Tuesday night, and then entered at 3 o'clock the following morning, his mother, who was still waiting for him, asked where he had been. He frankly replied that he had been with some friends in Harlem whom he found it difficult to leave, but seemed to regret that he should cause his mother so much trouble and anxiety of mind. •

leaving his parents shocked and confused for the tragic event. Coping with his distress, Melville may have been concerned about his failure to perceive Malcolm's feelings and anticipate the tragedy.[208] This personal need to try to 'approach' his son when it was too late to approach him, in my opinion, might have inspired the general framework for the poem –the pilgrimage, the quest in which the 'paternal' narrator would guide the young Clarel through his journey–, as well as Melville's remembrance of his own travel to Palestine at a time in which, Melville biographers have noted, the author may well have been in distress and at a loss himself, perhaps even with thoughts of 'annihilation', as he had expressed to Hawthorne.[209] Yet, Melville, unlike his son Malcolm, did not kill himself; he continued writing, and diving. The poem never reveals the exact age of the young student Clarel, but the narrator's insistence on Clarel's youth may be indicative that the character's age was perhaps not too different from Malcolm's at the time of his death. Melville may have conceived Clarel as an alter-ego to Malcolm, a literary 'son' sharing in the doubts of his real son (and his own doubts at many points of his life), and in need of guidance to find sense to his existence and face the hardships of life. In a similar way as to how Clarel fails to respond to Celio's lonely yearnings and longings for intersubjective bonding in the poem, Melville himself may have failed to provide such guidance to his son in life; hence the possible sense of grief, shock, and

She mildly remonstrated with him for being out so late and he said it should not occur again. Then, embracing his mother and kissing her good night he entered his room. He failed to appear at the breakfast table as usual in the morning. In consequence of being up so late Mrs. Melville concluded not to disturb him, thus matters remained till five o'clock Wednesday afternoon, when forcing open his room door, it was found that he had shot himself. He was only eighteen years of age" (Utica, NY, *Daily Observer*, September 13, 1867). Reading this and other reports on Malcolm's death, it continues to be surprising that none in the family had heard the gunshot.

[208] All kinds of readings have been produced about Melville's relationship with his eldest son Malcolm, some of which have pictured Melville as an authoritarian and neglecting father, even responsible for the suicide of his son (e.g., Shneidman 1976, Renker 1996). For a careful study on Melville and fatherhood see Cohen and Yannella (1992).

[209] As indicated in Section 2.2.1, in his report on his meeting with Melville in Liverpool in November 1856, Hawthorne asserts that "[Melville] *informed me that he had 'pretty much made up his mind to be annihilated*'" (qtd. in Bezanson 1991: 511). Hawthorne, however, adds that Melville "*still does not seem to rest in that anticipation*" because he "*will never rest until he gets hold of a definite belief*" (qtd. in Bezanson 1991: 511).

responsibility he might have experienced at the youth's death. In this respect, Malcolm's early death might have inspired *Clarel*, the general structure of the pilgrimage and perhaps the doubting natures of characters such as Clarel (who might live on and endure, as the paternal narrator advises him to do) or Celio (who does 'annihilate' himself early in the poem). At the same time, in an effort to identify with his son, Melville may have remembered the time in which he himself had been at a loss and in pain when he was in his late 30s, perhaps, even considering suicide, before a trip that would take him to Palestine, and which was recommended to him as a cure for the depression and exhaustion he appears to have suffered at that time. This would also explain why Melville would feel the need to 'return' to the Holy Land more than a decade after his trip and turn Palestine into the literary context for his new poetry project.[210] *Clarel* may have been inspired by both Malcolm's suicide and Melville's life-crisis, and developed as a result of Melville's possible identification with, and need to approach, his son. This is not to argue that the character of Clarel stands for Malcolm, but my claim is that Malcolm's tragic death might have revived a life-crisis and quest for meaning (as well as the need to learn how to continue functioning without definite metanarratives, and aware that no definite 'Meaning' can be grasped) that may have determined both Malcolm's 'self-annihilation' in 1867 and Melville's wish "*to be annihilated*" in 1856 (Hawthorne, qtd. in Bezanson 1991: 511).[211] At this stage, Melville

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[210] As Timothy Marr has noted, "Melville deterritorializes much of his fiction by setting it upon the fluid currents of the oceans that, as Melville says of the Pacific, 'makes all coasts one bay to it' (*Moby-Dick* 483)" ("Out of this World" 2006: 540). Even though *Clarel* is not deterritorialized, the Holy Land provides the uniting component that oceans have in other Melville works, as it is a context of human plurality and a watershed of different peoples, and the desert is portrayed as a weary state of the human soul. Melville further connects the desert and the sea by having the narrator claim that "Sands immense / Impart the oceanic sense", adding that "Pillars of sand […] / True kin be to the water-spout" (2.11.36-37, 39-41).

[211] While there are a series of characters who annihilate themselves (or are annihilated) at different stages of the poem because they cannot bear the suffering that life inflicts upon them any longer (Celio, Mortmain), by the end of the poem, Clarel does not kill himself but, in his unlearning,

may have conceived the issues he would explore in *Clarel* (the central topic of the pilgrimage, and the existential crisis of faith and 'Meanings' that give sense to human existence); writing the poem would become itself a (painful, certainly) journey of exploration –a poem and pilgrimage, as the subtitle indicates– for the writer, as much as it is to characters and readers. *Clarel*, therefore, may have been presented to Melville's imagination as a complex search for beliefs and ideals that sustain human existence, an analysis of the grief and desperation derived from existence and the impossibility to find immutable 'Meanings', and a dialogue between different attitudes and worldviews adopted by different human beings in order to find sense to their existences in a world which generates pain and where ultimate 'Truths' may eventually be as void as might be the core of pyramids.[212] The eventual destination of the young Clarel in the poem is not death or a feeling of 'home' but the endurance (in a permanent wandering) of the suffering provoked by life and derived from constant diving. It is, thus, my hypothesis that Melville may have started imagining *Clarel*, and perhaps even writing Part 1 ("Jerusalem"), in the months following Malcolm's death. From such early stage in the writing process onwards, the author may have conceived the general framework of the story and the setting, sketched (some of) the major characters (Clarel, Nehemiah, Nathan, Ruth, Agar, Celio, Vine and Rolfe), and determined some of the issues the poem would analyze. The influence of Melville's 1856-57 journal of his trip to the Mediterranean was probably of importance for the design of *Clarel*'s plot and

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learns that life is a matter of endurance (see Knapp 1971, and Potter 2004). See the analysis of the final cantos of the poem in Section 4 in this chapter.

[212] In *Pierre*, the narrator compares the world to the appallingly empty Egyptian pyramids: "The old mummy lies buried in cloth on cloth; it takes time to unwrap this Egyptian king. Yet now, forsooth, because Pierre began to see through the first superficiality of the world, he fondly weens he has come to the unlayered substance. But, far as any geologist has yet gone down into the world, it is found to consist of nothing but superinduced superficies. By vast plains we mine into the pyramid; by horrible gropings we come to the central room; with joy we espy the sarcophagus; but we lift the lid—and no body is there!—appallingly vacant as vast is the soul of man!" (*Pierre* 1852: 332). Similarly, in his 1856-57 journal, Melville portrays the pyramids as something impenetrable, incomprehensible, and terrifying, perhaps even empty. See the entries in Melville's journal on page 361 in this chapter.

characters. Once he started writing *Clarel*, in my opinion perhaps already in late 1867, the poem gradually acquired its own life, leading the author to gradually sketch the rest of the characters and incorporate other questions about which he wanted to reflect and which he might not have considered at the beginning of his literary project.

As has already been argued, by the time he went to the Berkshires in the summer of 1869, Melville may have finished Part 1 and already started conceiving, perhaps even writing, Part 2 ("The Wilderness"). More arbitrary is to conjecture about the years of composition of Part 3 ("Mar Saba") and Part 4 ("Bethlehem"). As mentioned earlier, in his biography of the author, Hershel Parker establishes late 1869 or 1870 as the time when Melville may have begun writing Part 1 of *Clarel*, and 1871 as the year when he might have initiated Part 2. Following these hypotheses, Parker establishes Part 3 might have started to be written in 1873 and Part 4 in 1874-75. My theory, however, is that, if we are to consider that Melville began imagining *Clarel* and working on "Jerusalem" (Part 1) in late 1867 or perhaps early 1868, and that he might have embarked in "The Wilderness" (Part 2) by or after August 1868, we could think of 1871 as an approximate timing for "Mar Saba" (Part 3) and 1873 as the approximate context for "Bethlehem" (Part 4). Even though it may appear by this affirmation that I am assuming here the writing of *Clarel* as sequential or linear, I am aware that Melville's progression from Part 1 to Part 4 may have been characterized by stages of overlapping among different cantos which may have been (re)written simultaneously, or periods in which the writing of a later canto may have led the poet to introduce modifications in earlier ones. Although, as I started claiming at the beginning of this section, the different Parts and cantos of the poem are dynamically interconnected and therefore bound to modify, and be modified by, the other, I believe that, on the whole, the writing process of *Clarel* was a linear one. This does not mean, of course, that Melville

did not go back and changed Part 1 as he continued writing further parts and introducing new characters to the poem. In regard to Part 4 ("Bethlehem"), if we consider that it is in this section that the character of Ungar –the ex-Confederate half-Anglo and half-Cherokee American who is at present a soldier for the Turks– is introduced and, through him, Melville's critique of the U.S. which consolidated after the Civil War, the composition of this part can be related to the aftermath of the U.S. Presidential Election in November 1872, or to the aggravating class tensions and social conflicts at the time of the economic depression, especially between 1873-74 (Ungar actually foresees a class war in America in Part 4). Living in New York at the time, Melville witnessed the excitement that arose in the city after the reelection of Ulysses S. Grant, who would give continuation to the high degrees of corruption that had already characterized his first administration since 1868 (Ferrell 2003: 54-55), in a national context of deep and violent divisions among Americans. After having worked over five years at the Customs House by then, and having witnessed the spreading of bribery, Melville had probably abandoned by 1872 any hopes he may have held in Grant's government in 1868, providing he had had any hopes at all.[213] Grant's reelection may have influenced Melville's eagerness to evaluate postbellum U.S., and to analyze the still bleeding wounds of the war, as well as postbellum America's sociopolitical and, rapidly widening, economic divisions, through the voice of a group of American characters (Rolfe, Clarel, Vine [Northerners], and the Southern veteran Ungar) who are estranged

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[213] Ulysses S. Grant was elected President of the United States in 1868 and then, again, in 1872. During those years in government a "Gospel of Prosperity" (Foner 2002: 379) spread in the country, as the federal government engaged in a railroad program intended to modernize the economy of the United States but which ultimately became a generator of corruption from which everyone benefited, for "[…] many officials saw nothing wrong with taking a piece of the expanding economic pie for themselves" (Foner 385). This "get-rich-quick mentality" (Foner 385) soon doubled the debts of the states, tainted the image of Republicans, and precipitated the economic depression of 1873. Melville had met Grant as a Civil War General in 1864, during his trip to the battlefields in Virginia with his brother Allan, which inspired the poem "The Scout Toward Aldie" in *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War*. While Stanton Garner has claimed that Melville had more sympathy for McClellan's belligerent methods than Grant's, there is no documental evidence of Melville's political views on Grant.

from one another in the American microcosm that they are made to constitute in the poem. Through Ungar, Melville voices the anger that he himself may have accumulated over years of political discontent, and turns the ex-Confederate, in Walter Bezanson's words, into a "bitter judge of man and society" (1991: 563). Moreover, in his identity both as a Southern ex-Confederate and as a half-Anglo and half-Cherokee American, on the one hand, and as a soldier for the Ottoman Empire, on the other, Melville creates in Ungar the connecting bridge between different forms of violence and oppression, making him an example of the "Man, suffering inflictor" that the author refers to in the fourth piece of the "Pebbles" section in *John Marr and Other Sailors* (1888: 122).[214] Thus, it is my opinion that Melville may have started writing Part 4 ("Bethlehem") around 1873, perhaps in the months after Grant's reelection, as this political context may have inspired the incorporation of Ungar and his powerful speeches into the poem. In the case of Part 3 ("Mar Saba"), the hypothetical date of composition I propose is harder to justify through any particular event that may have inspired any of its topics or characters. My claim that it may have been initiated approximately in 1871 derives from the fact that I think Melville may have taken between one to two years to complete (and perhaps revise individually and in relation to others) each of the parts. This argument, however, may rightly be considered vague.

Melville may have completed *Clarel*, the whole poem, by 1874 and embarked in the not small task of revising such a long poem afterwards. That year he probably announced his project to his wife Elizabeth, who may have told the family –judging from the evidence that has reached us– by Thanksgiving 1874 and, later, in her March 1875 letter to Kate Gansevoort asking her not to spread the news which she had

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[214] As a matter of fact, Ungar's denunciations of Anglo colonization of the "Indians east and west" (*Clarel* 4.9.120) may also echo the harsh policies which Grant's administration had implemented on Native Americans already in the first four years of his government and which the President would continue inflicting after his reelection. See footnote 531 on page 489 in this chapter.

already announced to her in confidence before that letter. In August 1875, Melville spoke to his uncle Peter Gansevoort about *Clarel*, perhaps having already finished revising it after completion. The following months until the eventual publication of the poem were devoted to the final revisions and to preparing the manuscript for the press, which, as the next section shall analyze, seems to have created tensions to the Melville home. By mid-April 1876, as Lizzie's letter to Kate announced, *Clarel* was already in type.

2.3. That "dreadful *incubus* of a book": Domestic Tensions in the Melville Household

> "'It is finished, then,' cried Isabel, […] 'That vile book, it is finished!—Thank Heaven!'
>
> 'Not so,' said Pierre; and, displacing all disguisements, a hectic unsummoned expression suddenly came to his face;—'but ere that vile book be finished, I must get on some other element than earth. I have sat on earth's saddle till I am weary; I must now vault over to the other saddle awhile. Oh, seems to me, there should be two ceaseless steeds for a bold man to ride,—the Land and the Sea; and like circus-men we should never dismount, but only be steadied and rested by leaping from one to the other, while still, side by side, they both race round the sun. I have been on the Land steed so long, oh I am dizzy!'"
>
> (Herman Melville, *Pierre* 1852: 404)

Elizabeth's letters during the years of composition of *Clarel* reveal a certain distancing from her husband mostly due to her incapacity to understand the importance of writing for Melville. As a matter of fact, Lizzie often believed that her husband's mental health was negatively affected when he was engaged in periods of sustained intellectual activity which required solitude. In the same way as Melville's cousin Kate, Lizzie may have considered that the job at the Customs House was benefiting her husband's mental

health by decreasing his hours at the desk, writing and thinking. Contrary to what biographers such as Elizabeth Renker have argued,[215] Lizzie's concern for Melville's mental well-being, I believe, indicates more love than bitterness toward her husband, a love which, as documental evidence demonstrates, went through turbulent periods throughout their relationship.[216] Moreover, Lizzie was in charge of a family economy that was pressing, and seems to have felt at times that the money her husband was dedicating to the publication of his writings might have needed to be invested in the family economy instead. Despite the difficulties they might have had, however, Lizzie supported her husband to the end of his life, and Melville trusted her to the extent that she was a crucial force in the materialization of his writings, sometimes even negotiating publication conditions, as at the time of the rejected *Poems* (ca. 1860), for example. If there were times of bitterness in their relationship, this bitterness seemed to have decreased in old age, as illustrated by Melville's writing of *Weeds and Wildings Chiefly: With a Rose or Two*, the manuscript of which was left unpublished at the author's death, and which included an extended dedication to his wife. Melville's tombstone, moreover, may also be taken as an example of Lizzie's love for Herman: if, on the one hand, the decision of having a *blank* leaf and a quill (certainly not an accidental motif)[217] was Melville's, Lizzie managed to have the wishes of her husband fulfilled; if, on the other hand, this decision was Lizzie's own, it demonstrates an extraordinary knowledge of her husband and his lifelong literary project.

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[215] See Renker's *Strike Through the Mask. Herman Melville and the Scene of Writing* (1996).

[216] Lizzie's apparent intentions to be separated from Melville in 1867, for example, have been documented in Melville biographies, most recently Renker, Kring, Parker, Delbanco, etc.

[217] While the leaf and the quill were common motifs in funereal art during that period (Melville died in 1891), one only has to visit Woodlawn Cemetery –Melville's burial place in the Bronx, NY– to realize that Melville's tombstone differs from most of these tombstones in that the latter normally include the name of the deceased filling the page. I am grateful to Prof. John Bryant (Hofstra University) for his hospitality and tour of the Melville (and other literary) sites in Manhattan and the New York City area in February 2011.

Melville wrote, and loved writing, yet this does not mean that writing was an easy task. *Pierre* is perhaps the work by Melville that best describes the process of creative wrestling. The following scene from the novel describes the young Pierre in the scene of writing:

> From eight o'clock in the morning till half-past four in the evening, Pierre sits there in his room; —eight hours and a half!
>
> From throbbing neck-bands, and swinging belly-bands of gay-hearted horses, the sleigh-bells chimingly jingle; —but Pierre sits there in his room; Thanksgiving comes, with its glad thanks, and crisp turkeys; —but Pierre sits there in his room; soft through the snows, on tinted Indian moccasin, Merry Christmas comes stealing; —but Pierre sits there in his room; it is New Year's, and like a great flagon, the vast city overbrims at all curb-stones, wharves, and piers, with bubbling jubilations; —but Pierre sits there in his room: —Nor jingling sleigh-bells at throbbing neck-band, or swinging belly-band; nor glad thanks, and crisp turkeys of Thanksgiving, nor tinted Indian moccasin of Merry Christmas softly stealing through the storms; nor New Year's curb-stones, wharves, and piers, over-brimming with bubbling jubilations: —Nor jingling sleigh-bells, nor glad Thanksgiving, nor Merry Christmas, nor jubilating New Year's: —Nor Bell, Thank, Christ, Year; —none of these are for Pierre. In the midst of the merriments of the mutations of Time, Pierre hath ringed himself in with the grief of Eternity. Pierre is a peak inflexible in the heart of Time, as the isle-peak, Piko, stands unassaultable in the midst of waves.
>
> He will not be called to; he will not be stirred. Sometimes the intent ear of Isabel in the next room, overhears the alternate silence, and then the long lonely scratch of his pen. It is, as if she heard the busy claw of some midnight mole in the ground. Sometimes, she hears a low cough, and sometimes the scrape of his crook-handled cane.
>
> Here surely is a wonderful stillness of eight hours and a half, repeated day after day. In the heart of such silence, surely something is at work. Is it creation, or destruction? Builds Pierre the noble world or a new book? or does the Pale Haggardness unbuild the lungs and the life in him? —Unutterable, that a man should be thus! (*Pierre* 1852: 354)

Pierre is, together with the poem "Art",[218] perhaps the most meta-literary text that Melville wrote. While it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to engage in an analysis of *Pierre*, I believe it is important to consider at this point the reflections on the creative

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[218] Melville's brief poem "Art" expresses a conception of the creative process as a fusion of elements that are diverse and even opposing to one another.

process that Melville presents in this novel. In another relevant passage which underlines the importance of (and the pain produced by) the act of writing, the narrator wonders if such a long and self-tortuous process of giving life to a book is worthy, just for the sake of producing a novel that, if read at all, will be consumed in a few hours or go completely unnoticed. Writing, learning, is not about producing a final product, but about the process of 'diving' it supposes and which is profoundly transforming to the writer/thinker. The passages that, despite considerable length, I have chosen to include in previous pages are informing to my analysis of *Clarel*, not only in their illustration of the material conditions of the writing process itself, but, most importantly, of the unpredictable transformative consequences of this creative act upon the writer who undertakes it (and the reader that may linger with such writer through the text afterwards).

The year prior to the publication of *Clarel* –1875–, became a particularly delicate period in the Melville household, as the manuscript of the poem was completed and the process of revision and preparation for the press began. Melville's wife Lizzie was an essential piece in this process, as she had been in all of her husband's works.[219] According to Lizzie, the preparation of *Clarel* was a process that paralyzed the entire Melville household, absorbing the routines of its dwellers, even of Herman and Elizabeth's daughters Bessie and Fanny. As Melville, like Pierre, transplanted himself from "the grief of Eternity" back into "the midst of the merriments of the mutations of Time" again (*Pierre* 1852: 354), his persistence to stand like "a peak inflexible in the heart of Times" (354) seems to have clashed with the interests of his family members and with the unexpected irruptions of life itself, which added to the other expected daily interruption that his job at the Customs House already represented. There is

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[219] Also in *Pierre*, the narrator describes a scene of Isabel's copying of Pierre's manuscript which might be taken as evocative of Lizzie's, or of Melville's sisters' earlier in his life.

evidence from Lizzie's correspondence that Melville felt irascible at having

interruptions during this period, even when these interruptions were close relatives'

visits to his house. Melville's sister Augusta, who had decided to stop by Herman and

Lizzie's house in 23rd Street when she visited New York in late January 1876, finally had

to stay at her brother Tom's in order not to interfere in the preparation of *Clarel*. Lizzie

described the frenzied state in which Herman and herself were in in some letters to

Melville's cousin Kate, first in a 'controlled' way in a public letter her husband could

read,[220] and afterwards in a more inflated tone, in a private letter she kept out of

Herman's sight. This second letter asserted that:

> […] Herman, poor fellow, is in such a frightfully nervous state, & particularly now with
> such an added strain on his mind, that I am actually *afraid* to have any one here for fear
> he will be upset entirely, & not be able to go on with the printing […]. If ever this
> dreadful *incubus* of a *book* (I call it so because it has undermined all our happiness) gets
> off Herman's shoulders I do hope he may be in better mental health—but at present I
> have reason to feel the gravest concern & anxiety about it—to put it in mild phrase—
> please do not speak of it—you know how such things are exaggerated […]. Rather pity
> & pray for yr [sic.] ever affectionate Cousin Lizzie. (2 February 1876, qtd. in Parker
> 2002: 792)

Melville must have been in a nervous state at the time, but what we do not know is

what was in this nervousness that was so 'frightful' in Lizzie's view. What was sure,

however, is that the revisions and preparation of the final copy by hand that would

serve as the basis for the published version of the poem must have been an exhausting

process not only for Herman but for Lizzie as well, as she had to do the copying of the

long manuscript (*Clarel* is 17,863 lines long, the longest poem in U.S. literature and one

of the longest written in English) and also be ready to repeat already copied pages if her

husband altered any passage(s). This preparation process seems to have occasionally

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[220] This first letter merely informed that "The book is going through the press, and every
minute of Herman's time and mine is devoted to it—the mere mechanical work of reading proof &c is
so great and absorbing" (qtd. in Parker 2002: 792).

affected Melville's daughters, particularly Frances, who decades later remembered with bitterness how her father woke her up once in the middle of the night so that she would help him reading proofs of the poem (Parker 2002: 794). It seems that by the time the manuscript of *Clarel* was ready for the press, these domestic tensions dissipated, as demonstrated by Lizzie's invitation to Twenty-sixth Street to Melville's cousin Kate in a letter from April 1876 (Parker 2002: 799).

Clarel was published by Putnam on 3 June 1876, including Melville's name (despite the author's initial wishes to publish the poem anonymously, a fact that the next section shall reflect on) and a dedication to the man who had provided the funds for its publication yet who could not finally see its completion. Although *Clarel* was initially conceived to be printed in a single volume, it was eventually published in two separate volumes with the ensign of Jerusalem in their front cover.[221]

2.4. Authorial (Self-)Sacrifice: *Clarel* as Anonymous Poem

> "This train of thought terminated at last in various considerations upon the subject of anonymousness in authorship. He regretted that he had not started his literary career under that mask. At present, it might be too late; already the whole universe knew him, and it was in vain at this late day to attempt to hood himself. But when he considered the essential dignity and propierty at all points, of the inviolably anonymous method, he could not but feel the sincerest sympathy for those unfortunate fellows, who, not only naturally averse to any sort of publicity, but progressively ashamed of their own successive productions—written chiefly for the merest cash—were yet cruelly coerced into sounding title-pages by sundry baker's and butcher's bills, and other financial considerations; inasmuch as the placard of the title-page indubitably must assist the publisher in his sales."
>
> (Herman Melville, *Pierre* 1852: 292)

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[221] One of the characters in *Clarel*, the mariner Agath, has this ensign tattooed on his arm.

"But I dont [sic.] know but a book in a man's brain is better off than a book bound in calf — at any rate it is safer from criticism. And taking a book off the brain, is akin to the ticklish & dangerous business of taking an old painting off a panel — you have to scrape off the whole brain in order to get at it with due safety — & even then, the painting may not be worth the trouble."

(Herman Melville, Letter to Evert A. Duyckinck, 13 December 1850, *Correspondence* 174)

In a letter from [1? June][222] 1851, Melville lamented to Hawthorne that "What I feel most moved to write, that is banned, — it will not pay. Yet, altogether, write the *other* way I cannot" (*Correspondence* 191). Keeping faithful to what he called "the great Art of Telling the Truth" ("Hawthorne and his Mosses" 1850: 53), yet without the pressure of having to make a living by it because he now had a paying job at the Customs House, Melville may have been freer to 'dive' in *Clarel* yet it is intriguing that he chose poetry and, in particular, the rigid meter of the tetrameter for such divings. As has been previously argued, Melville did not write *Clarel* only for himself, but was willing to circulate the poem, as demonstrated by the fact that he intended to publish it. Melville's initial wish, however, was to have *Clarel* published anonymously, which implied that, even though he had written the poem, Melville was disposed to renounce any claims of authorship so that *Clarel* could be valued by itself, as a text, as a poem, perhaps even as a pilgrimage, as its subtitle indicates.[223] This decision, I believe, was an act of love on

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[222] The exact date of the letter is unknown. The editors of the Northwestern-Newberry edition of Melville's *Correspondence*, however, argue that it may have been written between May and June 1851.

[223] The notion of pilgrimage, as Stephanie S. Rogers has noted, derives its meaning from a religious dimension. A religious seeker, the 'pilgrim' is different from other types of 'travelers' or 'tourists': he is defined "as one who moves across the earth, one who leaves one's home in order to journey to a shrine or a holy place as a devotee, seeking a closer affinity to the divine through physical proximity. Many pilgrims came to a sacred place believing and hoping for direct communication between themselves and God. The pilgrim's journey is an ellipse; it is complete when the devotee has returned home with a new understanding of themselves and their God that is embodied: it is found and realized through physical proximity—a journey that is both physical and spiritual" (Rogers 2011: 4-5). The irony in *Clarel*'s subtitle "A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land" becomes evident if juxtaposed to Rogers's definition. Even though the young Clarel initially sets on a pilgrimage for religious purposes, in order to recover the (lost?) connection with God, silence his doubts, and soothe his spiritual crisis, such pilgrimage becomes a process of gradual unlearning and disconnection from any sense of religious

Melville's part for a text he may have wished to give entirely for readers to unfold; he might have written 'himself' in the process, for as the narrator of *Pierre* claims, "It is impossible to talk or write without apparently throwing oneself helplessly open" (1852: 302), but at the same time concealing his presence behind narrator and characters and, ultimately, in such desired anonymity.[224] While circumstances that will be explained in succeeding pages would force Melville to eventually have his poem published under his name, his initial desire of anonymity, I believe, reinforces the thesis that *Clarel* is a democratic poem, rejecting monolithic conceptions of 'Meaning', and creating plural thinking while placing under evaluation interpretations as varied as the representative sample of humanity the poem gathers together. Authorial anonymity, therefore, may have not only liberated Melville from self-censorship, but democratically empowered readers to value the poem and create their own reading of it without any possible prejudice against, or intimidation on the part of, its 'Author'. As I will discuss in the following pages, there is evidence indicating that Melville may have wished to publish *Clarel* anonymously at first, and only changed his mind after his uncle Peter Gansevoort offered to pay for the publication. It is important to consider that, by the time *Clarel* was published, in 1876, the 'Author' Herman Melville was an author who, according to critics, had not produced any fine piece of writing since the late 1854s, who had

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faith or relationship with a transcendental divinity. As a matter of fact, the student himself self-defines as "a traveler—no more" (*Clarel* 1.9.28) to Nehemiah's direct question "A pilgrim art thou? pilgrim thou?" (1.9.20), some simple words which, the narrator explains, "in Clarel bred / More than the simple saint [Nehemiah] divined" (1.9.21-22). In *Clarel*, thus, Melville redefines the notion of 'pilgrimage', not only expanding but even subverting its traditionally religious associations, in order to design a process of diving which not only does not lead to progress or learning, but questions traditional metanarratives and established versions of 'Truth' and tradition, encouraging a generalized voyage of unlearning throughout. Clarel's maturation, therefore, comes through his *un*learning or through learning to unlearn. No security, certainty, or 'home' is reached by the end of the pilgrimage but a perpetual sense of dislocation, unhomeliness, and pain suffuses both characters and readers.

[224] Melville had published many of his magazine stories anonymously and had also used pseudo-anonymous names such as Guy Winthrop or Salvator Tammore.

repeatedly offended his readers' sensibilities, and who, as he had demonstrated in *Battle-Pieces*, was not seen as a good poet (if he had ever been known as a poet at all).[225]

The publication of *Clarel*, nevertheless, was different from what Melville may have originally envisioned. According to his wife Elizabeth Shaw Melville, Melville was "averse" to having his name on the title page, and he only consented to change his mind after some "*very strong*" pressure from his publishers (qtd. in Parker 2002: 799). There is no evidence of why Melville was so averse to having *Clarel* published under his name, yet I believe it might have had something to do with the fact that the author wanted to enjoy the freedom allowed by anonymity. Besides, Melville was well-aware of some of his contemporaries' association of the name 'Herman Melville' with *Typee* (1846) and *Omoo* (1847), his two first, and very successful, novels of adventures which readers had expected to see reproduced in all the writings that came afterwards, and which clashed with the author's efforts to move away from the adventure-narrative genre and of his contemporaries' association with it. To this was added both the readers' and the critics' tendencies to attack any piece of writing carrying Herman Melville's signature. This may explain, in my opinion, why Melville might have sensed at this point that, knowing *Clarel* was a poem written by Herman Melville, critics and readers would be automatically prejudiced against the text, misreading –if reading at all–, misunderstanding –if understanding at all–, and undervaluing –if valuing at all– the poem beforehand, like most of his previous works, with the only exception of the successful *Typee* and *Omoo*. Melville had probably given up any faith in achieving authorial recognition among his fellow Americans by 1876. This does not mean that he did not want to give public life to his works anymore (the fact that –though in private and small editions– he continued publishing his latter volumes of poetry indicates, in

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[225] See reviews of *Battle-Pieces* (1866) and other previous works in Higgins and Parker 1995.

my opinion, that he did not want to keep these works to himself but wished to 'expose' them to some degree of public life yet without the pressures of publishers and the publishing industry, even though the public life of these works might well have to be postponed). He might have paid himself to publish *Clarel* anonymously in a small, private edition as he did with *John Marr and Other Sailors* (1888) or *Timoleon* (1891), had it not been for a fact that changed the course of events.

Melville owed the actual publication of *Clarel* to his uncle Peter Gansevoort, who provided the economic means to make the publication of the poem possible. As a matter of fact, Peter Gansevoort had been actually encouraging Melville to write about his experiences in the Middle East ever since the author had returned from his 1856-57 voyage. In 1875, nearly twenty years later, Melville's uncle may have perceived *Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land* as the literary piece he had been expecting from such a trip and, aware that the economic situation in his nephew's household was indeed difficult despite Melville's salary,[226] he was willing to give Melville the money to cover the expenses derived from the publication of the book.[227] Hershel Parker has argued that Melville and Peter Gansevoort may have discussed the particulars of *Clarel* in August 1875, when they met during their summer vacation. Actually, we cannot possibly know how *Clarel* would have been published without the economic support of Melville's uncle. Melville honored his uncle's kindness and economic support by inscribing *Clarel* to him. However, Peter Gansevoort would not see the poem published, as he died on 4 January 1876, when Melville was still in negotiation about *Clarel*'s publication with Putnam: "Uncle is released from his suffering. —*In pace.*— The

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[226] To worsen things, there was a reduction of the salary of all inspectors working at the Customs House which affected Melville in 1875.

[227] After his uncle's death, Melville also received $100 from his cousin Kate (Peter Gansevoort's daughter), in order to cover other "supplementary charges" which had derived from the publication of *Clarel* (Melville, 25 July 1876, in *Correspondence* 437) and which the initial $1,200 had not reached to cover, since, Kate insisted, it was her father's wish to provide for the entirety of this literary project.

event happens at a time which brings it home to me the most sensibly, since, as it happens, only to-day I made arrangements for that publication which he […] enabled me to effect" (Melville to his cousin Kate's husband Abraham Lansing, *Correspondence* 435).

Some critics have argued that the author's decision to eventually acknowledge authorship of the poem was determined by pressures from publishers. Hershel Parker claims in his biography that, when Melville was in negotiation with the publishers at Putnam, the writer still intended to publish *Clarel* without his name, but a rumor circulated in the press which changed the course of events: "[…] on 12 January among the 'Literary Notes' in the *Tribune* was the news, surely unwelcome at Twenty-sixth Street, that a 'narrative and descriptive poem on the Holy Land, by Herman Melville, is in press by G. P. Putnam's Sons'" (Parker 2002: 790). According to Parker, Melville might have felt strong pressure from publishers to renounce his wishes for anonymity. He might have also been reluctant to having a dedication in the volume (probably because such a dedication would also condition his name to appear). Elizabeth Melville refers to her husband's forced change of mind in a letter to Kate (22 April 1876):

> Congratulate us that the book is *at last*, in type, to the last page of Ms. and a few days more will finish up the *plate-printing* and the various little odds and ends of the work—Herman has consented on the *very strong* representations of the publishers, to put his name on the title-page, for which I am very glad—and *therefore* he has changed his mind about having a dedication—Now, he wants me to tell you he is going to inscribe that book in your father's name, as seems most natural and fit—I have been all along in strong hopes that he would, but he seemed averse to having *any* dedication whatever or any name on the title page—I shall be so thankful when it is all finished and off of his mind, and cannot help hoping that his health will improve when he is released from this long continued mental strain. (qtd. in Parker 799)

The letter not only expresses gladness that what Lizzie had called a "dreadful incubus of a book"[228] be finally over but also for the fact that Melville eventually changed his mind and published *Clarel* under his name, properly inscribing it to his uncle, who had sponsored the publication of the volume. If, as argued earlier, during the composition of the poem, Melville had enjoyed the freedom of a writer-poet to write *Clarel*, publication made the poem not only a public work but also a poem by Herman Melville, therefore exposing Melville as a public author again, and conditioning the text to its liaison with its author which Melville seems to have initially wanted to avoid.

Melville abandoned *Clarel* to its fate, predicting the disregard (and harsh regard) that the poem would indeed experience. In a prefatory note to the poem placed after the "Contents" page and right before the first canto, Melville writes: "If during the period in which this work has remained unpublished, though not undivulged, any of its properties have by a natural process exhaled; it yet retains, I trust, enough of original life to redeem it at least from vapidity. Be that as it may, I here dismiss the book— content beforehand with whatever future awaits it" (*Clarel* 1876: xiv). Though the following claim is a matter of conjecture –the necessary conjecture that, on the other hand, Robert Milder claims as essential when approaching Melville's works, and which Melville's works themselves seem to invite in their rejection of one-sided 'Meanings'–, I believe that Melville might have added this note after he was persuaded to add his name to *Clarel* and, thus, forced to be an 'Author' again (echoing John Bryant's distinction between 'author' and 'writer'). In any case, even though Melville could foresee the neglect that, for a very long time, *Clarel* would experience, reading the contemporary reviews of the poem may still have been a painful experience to him.

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[228] See Lizzie's letter to Kate Gansevoort on page 243 in this chapter.

2.5. The Critical Reception of *Clarel*

> "I suppose that if John Milton were to offer 'Paradise Lost' to the Harpers tomorrow, it would be promptly rejected as 'unsuitable' not to say, denounced as dull—"
>
> (Elizabeth Melville, Letter to Evert Duyckinck, 23 June 1860, qtd. in Leyda, *Melville Log* 620)

> "The history of Herman Melville's literary reputation is somewhat curious. His short-sighted contemporaries, unable or unwilling to penetrate the depths of his art and ideas, saw him merely as a writer who had attained an early success for the description of his adventures in the South Seas; who appeared to falter for the moment when he sought to be pretentious and philosophical; who seemed on the way toward recovery with several other autobiographical stories of the sea; and who then perversely went off the track again, writing novels sodden with allegory and metaphysics. Nothing much was heard of him thereafter except that he composed some rough verses about the Civil War and a poem longer than *Paradise Lost* having to do with a group of eccentric travelers in the Holy Land who talk too much about science and religion, faith and doubt, the fall of man, the degradation of democratic dogma, and similar unpleasant subjects."
>
> (Hennig Cohen, *Selected Poems of Herman Melville* 1964: xi)

> "In his early works he mingled romance with adventure. The vein soon exhausted and his later publications gradually failed to interest the public."
>
> (New York *Buffalo*, "The Prominent Dead. Herman Melville, a South Sea Authority", 29 September 1891)

The poem was finally published by Putnam, after some "vexatious delays" (Parker 2002: 540), on 3 June 1876. The exact number of copies of *Clarel* that were printed is not known, though Hershel Parker estimates from the little available data that these may have amounted to some 350, most of which were exclusively circulated in the cities

of Boston, New York, and Chicago.[229] A few copies of the poem (the exact number remains unknown) were also sent to London but, judging from Melville's English admirer and correspondent James Billson's inability to locate a copy of *Clarel* in England, these may have been few indeed.[230] In the United States, the first reviews of the poem already confirmed Melville's suspicion (as he assumed in the note preceding the poem) that *Clarel* would follow the same fate as most of the author's previous works and add to the list of Herman Melville's publishing failures.

Melville knew that *Clarel* was demanding and that most readers would not be willing to undertake the 'pilgrimage' posed by the poem; the poet could only anticipate his resignation to be "content" with any reception *Clarel* may have, abandoning the poem completely to its fate. If, as has been noted earlier, the nineteenth century was a moment for a poem about the Holy Land due to the popularity at the time of cultural representations of Palestine,[231] it was not the moment for the type of poem on the Holy Land that *Clarel* constituted or for the thinking challenge it posed. In his analysis of *Clarel* in relation to Matthew Arnold's *Essays in Criticism*, Peter Norberg notes how Melville "double-scored and underlined Arnold's claim that 'for the creation of a master-work of literature two powers must concur, the power of the man and the power of the moment, and the man is not enough without the moment'" (2004: 45). Melville died before achieving recognition, which came in the mid-twentieth century, first as a novelist and, only recently, as a poet. Yet, even though interest in Melville's poetry has increased considerably in the last years, *Clarel* continues to be one of the

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[229] Parker infers this estimation from the letter Melville sent to Putnam in March 1879, in which the author gave his consent, in response to the petition of the publishers, to destroy the stocked copies of *Clarel* which had been printed but not sold, and which Putnam considered would provide little sale.

[230] Charles James Billson (1858-1932) was an English intellectual specializing in classical literature at Oxford (he translated the *Aeneid* [1906] and the Greek poet Pindar [1931]) (*Correspondence* 1993: 482). Billson corresponded with Melville in the 1880s and declared to be an admirer of Melville's works. See William B. Dillingham's *Melville and His Circle: The Last Years* (1996).

[231] See also Section 3.5 in this chapter.

most unanalyzed of his works. At the time of its publication, *Clarel* was dismissed by the few readers who read it yet did not understand its degree of profundity. When the poem was reviewed, such reviewers were not generous in their public comments. One of the first reviews to appear was that of the Boston *Daily Evening Transcript* on 10 June, which harshly asserted that *Clarel* was "rather apt to create a disgust for poetry if one is obliged to read [it] conscientiously and crucially" (qtd. in Parker 2002: 804),[232] an opinion which seems to have been shared by most subsequent reviewers of the poem. On a different basis, the reviewer of the *Tribune* (16 June) complained of the lack of conclusions and 'answers' of the poem to the numberless "theological doubts, questions, and disputations indulged in by the characters, and those whom they meet" (804). This reviewer was, however, respectful with the poem since, despite declaring it confusing, he also perceived *Clarel* as "a vein of earnestness" which was (and here comes the discomfort with Melville's verse, shared by many reviewers) "singularly at variance with the carelessness of the execution" (804). The poem, he claimed, contained "fragments of fresh, musical lyrics, suggestive both of Hafiz and of William Blake" (painfully, according to the reviewer) juxtaposed to "passages so rough, distorted, and commonplace withal, that the reader impatiently shuts the book" (804). A common complaint among reviewers was the length of the book and its complexity, which according to them turned the poem into an "appalling" work to the average reader: "if it is an attempt to grapple with any particular problem of the universe, the indecision as to its object and processes is sufficient to appal [sic.] or worry the average reader" (New York *World*, 26 June, 804). More benevolent was the Chicago *Tribune* (1 July), which professed that "The manufacture of the poem must have been a *work of love*" for "It bears internal evidence of having been labored over as a blacksmith hammers at his

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[232] Unless otherwise specified, all quotations from the *Clarel* reviews in this section are from Parker 2002.

forge, and only a mastering passion for the severest task-work could have sustained the author through it all" (Higgins and Parker 1995: 534; my italics). The New York *Independent* (6 July) claimed that *Clarel* was "destitute of interest or metrical skill" (qtd. in Parker 2002: 805). More considerate was the review of the New York *Times* (10 July), which recognized Melville's talent as "undoubted" and praised the descriptions and the "Oriental atmosphere" of the poem, together with the author's efforts to write in difficult octosyllabic verses, like Walter Scott or Lord Byron. This reviewer ambiguously concluded that "There is no nonsense about the book; it is written in an honest and sincere style, but verse is certainly not the author's forte" (806). The review of the New York *Galaxy* (August) was not so supportive: "It is not given even to the gods to be dull; and Mr. Melville is not one of the gods" (807). The New York *Literary Table* (August) was more benevolent, for it claimed that *Clarel* might "meet with some readers who will not object to linger with the author by the way and who will think it none too long" (807).[233]

In the Melville family circle very few ventured to read *Clarel* closely. The exception was John Hoadley, one of Melville's brothers-in-law, who became one of its earliest readers and keenest defenders, (privately) opposing the "flippant" and "foolish" criticism that had appeared to the date (Hoadley, qtd. in Parker 805). In a letter to Abraham Lansing[234] (July 8, 1876), Hoardley wrote:

> "Clarel" is not easy reading. It requires determined study, and my attention must be at its freshest, to relish it until after several perusals.
> But it will grow on thoughtful reading, and will give Mr. Melville a firm footing on a higher plane than anything he has before written.

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[233] Even though I am aware that it would have probably been clearer for the reader to classify the reviews in this section into positive and negative, I decided to present them according to the chronological order in which they appeared, since this, I believe, reflects in a more realistic way how such public comments might have reached Melville.

[234] Abraham Lansing was Herman Melville's cousin Kate Gansevoort's husband.

> I wish it might make him at once rich, famous and happy!—Noble Fellow! He deserves to be all three!— (805-806)

Hoadley engaged in a thorough reading of *Clarel*. A convinced Radical Republican,[235] he projected his political and religious views onto the poem, commenting in his own copy of *Clarel* many of the references to the socio-political context of Reconstruction,[236] or stating his agreement with Ungar's attacks to U.S. democracy and Western civilization.[237] Judging from his annotations, Melville's brother-in-law would have probably encouraged Ungar to speak more fiercely against postbellum America and the so-called New World, and he could not agree with Ungar's claim for Northern kindness toward the South, as Hoadley believed that "forgiving the unrepentant" was a foolish action (qtd. in Parker 811). Hoadley's comments in his copy of *Clarel* help us notice how the poem may have been perceived by a readership made up of Radical Republican sympathizers.[238] Being Melville's brother-in-law, Hoadley, of course, was not impartial

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[235] As opposed to the more right-wing Democrats, or moderate Republicans like President Lincoln himself, Radical Republicans were a leftist party deeply opposed to slavery at the time of the Civil War, and committed to racial equality during the Reconstruction period. According to Reconstruction historian Eric Foner, "The driving force of Radical ideology was the utopian vision of a nation whose citizens enjoyed equality of civil and political rights secured by a powerful and beneficent national state" (1990: 105). During the Reconstruction period, Radical Republicans would legislate in order to materialize such vision. Some well-known Radical Republicans were, for example, Charles Sumner or Thaddeus Stevens, among others.

[236] Historian Eric Foner establishes the temporal framework of Reconstruction in the period between the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 and the Presidential election of Rutherford B. Hayes in 1877, arguing that "Reconstruction was not merely a specific time period, but the beginning of an extended historical process: the adjustment of American society to the end of slavery" (1988: xxv). Even though such "adjustment" was far from complete by 1877, Foner argues that the end of the last Republican governments in the South, and subsequent withdrawal of federal troops established a turning point in the history of the United States (xxv), as it signified the abandonment of Reconstruction and the consequent prolongation of the intimidation and violence against African Americans and segregation in the South for almost a century, until the Civil Rights Movements of the 1960s. In this context, Melville's affirmation in the "Supplement" to his 1866 Civil War volume *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War* that "Emancipation has ridded the country of the reproach, but not wholly of the calamity" (269) is relevant.

[237] John Hoadley's copy of *Clarel* is kept today at the Houghton Library of Harvard University. Hershel Parker reproduces some of Hoadley's annotations on the poem on pages 810-811 of volume two of his biography (2002).

[238] By 1876, Radical Republicans had been replaced by more conservative-minded politicians within the Republican party. These Republicans would eventually establish an agreement with Democrats through the Compromise of 1877, which made possible the eventual election of Rutherford

in his claims, and we certainly cannot universalize his opinion as representative for all Radical Republican readers. It is also interesting that, as he read *Clarel*, Hoadley also corrected what he thought were possible typographic or punctuation errors, and identified some of the actual people behind Melville's references and character-construction, together with some of the literary sources the poet had used.

Another positive review came from Europe. On 19 August the London *Academy* published an appraisal of *Clarel*, which the reviewer considered "a book of very great interest, and poetry of no mean order" (in Parker 2002: 809). Unlike most critics in the United States, the English reviewer observed that Melville was no bad poet: "The form is subordinate to the matter, and a rugged inattention to niceties of rhyme and meter here and there seems rather deliberate than careless" (809). The review concluded with a precise observation: "We advise our readers to study this interesting poem, which deserves more attention than we fear it is likely to gain in an age which craves for smooth, short, lyric song, and is impatient for the most part of what is philosophic or didactic" (809). It is significant that such a positive evaluation should come from overseas and not from the United States. This appraisal, however, was unique in England, where more negative than sympathetic reviews were published.[239] On 26 August, the London *Saturday Review*, for example, dismissed *Clarel* as "a versified account of a pilgrimage in Palestine, not remarkable either for elevation of sentiment or for poetic excellence" (810), while in October, the *Westminster Review* bluntly despised the poem as "nonsense" (810). In the meantime, negative critiques continued appearing in the United States as well, most of which continued to complain about the lack of conclusions or answers to the social, political, religious, spiritual, etc., questions the text

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B. Hayes as U.S. President in 1876, and brought Southern Reconstruction to an end. See C. Vann Woodward Sterling 1966.

[239] Melville criticizes English imperialism severely in *Clarel*. For an analysis of that criticism, see Section 3.5.

foregrounded.[240] One of the last reviews was that of the New York *International Review* (5 January 1877), which wondered about the reasons why "the hero of whaling and Polynesian adventures, whose model seemed to be Defoe, should become a theological mystic in his ripened years", concluding that Melville had written *Clarel* "for himself and not for the reader" following "the bent of his own interest and fancies" (813). This reviewer believed that Melville had failed in his poetry project. Placing these dismissive reviews together, it is impossible not to wonder whether it would have made any difference in the reception of *Clarel* had it been published anonymously, as Melville seems to have first intended.

The failure of *Clarel* had already become evident by 1879, when Melville gave his authorization to withdraw the poem from circulation by pulping the undistributed copies after an interview with Putnam's, who considered that *Clarel* was providing very little profits.[241] Consenting to this decision, as Hershel Parker remarks, Melville was engaging in a "suicidal act", since what Putnam's was requiring from him would kill any possibilities for further circulation (2002: 839). Melville may have stored some copies of *Clarel* at home or in a place that was within easy reach to him, as he seemed to have had no problems to 'rescue' one of these copies to send it to his English admirer James Billson in 1884. His relationship with Billson in correspondence must have provided Melville with the feeling that some of his works were being valued somewhere in the globe at least by a small group of admirers, since Billson asserted the author that his books were difficult to find in Britain but that, in any case, they were "in great request" by men in his circle: "as soon as one is discovered […] it is eagerly read & passed round

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[240] For an example, see the review of the Philadelphia *Lippincott*, published in September 1876, in Parker 2002: 810).

[241] On 27 March 1879, Melville sent a note to Putnam's which read: "Please dispose of cases 2 & 3 ('Clarel') containing two hundred and twenty four copies, on my account, to paper mill" (*Correspondence* 472).

a rapidly increasing knot of 'Melville readers'" (qtd. in Parker 863). Replying to Billson's query about other works he had published, Melville interestingly chose to mention three, *White-Jacket*, *Battle-Pieces*, and *Clarel*, but he added a brief description introducing only *Clarel*, which he presented as "a metrical affair, a pilgrimage or what not, of several thousand lines, eminently adapted for unpopularity", playfully adding that "The notification to you here is ambidexter, as it were: it may intimidate or allure" (*Correspondence* 483). Melville's description of *Clarel* may be taken as an invitation to venture into the poem. Some months later, in January 1885, the author "disinterred" a copy of *Clarel* for Billson, fearing that his English followers might never succeed in tracking the book on their own. At that time, Melville was surely feeling grateful that *Clarel* would have a second opportunity after six years of interment. Thus, Melville readily sent Billson a copy, feeling enough pride in *Clarel* to be willing to circulate it again, and probably hoping that the poem might "allure" Billson and the rest of his English admirers.

As a matter of fact, Melville's reputation was being timidly recognized in England over the 1880s. A proof of it is the issue of the London *Academy* (published on 15 August 1885) which Billson sent to Melville, and which included the poem "Socrates in Camden, With a Look Round" by the well-known British poet Robert Buchanan. This poem praised both Walt Whitman and Herman Melville as excellent writers who were "shin[ing] solitary and apart" (Whitman) and "sit[ting] all forgotten or ignored" (Melville), "While haberdashers are adored!" (qtd. in Parker 2002: 872-873). Melville thanked Billson for the poem, which "could not but give me pleasure" (*Correspondence* 1993: 489), claiming that "the writer has intuitively penetrated beneath the surface of certain matters here. [...] The tribute to Walt Whitman has the ring of strong sincerity. As to the incidental allusion to my humble self, it is overpraise, to be sure; but I can't

help that, tho' I am alive to the spirit that dictated it" (489). At age sixty-six, Melville

was again, after many years, receiving some praise for his writings, an appraisal that the

author had not experienced since the publication of some of his short stories in the mid

1850s. By 1885, too, Melville was being admired together with Walt Whitman, which

seems to have pleased the poet.[242] This reevaluation of both American authors was

being carried out by a group of male British artists and social reformers, some of them

homosexual.[243] This constituted the first movement interested in reviving Melville's

works, and would be followed, according to O. W. Riegel, by four more:

> The first occurred in England in the middle 1880's with Robert Buchanan and Henry S. Salt as the chief advocates. Another occurred in England and America after Melville's death (1891), when new editions of four of the books were published. Professor William P. Trent mentioned a "revival of interest" in Meville—and deprecated it— in 1903. Another revival, which resulted in the acknowledgement of *Moby-Dick* as Melville's masterpiece and one of the greatest sea books in all literature, began in 1914 with Professor Archibald MacMechan's essay on the White Whale. The last revival began with the Melville Centenary in 1919 and still continues. (1988: 4)

Hennig Cohen has claimed that "It is inaccurate to say that Melville was either totally

ignored or entirely misunderstood, but it was not until the 1920s [after Melville's

Centenary] that he began to be appreciated widely" (1964 xi). Cohen, however, realizes

how, though "Melville the novelist has long since won acclaim; now Melville the poet is

in its way toward a recognition that is overdue" (xii). The reevaluation of *Clarel* would

take much longer to arrive and it did only very slowly. Not until 1924 was the poem

printed again since its original publication in 1876 and withdrawal from publication in

1879.[244] After the 1924 edition some negative reviews were again published, which

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[242] Melville most likely heard of Whitman and read *Leaves of Grass*. There are, however, no comments on Whitman's poems by Melville that have survived until the present.

[243] For a thorough study of the reevaluation of Melville's works by homosexual writers see Robert K. Martin's *The Homosexual Tradition in American Poetry* (1998).

[244] The Constable edition of 1924 published Melville's *Clarel*. However, it was only with the Northwestern-Newberry critical edition of the text in 1991 that the poem became more generally

considered Melville a rather "clumsy" poet and *Clarel* a work "retaining the power only to bore" (qtd. in Bezanson 1991: 547). Such an off-putting statement also permeated Lewis Mumford's 1929 biography *Herman Melville*, but even though Mumford considered *Clarel* a "long, weary poem" (1929: 322) he also remarked how the text was critical of the notions of progress, democracy, industrialization, colonialism, religion, the church, science, morality, etc., in its contemporary society, and how *Clarel* reflected a new attitude adopted by Melville over the years in which he was writing *Clarel*.[245] Mumford's observations left an imprint on subsequent criticism on *Clarel*. In the 1930s, the German scholar K. H. Sundermann, for example, engaged in the analysis of the social dimension of the poem, producing what Walter Bezanson calls "the first fairly intensive study of the individual characters" (Bezanson 1991: 548). In the same decade, the French scholar Jean Simon regarded *Clarel* as a poem divided in two different parts, and hypothesized that the first of these had been written before the American Civil War whereas the second part was composed afterwards (Bezanson 548).[246] More studies appeared throughout the 1940s and the 1950s, amongst them Richard Chase's 1949 *Herman Melville: A Critical Study* and Newton Arvin's 1950 biography *Herman Melville*. While Chase considers the character of Rolfe as the creation of "Melville's ultimate humanist" (1949: 257), Arvin believes that *Clarel* is "a novel of ideas in verse" (1950: 269), the characters of which Melville uses to reflect the times' crises of faith (Bezanson 550). A year later, in 1951, scholar Ronald Mason would claim that the main protagonists of *Clarel* were not its characters but the ideas they embodied, understanding the poem not as the narrative of a journey but as "the analysis of [these]

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available, also coinciding with greater interest in the text on the part of scholars and, to a lesser extent, readers.

[245] This critical spirit, however, is not exclusive of *Clarel* but already characterizes Melville's first published novel *Typee* (1846).

[246] See footnote 198 on page 227 in this chapter.

conflicting principles" (Bezanson 551). Significantly enough, Mason would conclude that "if justice is to be done to Melville's work it is as important to appreciate *Clarel* as it is to appreciate *Moby-Dick*" (1951: 226). More studies have been published since the 1950s, most notably Walter Bezanson's edition of *Clarel* in 1960, based on his 1942 Ph.D. dissertation, which was published by Hendricks House –later reprinted in the Northwestern-Newberry edition of the poem (1991)–and which constitutes an unquestionable landmark in the history of criticism of the poem to which any study on *Clarel* is indebted. Also important to its circulation has been the inclusion of several sections of *Clarel* in selections and anthologies of Melville's poetry such as Hennig Cohen's 1964 *Selected Poems of Herman* Melville, Robert Penn Warren's 1970 *Selected Poems of Herman Melville*,[247] Douglas Robillard's 2000 *The Poems of Herman Melville*, or the Northwestern-Newberry 2009 *Published Poems*, volume 11 in the series *The Writings of Herman Melville*, edited by Robert C. Ryan, Harrison Hayford, and Alma MacDougall. Today, Melville biographers are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of analyzing Melville's poetry in order to understand the later years of the author's life, as demonstrated by Hershel Parker's insights on *Clarel* in the critical appendix[248] of the Northwestern-Newberry edition of the poem (1991) and his biography of the author (2002), Robert Milder's *Exiled Royalties* (2006), or Wyn Kelley's *Herman Melville. An Introduction* (2008), among others. New editions of Melville's poetry volumes have been printed (e.g., Robillard's 2006 edition of *John Marr and Other Sailors*), translations published,[249] criticism addressing Melville's poetry and the figure of Melville as poet has

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[247] At the same time that *Clarel* was being included in anthologies such as Warren's or Cohen's, in *American Poets: From the Puritans to the Present* (1968) Hyatt Waggoner labeled *Clarel* as "amateur poetry written by a man with no ear for speech and only the most abstract sense of the reality of his characters", considering *Clarel* characters "merely pasteboard figures" (1968: 227, 233).

[248] This critical appendix was published earlier and separately as a book in *Melville. The Making of the Poet* (2008).

[249] *Clarel* has also been twice translated into Italian under the title *Clarel: poema e peregrinaggio in Terra Santa* (Translators: Elémire Zolla, 1965; and Ruggero Bianchi, 2005).

increased,[250] and so has the attention for Melville's marginalia, and academic events focusing on these issues have been organized.[251] This demonstrates a growing interest in Melville's poetry which is contributing to 'disinter' some of the works by the author that have remained in the shadow and which are now being considered central to reconstructing periods of Melville's life and literary production that have not been fully researched because of lack of documental evidence. Melville dedicated much love, pains, energy, time, and patience to the writing of *Clarel*, the publication of which also supposed a big economic expense on the part of his family. But he needed to write *Clarel*. It was important as a result (a book) but, most especially, as a process. The narrator in *Pierre* reflects about the transformative potential of the writing process thus:

> Is there then all this work for one book, which shall be read in a very few hours; and, far more frequently, utterly skipped in one second; and which, in the end, whatever it be, must undoubtedly go to the worms?
>
> Not so; that which now absorbs the time and the life of Pierre, is not the book, but the primitive elementalizing of the strange stuff, which in the act of attempting that book, has upheaved and upgushed in his soul. Two books are being writ; of which the world shall only see one, and that the bungled one. The larger book, and the infinitely better, is for Pierre's own private self. That it is, whose unfathomable cravings drink his blood; the other only demands his ink. Bur circumstances have so decreed, that the one can not be composed on the paper, but only as the other is writ down in his soul. (1852: 355)

We will never grasp the *Clarel* in Melville's "soul" as it was being composed, but we cannot despise the *Clarel* written on paper and not see how it 'writes' in our selves as we engage in the poem-pilgrimage the text encourages to undertake.

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[250] In recent years, there has been, for example, an increasing number of essays on Melville's poetry published in *Leviathan: A Journal of Melville Studies*. See, for example, issues 9.3 (2007), among others.

[251] Two Melville Society Conferences have directly centered on Melville's poetry: on the one hand, on *Clarel*, in June 2009, and, on the other, on *Battle-Pieces* (in comparison to Walt Whitman's Civil War poetry volume *Drum-Taps* [1865], in June 2013). Also, two panels on "Melville Among the Poets" were set up in the context of the 2011 ALA (American Literature Association) Conference, as well as a comparative panel on "New Approaches to Civil War Poetry: Dickinson, Whitman, Melville" in the 2012 MLA (Modern Language Association) Conference.

3. Against the Walls. The Politics of *Clarel*

"Take all Mardi for thy home. Nations are but names; and continents but shifting sands."

"And all these are in this Mardi as a unit. Daily the slow majestic throbbings of its heart are perceptible on the surface in the tides of the lagoon. Its rivers are its veins; when agonized, earthquakes are its throes; it shouts in the thunder, and weeps in the shower; and as the body of a bison is covered with hair, so Mardi is covered with grasses and vegetation, among which, we parasitical things do but crawl, vexing and tormenting the patient creature to which we cling."

(*Mardi* 1849: 1300; 1114)

"'What signifies who we be, or where we are, or what we do?' Slap-dash! 'Kings as clowns are codgers—who ain't a nobody?' Splash! 'All is vanity and clay.'"

(*Israel Potter* 1855: 602)

"[…] those colored cravats are not in the best taste, at least not to mine; but my taste is no rule for all."

(Herman Melville, *The Confidence-Man* 1857: 897)

"Say what some poets will, Nature is not so much her own ever-sweet interpreter, as the mere supplier of that cunning alphabet, whereby selecting and combining as he pleases, each man reads his own peculiar lesson according to his own peculiar mind and mood."

(*Pierre* 1852: 397)

"It is curious, how a man may travel along a country road, and yet miss the grandest, or sweetest of prospects, by reason of an intervening hedge, so like all other hedges, as in no way to hint of the wide landscape beyond."

("Hawthorne and His Mosses" 1850: 48)

"But ah, the dream to test by deed,
To seek to handle the ideal
And make a sentiment serve need:
To try to realize the unreal!"

(*Clarel* 1876: 1.27.67-70)

The past sections in this chapter have been intended as an introduction to the universalist project in *Clarel* (Section 1) and as a contextualization of the poem (Section 2). The present section shall investigate the politics of *Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land*, and defend my interpretation of *Clarel* as a universalist poem, which I connect to the larger context of Herman Melville's oeuvre. In *Clarel*, this section argues, Melville analyzes the potentiality of universalism –the (im)possibility of which he locates in the (im)possibility of intersubjectivity– to the democratization of human relationships beyond the 'walls' of egocentric behaviors, one-sided thinking, and community-based forms of belonging. However, at the same time as he analyzes the democratic potentiality of such intersubjective universalism, the author also expresses a sound lament at the sad realization of how human beings thwart the opportunities of developing interpersonal bonds with their fellow human beings, and how they choose, instead, to remain locked in their established security zones, self-centered individualities and communitarian formations, and adherences to monolithic Meanings. Published ten years after *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War* (1866) –Melville's volume of poetry on the U.S. Civil War–, and merely three weeks after the opening of the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia, *Clarel* reveals the perspective of a mature Melville in his fifties who had become markedly disillusioned with postbellum U.S. democracy. Despite this disappointment, the author continued defending the validity and necessity of intersubjective universalism in *Clarel*, yet aware of the fact that human beings abort its development and continue perpetuating one-sided –often (self-)destructive– ways of thinking and egocentric behaviors.

The present section features seven subsections studying subjects that are of central importance to my articulation of the universalist politics in *Clarel*. It opens with the analysis of Melville's universalist consciousness in relation to the author's –lack of, I

argue– religiosity, claiming that Melville's universalism expresses a secular rather than religious understanding of morality and human connectedness (Section 3.1). Melville was resistant to monolithic 'Meanings', and criticized any form of dogma as limiting one-sidedness while emphasizing the equivalential relationship of different religious systems in their respective interpretations of reality and God. Despite partaking of a universalist (and practical: "Take God out of the dictionary, and you would have Him in the Street", Melville would exclaim to Hawthorne in April 1856 [*Correspondence* 186]) conception of God, spirituality, and humanity, Melville's constant necessity of 'diving' could not find a home in any religious belief, and turned him into a wanderer stimulated by his permanent questioning, critical thinking, and doubting nature. Section 3.2 analyzes *Clarel* as a "poem" and a "pilgrimage", as its subtitle indicates, which textually generates and engages readers into a democratic exercise of plural thinking that is at the heart of the poem's universalist agenda, and by which varied worldviews, perspectives, and beliefs are placed in equivalential relationships, contested, and submitted to evaluation. In this respect, poetics, I argue, serves the textual manufacture designed to encourage plural thinking in *Clarel*. Section 3.3 studies *Clarel*'s problematization of U.S. progress, and interprets *Clarel* in the context of the celebration of the U.S. Centennial in 1876, as a critique of postbellum America, a critique that is at the same time also connected to a more global denunciation of 'progress' and 'democracy'. Section 3.4 defends the importance of analyzing *Clarel* together with the 1866 *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War*, to better understand Melville's disillusionment with postbellum U.S. as well as the poet's critique of nationalism and patriotism in *Battle-Pieces*, which, I claim, informs the universalism in Melville's *Clarel*. Melville himself introduces directly the subject of the American Civil War into *Clarel* through the character of Ungar. I, thus, believe it important to analyze Melville's hopes and warnings for the future of U.S.

democracy in *Battle-Pieces*, at the close of the Civil War, in order to approach the internal wound and irreconcilable divisions that the author exposes in *Clarel* as he reflects on, I argue, the context of 1870s U.S., and connects the postbellum American context to a more global context of inter-human divisions. Section 3.5 argues that both the context of the Holy Land, in general, and the city of Jerusalem, in particular, constitute relevant contexts for *Clarel*'s analysis of the (im)possibility of universalism: while, on the one hand, the Holy Land, I shall argue, is attributed a global dimension as a context representative of the diversity and plurality of humanity, on the other hand, it is also connected to the particular national context of the United States through the notion of exceptionalism. Section 3.6, in particular, analyzes how the Holy Land, a land divided by hatred and segregation, evokes the –racial, ethnic, social, political, ideological, inter-personal– inter-human segregations of postbellum United States, and how the poem recurrently places images of walls and gates at the service of its exploration of the possibilities –and democratizing potentiality to human relationships– of universalism, on the one hand, and of its critique of the sectarian nature of communitarianism and egocentrism reinforcing and perpetuating inter-human separation, on the other. The last section, 3.7, defends that, in *Clarel*, Melville proposes intersubjective universalism as a political project that may potentially transcend interpersonal walls, at the same time that he analyzes how characters abort the development of intersubjectivity and plural thinking, and, consequently, of universalism, thus perpetuating one-sidedness and adherences to monolithic 'Meanings'. The section connects the universalist project in *Clarel* to the larger context of Melville's oeuvre, arguing that intersubjective universalism constituted Melville's life-long literary political project (Section 3.7.1), and proceeds to analyze how *Clarel* points toward the potentiality of intersubjective universalism (Section 3.7.2) only to show how such potentiality is eventually neutralized (3.7.3).

According to this general structure, the section that follows analyzes Melville's views on religion and eventually connects Melville's universalist literary project to a secular rather than religious understanding of inter-human connectedness and responsibility.

3.1. Melville and Religion. Some Preliminary Considerations

> "There are many ways: the right one I must seek for myself."
>
> (Herman Melville, *Mardi* 1849: 985)

> "Religion ofttimes, one may deem,
> Is man's appeal from fellow-clay"
>
> (*Clarel* 1876: 3.3.54-55)

> "Faith? What's that?"
>
> (Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick* 1851: 462)

> "Blessest thou *me*,
> One wave here in this heaving sea
> Of heads?"
>
> (*Clarel* 1876: 1.12.73-75)

As a subject that is central to *Clarel*, I find it necessary to analyze Melville's religiosity and views on religion before elaborating my interpretation of the poem, which, despite not directly venturing upon religion and religiosity in the way other scholars have focused,[252] examines *Clarel*'s portrayal of one-sided thinking and analysis of inter-personal and inter-communitarian 'walls' (among which religious communities are

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[252] In the particular case of *Clarel*, it is important to note, for example, Stan Goldman's (1993) study of *Clarel* as exemplifying what the scholar terms Melville's "Protest Theism", and William Potter's (2004) analysis of the poem, from the perspective of comparative religion, as an exercise in what Potter calls "intersympathy of creeds". Complementing Potter's analysis, moreover, Basem Ra'ad has claimed that "Melville engaged in *something more profound* than making 'comparative' points: he systematically explored various mythological systems, including the beliefs of Judaism and Christianity" (2006: 138, my italics), among others. I agree with Ra'ad's remark, and believe that Melville's life-long exploration of religion was always enriched by his critical approach.

particularly emphasized), as well as of belief and unbelief, faith, spirituality, dogma, religious mania and, of course, doubt.

A number of studies have analyzed Melville's relationship with religion together with the influence exercised by the Bible upon the writer's literary production.[253] However, Melville's religiosity –if any– continues to inspire much debate and disagreement. As Roland Sherrill has remarked, Melville has been named "a mystic, a savvy kind of Calvinist, a Christian existentialist, a primitive pagan, a Romantic theologian, a Protestant prophet, an atheist, and a nihilist" (1986: 481).[254] And, yet, it is perhaps Nathaniel Hawthorne's description of Melville after the two met in Liverpool when the would-be author of *Clarel* was on his way to Palestine in November 1856, which, in my opinion, remains one of the most accurate portrayals of Melville's restless doubting nature:[255]

> *It is strange how he persists—and has persisted ever since I knew him, and probably long before—in wandering to-and fro over these deserts, as dismal and monotonous as the sand hills amid which we were sitting.[256] He can neither believe, nor be comfortable in his unbelief; and he is too honest and courageous not to try to do one or the other. If he were a religious man, he would be one of the most truly religious and reverential; he has a very high and noble nature, and better worth immortality than most of us.* (qtd. in Bezanson 1991: 511, Bezanson's italics)

"Doubt bleeds, nor Faith is free from pain!" (*Clarel* 1876: 3.21.304), angrily responds Clarel to Derwent's rejection of doubt in the poem. Melville's relationship to God and

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[253] Some of these works include, among others, William Braswell's *Melville's Religious Thought: An Essay in Interpretation* (1943), Natalia Wright's *Melville's Use of the Bible* (1949), Lawrance Thompson's *Melville's Quarrel with God* (1952), Bruce Franklin's *In the Wake of the God's: Melville's Mythology* (1963), T. Walter Herbert's Moby-Dick *and Calvinism: A World Dismantled* (1977), James Duban's *Melville's Major Fiction: Politics, Theology, and Imagination* (1983), Stan Goldman's *Melville's Protest Theism* (1993), Walter Donald Kring's *Melville's Religious Journey* (1997), Peter Stallybrass's "Books and Scrolls: Navigating the Bible" (2002), Gail Coffler's *Melville's Allusions to Religion* (2004), and Ilana Pardes's *Melville's Bibles* (2008).

[254] Hilton Obenzinger's calling Melville an agnostic (2006: 195) is perhaps closer to the views on the author's religiosity that I will expose in this section and which inform my interpretation of *Clarel*. Robert Milder also considers Melville an agnostic in his biography of the author (2006: 219).

[255] This quotation has been previously included in Section 2.2.1 in relation to my analysis of Melville's 1856-57 trip to England and the Mediterranean.

[256] The sands in the passage echo the beach in Southport, exposed to the windy currents of the Irish Sea. I thank Dr. Rodrigo Andrés (Universitat de Barcelona) for his careful observation.

religion, belief and unbelief, faith and dogma, was a restless one throughout the author's life, not exempt of anxiety and grief, as reflected in incessant explorations of doubt, spirituality, agnosticism, devotion, and religious mania in his works. Melville was no ordinary personality at the time in his religious opinions, and the sincerity with which he expressed them sometimes shocked family members. Melville's neighbor in Pittsfield, MA, Sarah Morewood, captured her own and other friends' amazement in her description of the writer:

> Mr Herman was more quiet than usual—still he is a pleasant companion at all times and I like him very much—Mr Morewood now that he knows him better likes him the more—still he dislikes many of Mr Herman's opinions and religious views—It is a pity that Mr Melville so often in conversation uses irreverent language—he will not be popular in society here on that very account—but this will not trouble him—[…]. (Letter to George Duyckinck, 28 December 1851, qtd. in Braswell 1943: 71)

Born to a Calvinist mother and a Unitarian father, and reared in a devout Calvinist family as a member of the Dutch Reformed Church, Melville was raised in Calvinist teachings since his earliest childhood, received a Calvinist education,[257] and was a usual attendant at church with his family.[258] The young Melville, however, soon found in travel and in the contact with human beings and societies who were different to his a way to 'de-universalize' the cultural and religious 'Truths' into which he had been indoctrinated since childhood. It was, in particular, his experiences at sea, first in merchant ships and later as a common sailor on board whalers, that exposed him to a

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[257] Melville attended Albany Academy, "a God-fearing school" (Braswell 6).

[258] Melville's rebellion against his own Calvinist rearing (the Calvinist notion of the innate depravity of man and of God's fearful nature) is, for example, manifested in the following passage in *Mardi*, expressed by the young boy whom characters meet in Maramma, and who ends up being captured and offered to the gods in sacrifice: "I love great Oro, though I comprehend him not. I marvel at his works, and feel as nothing in his sight; but because he is thus omnipotent and I a mortal, it follows not that I am vile. Nor so doth he regard me. We do ourselves degrade ourselves, not Oro us. Hath not Oro made me? And therefore I am not worthy to stand erect before him? Oro is almighty, but no despot. I wonder; I hope; I love; I have in me a feeling nigh to fear, that is not fear; but wholly vile I am not; nor can we love and cringe. But Oro knows my heart, which I can not speak" (*Mardi* 1849: 1002-1003).

representative plurality of human beings, cultural practices and religious beliefs by peoples whom his culture considered 'savages', as well as to the violent practices that Christian missionaries –whose own savagery the author would condemn in his first two novels *Typee* and *Omoo*– were carrying out in the Pacific. Melville would thus learn early in his life the no-line between savagery and civilization, as well as the hypocrisy of Christian morals and failure of Christians to be Christians. He would also conceive different religious systems of thought as equivalent to one another in their different interpretations of humans' relationship to God. As Hilton Obenzinger has remarked in his analysis of *Clarel*:

> All religions are explored with a clear sense of their underlying unity, that in their essence they all attempt to address the same ultimate questions, recognize the common bond of suffering, and worship the divine: "The intersympathy of creeds, / Alien or hostile tho' they seem" (1.5.207-8). Such a sense of "intersympathy of creeds" was not too difficult for someone who has had the "elasticity of mind" first exercised among the cannibals, and it was a developing cosmopolitan outlook in the nineteenth century: all religions are, at root, the same. (2006: 191)

Melville's religious (and human) outlook, in my opinion, is more than cosmopolitan, as he challenges the notion of religion and religious belief as Truth (together with nation/ality, or culture). These views of the thirty-year-old Melville of *Mardi* continue, I believe, present in the fifty-year-old Melville of *Clarel*; quoting Obenzinger again: "the poem [*Clarel*] does not find that any one faith, including Christianity, can resolve uncertainty, relieve the burden of doubt. The spiritual exercise of considering each one – as rich and beautiful as the dialogues may be – ends with no revelation. The poem, as Charles Olson observes, is a 'rosary of doubt' (99)" (2006: 191). The problematization of fixed notions of 'Truth' remains constant in his literary career. Melville would

condemn religious fundamentalism of any kind leading to one-sidedness, intolerance, and violence.[259] As Ishmael would remark in *Moby-Dick*:

> I have no objection to any person's religion, be it what it may, so long as that person does not kill or insult any other person, because that other person don't believe it also. But when a man's religion becomes really frantic; when it is a positive torment to him; and, in fine, makes this earth of ours an uncomfortable inn to lodge in; then I think it high time to take that individual aside and argue the point with him. (1851: 92)

Melville's works predicate religious tolerance, at the same time that they expose a conception of the equivalential relationship of different religious systems of interpretation of reality and God. In *Moby-Dick*, for example, Melville makes Ishmael an example of religious sympathy which transcends mere tolerance itself, as he not only respects Queequeg and leaves him to his beliefs, but actually accompanies his new friend in his adoration of the little idol Yojo. Ishmael justifies his gesture through an ironic reasoning which claims that a "good Christian; born and bred in the bosom of the infallible Presbyterian Church" (63), like himself, must paradoxically "turn idolator" in order to follow God's dictates of universal fraternal love:

> Do you suppose now, Ishmael, that the magnanimous God of heaven and earth— pagans and all included— can possibly be jealous of an insignificant bit of black wood? Impossible! But what is worship?—to do the will of God—*that* is worship. And what is the will of God?—to do to my fellow man what I would have my fellow man to do to me—*that* is the will of God. Now, Queequeg is my fellow man. And what do I wish that this Queequeg would do to me? Why, unite with me in my particular Presbyterian form of worship. Consequently, I must then unite with him in his; ergo, I must turn idolator. (63)

The religious opinions Ishmael expresses in *Moby-Dick* are not claimed from a cultural or religious supremacist point of view: he does not regard other religious interpretations

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[259] Melville analyzes religious mania in *Clarel*, especially through the character of Nathan, a representative of spiritual doubt who eventually clings to religious fervor in the form of Zionism, and also through Nehemiah, in connection to Millenialist movements. The poem foregrounds the religious confrontations and intolerance between the different major religious communities and sects in Jerusalem/Palestine. See Section 3.5 in this chapter.

as 'deviant' from the Christian 'Truth' or as 'wrong', but contemplates religion as a culturally determined human fabrication to give explanation to the inexplicable, and conceives each religious construct as connected to others, differently articulated by different peoples and at different times. This need for human comfort is best expressed through Babbalanja's own conception of religion and religiosity in one of his endless philosophical divings in *Mardi*:

> […] out of itself, Religion has nothing to bestow. Nor will she save us from aught, but from the evil in ourselves. Her one grand end is to make us wise; her only manifestations are reverence to Oro,[260] and love to man; her only, but ample reward, herself. He who has this, has all. He who has this, whether he kneel to an image of wood, calling it Oro; or to an image of air, calling it the same; whether he fasts or feasts; laughs or weeps;—that man can be no richer. And this religion, faith, virtue, righteousness, good, whate'er you will, I find in this book I hold [the book of Babbalanja's beloved philosopher Bardianna]. No written page can teach me more. (1849: 1046)

In a similar way as Babbalanja in the 1849 *Mardi*, in the 1851 *Moby-Dick*, even though he detaches himself from dogma and religious rituals, Ishmael understands the importance of religious belief to those who profess it,[261] yet feels certainly estranged from religious practices, even though he jokingly confesses that "I cherish the greatest respect toward everybody's religious obligations, never mind how comical, and could not find it in my heart to undervalue even a congregation of ants worshipping a toad-stool" (*Moby-Dick* 1851: 89). Not only Queequeg's veneration of Yojo in *Moby-Dick*, but also Mardians' polytheistic adoration in *Mardi*, and Catholics' worshipping of Jesus's tomb and the Holy Sepulcher or Jews' adoration of the Western Wall, or geologists' adoration of

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[260] 'Oro' is the supreme Mardian god in the novel.

[261] This is also characteristic of *Clarel*, a text which, despite its critique of one-sided religious manias such as Nathan's, etc., shows sympathy for sincere believers who can find peace in their different forms of faith. As Hilton Obenzinger has remarked: "Despite this sense of *Deus abscondus*, Clarel and the narrator regard heartfelt believers with great respect, no matter the tradition: Abdon, the black Jew from India, Djalea, the stoic Druze guide, and Catholic priests and Mar Saba monks are all comfortable and at peace in their faiths. But the other seekers are more troubled or troubling" (2006: 192).

stones and fossils, etc., in *Clarel*, constitute equivalent examples of such "congregation[s] of ants" at different stages in Melville's literary production.

Melville's religious views, as expressed in his works, seem to partake of a universalist conception of God, religion, and humanity –"pagans and all included" (*Moby-Dick* 63)–, for as Ishmael himself explicitly claims in *Moby-Dick*, we are all members of "the same ancient Catholic Church to which you and I, and Captain Peleg there, and Queequeg here, and all of us, and every mother's son and soul of us belong; the great and everlasting First Congregation of this whole worshipping world; we all belong to that […]" (95). More than an institutionalized form of religion, Melville expresses in his works an understanding of religion as a human construction, differently determined in each culture and society, to satisfy a universal human yearning for spiritual peace and communion with a higher 'Meaning' giving sense to earthly existence, at the same time that he is critical of religious institutions and of representatives who hypocritically promote brotherhood and devotion by actually imposing dogma. As in so many other beliefs, he differed from both his family and close circle of friends,[262] as well as from other contemporary authors.[263] William Braswell has no doubts about Melville's belief in God, yet he claims that "it is not so easy to say just what he believed in regard to the nature of the Deity" (1943: 24). Melville does not expose his religious beliefs either; yet he might have agreed with the

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[262] The Calvinist tradition in both the paternal and maternal line of the family, the Melvills and the Gansevoorts respectively, was mentioned earlier in this section. Melville's sister Augusta and brothers Allan and Tom were also religious, and his friends Evert and George Duyckinck were Episcopalians. Melville's wife Lizzie was a devout Unitarian (see Braswell 4-8).

[263] As Braswell notes, Melville was exceptional, in his life-long doubting nature, among the literary figures of the times: "None of the English men of letters affected by the skepticism of the time, such as Clough and Arnold, were hit quite so hard by their disillusionment. And in comparison with Melville, most of the eminent American authors of his day found happy answers to their questions. Emerson and Thoreau, with their transcendental theories, and Longfellow, Lowell, and Holmes, with their Unitarian views, were relatively contented and optimistic. Whittier was a good Quaker. Whitman's worship of the universe buoyed him. Even Hawthorne, often morose on the problem of sin, was contented enough in his beliefs to pity Melville" (Braswell 3-4).

following affirmation by the young boy that Taji and his group meet in Maramma (an independent thinker whom other characters perceive as "wild" yet an example of wisdom and honesty in the novel [1849: 995]) that: "Oro is but a sound, […] it is the soundless thought of him, oh guide, that is in me. [...] Nor he, nor thou, nor I, nor any; Oro, to all, is Oro the unknown […] I but feel Oro in me, yet cannot declare the thought" (*Mardi* 994). Melville might have also agreed, nevertheless, with *Pierre*'s narrator's irreverent reference to God as the "eminent Jugglarius" (1852: 305), in what is presented as a defiance of a dogma that favors the rich, snaffles the poor, and is inflexible in its non-contemplation of possible exceptions to the rules it poses. Other critics have followed Lawrance Thompson's thesis that Melville was a rebel to the Calvinist God of his ancestors, identifying him with Ahab's revolt against the malevolent divinity, and claiming that Melville's quarrel with God was actually a lover's quarrel (Thompson 1952: 30). Following Thompson, and similar to Stan Goldman's arguments on the hiddenness of the divinity, Daniel Paliwoda confuses Ahab's passionate arguments against God in *Moby-Dick* with Melville's, claiming that this rage ultimately reveals a devotion to God that demonstrates that Melville was not an atheist: "If an atheist, why shout against God? […] If one does not believe, why invest so much energy toward a non-existing entity? It indicates the possibility that Melville wanted to believe, but could not find a satisfactory way of doing so" (2010: 104). Contrarily to Paliwoda, I believe that the fact that Melville constantly analyzed religion and God in his work is not necessarily a conclusive proof that he was a believer, since in my opinion it was Melville's permanent doubting nature, and not his belief in God, that led him to the "dismal deserts" that Nathaniel Hawthorne described in his account of the 1856 Melville he met in Liverpool as the would-be-author of *Clarel* was on his way to

Palestine.[264] In his works, Melville analyzes the fact that God may be nothing but a human construction born out of human beings' necessity for answers and balm. In *Clarel*, as a matter of fact, faith even fails to provide that needed relief to the young seeker and some of his companions. Doubt, and perhaps also nothingness (as opposed to the hiddenness of God that Stan Goldman perceives in Melville's *Clarel*), pervade at the end of the poem-pilgrimage. James E. Miller claims that Melville proposes a balance between doubt and faith, without championing conventional Christian faith (1962: 217), at the end of the poem: "Melville does not seem to accept faith to the exclusion of doubt, but rather he advises Clarel (and surely himself) to reconcile heart (where faith and hope reside) and mind (where live doubt and despair), and to hold them in a balance of sanity. […] This is the advice that, heeded, could have saved Taji, Ahab, Pierre, and Mortmain from catastrophe and death" (216-217). While I mostly agree with Miller's argument that Clarel is eventually advised to find a balance between doubt and hope that may keep him from falling into the self-destructive madness that characterizes so many of his companions in the poem, as well as his predecessors in other Melvillean works, in my opinion the young seeker moves away from religious faith at the end of his journey. Believer or non-believer, the only 'truth' that is 'revealed' to Clarel, even though it remains ambiguous whether he is able to reach full awareness of it or remains blind to it, is not his bond to God but his connection with humanity –"Cross-bearers all" who "follow, slowly follow on" (4.34.43, 44).[265]

Whether we choose to consider Melville a believer or an atheist, still today, Melville continues resisting our scholarly impulse to categorize him within one group or the other. Neither is there just one 'Melville' to 'categorize'; as Babbalanja would claim in *Mardi*: "in one life-time we live a hundred lives" (1849: 1112); "[…] though I have

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[264] See the full Hawthorne quotation reproduced on page 213 in this chapter.
[265] My analysis of the end of the poem is developed in Section 4 in this chapter.

now been upon terms of close companionship with myself for nigh five hundred moons, I have not yet been able to decide who or what I am" (1111). If in other moments of his literary career Melville was able to cling to his faith and/or God, in my opinion, *Clarel* reflects a bleaker, if not nihilistic, sense of religious belief. It is evident from his works that Melville's exploration of God and religion was an anxious one over his lifetime, yet I think the author moved closer to unbelief in the latter decades of his life. This is latent in works such as *Clarel* –the poem's portrayal of the Holy Land, not as the mystical place of a hidden God (Goldman), but as a no-God place where religion provides no consolation to characters who dive, and where no Divinity is eventually 'found' by these characters in the midst of their agony (both personal and universal, as exemplified by the image of the Via Crucis and the (comm)union of universal "wail[s]"[266]) against which each individual struggles in the most utter aloneness and pain–; or in the ship *Atheist*'s mortally wounding Captain Vere not long after he orchestrates the "angel" Billy's execution justifying it in the name of God, the king, and the nation (the sacred trilogy) in *Billy Budd, Sailor* ([ca. 1891:] 495).[267] Reflecting on the writer, Melville's grand-daughter Eleanor Melville Metcalf asserted that "From the eighteen-fifties on […], he seldom went to church […]. He would on rare occasions go to All Souls' Church in Fourth Avenue [his wife's church], but for many years during the latter part of his life he did not do even this" (qtd. in Braswell 1943: 7).[268] Whereas Elizabeth was an active member of All Saints' Church and a devout Unitarian, Melville seems to have been more detached from the Church, and the part that he may have

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[266] As I will argue (see section 4 in this chapter), the poem presents a universalist understanding of the interconnectedness of individual pain (both human and animal) as experienced by each different "form[…] of fate" (*Clarel* 4.34.41). Obenzinger summarizes this interpretation, arguing that "The final vision of multiplicity and unity deepens Clarel's understanding of the common bond of suffering. Those he watches passing by, man or animal, become 'Cross-bearers all' (4.34.43), and he too joins the procession, despite the fact that the stones of Jerusalem remain blank" (2006: 193).

[267] Vere is mortally wounded by the French war ship the *Athée* (the *Atheist*) in the *Bellipotent*'s return voyage.

[268] All Souls' Church is a Unitarian Universalist Church in New York City founded in 1819.

played within the congregation, which he joined in 1884, is unknown. Equally

mysterious remain the reasons why he decided to become a member in the first place.[269]

Defining itself as "a 'non-creedal' religion: we do not ask anyone to ascribe to a creed",

All Souls' states today, that "We believe that personal experience, conscience and

reason should be the final authorities in religion, and that in the end religious authority

lies not in a book or person or institution, but in ourselves" (Rankin 2010). These major

principles were foundational to the community when Melville became a member. As a

matter of fact, Minister emeritus of New York's Unitarian Church of All Souls Walter

D. Kring has argued that, by joining All Souls', Melville "bound himself to no

hierarchy, no creed, Christian or otherwise. He simply agreed to search for the truth

and to adopt whatever he believed to be the truth for his own use" (1997: 130).[270] The

difference between All Souls' quest for "truth" and Melville's possibly being that

Melville was well aware that there might be no 'Truth' at all. As he would write to

fellow 'diver' Nathaniel Hawthorne already in 1851, at the time of *Moby-Dick*:

> And perhaps, after all, there is *no* secret. We incline to think that the Problem of the
> Universe is like the Freemason's mighty secret, so terrible to all children. It turns out, at
> last, to consist in a triangle, a mallet, and an apron, — nothing more! We incline to
> think that God cannot explain His own secrets, and that He would like a little
> information upon certain points Himself. We mortals astonish Him as much as He us.
> But it is this *Being* of the matter; there lies the knot with which we choke ourselves. As
> soon as you say *Me, a God, a Nature*, so soon you jump off from your stool and hang
> from the beam. Yes, that word is the hangman. Take God out of the dictionary, and
> you would have Him in the Street. (16th[?] April, 1851, *Correspondence* 186)

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[269] William Potter has pointed out that Melville and Lizzie together belonged consecutively to
two Unitarian Churches in New York at different moments of their lives, the Church of the Divine
Unity, before moving to Pittsfield in 1850, and All Souls' Church, after returning from Pittsfield in 1863:
"His [Melville's] attendance at these and other churches may have been sporadic, but the very spare data
are not always easy to interpret" (2004: 205).

[270] Kring further explains that "In theological matters the church adopted a general covenant
which had to be affirmed by those who joined the church. The covenant was what bound the members
of the church together. But each individual member had the responsibility to make up his mind as to
what he himself believed" (1997: 130).

By rejecting any form of institutionalized religion and dogma, Melville seems to suggest, in my opinion, that the fraternal love and spirituality promoted –yet sometimes not exercised– by religious institutions need to emerge from *within* individuals, in their own hearts lying the potentiality to be at peace with the world and with themselves in an Ishmael-Queequeg-like way. At this point God becomes the love emanating from the human heart, and love, God; God/love is thus removed from its metaphysical realm; it is taken "out of the dictionary" and placed "in the Street" –it becomes a *praxis*:[271]

> The Master's great command is Love; and here do all things wise, and all things good, unite. Love is all in all. The more we love, the more we know; and so reversed. Oro we love; this isle; and our wide arms embrace all Mardi like its reef. How can we err, thus feeling? We hear loved Alma's pleading, prompting voice, in every breeze, in every leaf; we see his earnest eye in every star and flower. (*Mardi* 1849: 1291-1292)

More than as a mysterious, metaphysical entity, in this description God is portrayed as the fact of being, not only our own individual lives but our existence in the world and, consequently, our existence-*with* others; as Alfred Kazin argues "What he [Melville] finally come [sic.] out with is that God is not a single entity to be taken seriously. It is not in 'God' that we are immersed, but *being*, the actual flux and storm. We kill ourselves when we try to turn 'God' from a word into an absolute separate power and then try to figure Him out" (1997: 255). As Melville himself would imaginatively respond to St. Paul's question to the Romans "Hast thou faith?": "The only kind of faith—one's own" (qtd. in Braswell 1943: 19).[272]

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[271] This brings us also to Babbalanja's other affirmation, quoted earlier in this section (see page 272), by which the philosopher equates 'religion' and 'god' with righteousness, that is, the suppression of evil in the heart of human beings.

[272] In his copy of the New Testament, Melville underlined from Romans 14 the line "Hast thou faith? Have it to thyself before God" writing down the comment "The only kind of Faith—one's own" (Parker 2002: 440). It is important, I believe, to note Melville's capitalization of the word 'faith' in his own comment as compared to the highlighted line in which 'faith' is not written with a capital 'F'.

3.2. *Clarel*, Poem and Pilgrimage

> "The journey of Mercier and Camier is one I can tell, if I will, for I was with them all the time."
>
> (Samuel Beckett, *Mercier and Camier* 1970: 7)

> "They fled. And thou? The way is dun;
> Why further follow the Emir's son?
> Scarce yet the thought may well engage
> To lure thee thro' these leafless bowers,
> That little avails a pilgrimage
> Whose road but winds among the flowers.
> Part here, then, would ye win release
> From ampler dearth; part, and in peace."
>
> (Herman Melville, *Clarel* 1876: 2.13.112-119)

> "'Clarel', published by George P. Putnam's Sons, New York — a metrical affair, a pilgrimage or what not, of several thousand lines, eminently adapted for unpopularity. — The notification to you here is ambidexter, as it were: it may intimidate or allure."
>
> (Herman Melville, Letter to James Billson, 10 October 1884, *Correspondence* 483)

> "Must bring your own provisions, as well, too, for mind as body — for all is barren."
>
> (Herman Melville, 26 January 1857, *Journals* 83)

In the very subtitle of the poem ("A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land"), Melville emphasizes the reading journey and literal 'pilgrimage' posed by, and portrayed in, the poem.[273] The pilgrimage narrated in *Clarel* largely reproduces Melville's actual

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[273] To an analysis of the notion of 'pilgrim' and 'pilgrimage', as well as of the turn that Melville's "Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land" introduces to such notions, see footnote 223 on page 245 in this chapter. Stan Goldman conceives the pilgrimage in *Clarel* exclusively in religious terms, as a search for God and a voyage toward the understanding of the relationship between humans and God, together with the nature of faith. Following Bernard Rosenthal, who argues that the title may be a reference to the phrase "light of God" (1979: 182), Goldman claims that the title is already indicative of the poem's theological pilgrimage: "The first word of the title refers not only to the poem's main character but also to the sense of clarity (ironically) combined with the Hebrew word *el*. *El* means God in Hebrew and was also the name for the God of gods of the Canaanite pantheon. […] The idea of clarity combined with *el* suggests a semantic compound in the name 'Clarel' and implies a quest for the clarity of God" (1993: 3). Vincent Kenny also noted the resonance of 'clarity' in the name Clarel, arguing how this name "fits the hero ironically: he is more opaque than he is clear or 'clair' […]" (1973: 124-125). Kenny also pointed toward a feminine resonance of the name: "Clarel's similarity to Clarel and Clara also suggests the feminine side that requires development; that is, Clarel's whole purpose in Palestine is to uncover the

pilgrimage in the Holy Land during his trip to Palestine in January 1857, with the only

variation in the number of days that characters spend in each of the places they visit as

compared to the author's. The pilgrimage in the poem starts in Jerusalem, where Clarel

spends a few days before embarking on a several-day trip in Palestine. From Jerusalem,

Clarel and his fellow travelers start north-east on a three-day route through the

Wilderness which brings them first to Jericho, where they spend two days, and then to

the Jordan River and the Dead Sea, on the third. On the fourth morning, the pilgrims

cross the mountainous Judean desert and eventually reach the Greek Orthodox

monastery of Mar Saba by evening, which they visit the subsequent two days. On the

seventh day of the pilgrimage, the group departs from Mar Saba, traveling west to

Bethlehem and remaining there until day ten, which coincides with Ash Wednesday, the

day the pilgrims are back in Jerusalem by dawn.[274] This variety of places and diversity of

characters, combined with the historical, religious, and mythical traditional associations

of the Holy Land as conceived through different 'cultural lenses', provides Melville with

an important global context from which he constructs the universalist project in *Clarel*,

at the same time that he tests and analyzes the democratizing potentiality, challenges,

difficulties, and eventual impossibility of universalism. Amy Kaplan has noted how,

following the example of Melville's other works, *Clarel* is "engaged in imagining

communities and ways of knowing history that go beyond the framework of single

nations" (2010: 50). *Clarel*, Kaplan argues, rejects master narratives such as progress,

revolution, religion, science, in order to represent a heterogeneous and plural

collectivity of fellow pilgrim-travelers united not by traditional communitarian

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meaning of the heart" (125). It is interesting to note that pilgrimages were popular motifs among American readers, John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Process* (1678), for example, constituting one of the most widely read books in the United States from the Revolutionary War to the Civil War (Rogers 2011: 28), even evoked in the subtitle of Mark Twain's own bestselling sarcastic pilgrimage *The Innocents Abroad; or, The New Pilgrims' Progress* (1869).

[274] A map illustrates this itinerary on page 709 of the Northwestern-Newberry edition of *Clarel*.

–identity-assembling– parameters such as nation, ethnicity, 'race', cultural background, or religious creed, but by the "sense of their being suspended at a moment of convulsive change where their relation to the past and future is unclear" (50). In *Clarel*, thus, Melville examines the "abyss into which [the] 'modern' man finds himself peering" (Brodwin 1971: 375), transcending traditional community-based modes of thinking in order to connect human beings in their diversity and plurality to a human 'race'. To this end, he creates a democratic polyphonic conversation in the form of a poem-pilgrimage, as the author defines his project, which juxtaposes and places under evaluation a variety of worldviews, emphasizing the fact that none of these views is a monolithic and unquestionable 'Truth', but just one possible interpretation of humanity and the world within a dynamic relationship with other possible interpretations. Melville's poem, thus, encourages plural thinking, at the same time as it condemns adherences to monolithic 'Meanings' and worldviews that aim to suppress the constitutive plurality of humanity.

Vincent Kenny has noted that, "Like Pierre, he [Clarel] is a solitary, one of Melville's 'lonely outposts of the world.' His landing at Jaffa, however, connects him with the magnetic chain of humanity in a series of relationships that differ only in kind from that of Ishmael and Queequeeg [sic.]" (1973: 147). Clarel's 'guides' are his fellow pilgrims, all of them (re)presenting multiple conceptions and readings of reality which, like the manysided Rolfe, the young student has to learn to bring together and critically analyze in a dialogic process that may lead him to de-transcendentalize 'Meaning'. As Joseph G. Knapp notes, in *Clarel* Melville "struggled for the principle that would integrate the manysidedness of things, a principle that would provide for man a point of human wisdom in the tension of opposites. In *Clarel*, finally, he found his dynamic synthesis which once and for all integrated his famous polarities" (1971: 18). Melville's

–universalist, this dissertation argues– political project in *Clarel* underlines the interconnectedness of human beings and places the possibility of universalism at the intersubjective level, in the coming together of different human beings and, therefore, in the encounter between different worlds. Showing the interlacing, and inseparability, of the particular and the universal, *Clarel* –I shall analyze in the remaining sections of the present study– not only presents universalism as a political movement (representative of Melville's larger literary project) with a democratizing potential upon human relationships and thinking,[275] but *becomes* in itself such a movement: it both exposes and moves away from inter-national, inter-community, and inter-personal borders which establish the 'walls' separating human beings and segregating them into groups, making individuals oblivious of their real interconnection with other human beings. Both the context of the Holy Land, in general, and the city of Jerusalem, in particular, become appropriate for Melville's analysis of universalism. While, on the one hand, Jerusalem proves an excellent global microcosm to experiment with the possibilities and impossibilities of universalism and democracy, on the other hand, *Clarel* portrays Palestine not as the glorious biblical land of promise, but as a land of shattered expectations and peoples divided by hatred. The mythical metropolis of Jerusalem becomes thus a city of walls, segregation, and confrontation between different communities that compete for the domination of the land and for imposing themselves and their worldviews, as they remain deaf to the worldviews of others.[276]

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[275] See Section 3.7.1 in this chapter for an analysis of *Clarel* in relation to Melville's universalist literary project.

[276] As it will be argued in future sections of this chapter (see, for example, Section 3.5), the Holy Land in the poem also bears resonances of the United States, and particularly of the postbellum atmosphere of national confrontation, sectarian divisions and segregation. As Tim Wood has claimed, in line with critics such as Hilton Obenzinger, or Basem Ra'ad, among others: "The desert outside Jerusalem is an odd setting and obscures an underlying American geography. Nevertheless, the poem is about American empire, and the Palestinian desert in Clarel is the specter of an American wilderness […]" (2011: 86). Such "American wilderness" in the wilderness of the Holy Land becomes more evident in the characterization of Nathan's Zionist project in Palestine. See Section 3.5 in this chapter.

William Potter has acknowledged that Melville was exceptional amongst the intellectuals of his time:

> […] at the very moment in history when many of his most enlightened country-men and women were forming utopian societies[277] predicated upon the essential ideal of universal equality [some "utopian societies" which, on the other hand, were very homogeneous in terms of race, social class, religious background, or education], Melville frequently depicted intercultural contact in terms suggesting nothing less than genocide. (2004: 164)

Clarel analyzes the complexity of human relationships, and exposes the egocentrisms and monomanias that block away the possibility of intersubjectivity and, as a consequence, of universalism. In the face of such self-centeredness, one-sidedness, and segregation, the poem constitutes in itself an exercise in pushing through these inter-personal walls and making the different individuals and communities it accommodates –a fictional representation of the plurality of humanity– talk to (and potentially influence and be influenced by) one another. Skeptical of extremisms, Melville maintains a critical distance from each one of these views, expressing both their good and their weaker points. Thus, the particularisms that are placed in this intersubjective dialogue, however, are not all equal: whereas, in his construction of universalism and plural thinking, Melville democratically includes even readings of reality and of human relationships that are non-democratic because they uphold some kind of supremacist leanings (cultural, racial, religious, national, etc.), the author does criticize monolithic, monomaniac, and one-sided worldviews of humanity which often lead to dangerous practices by which a given particular (an opinion, culture, [non-]religious form of belief, etc.) is –often violently– universalized as a 'norm' which rules out diversity,

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277 An instance of these utopian societies is Brook Farm, a community established in the 1840s in West Roxbury, MA, and which was organized around principles derived from the transcendentalist philosophy of its founders and dwellers.

homogenizes plurality, and therefore eliminates individuality as well. Intersubjectivity is a central element to the polyphonic dialogue the poem presents, as it is through the communicative encounters of different human beings, and the coming together of the worldviews and 'worlds' they represent, that meaning may be discussed interpersonally, and that universalism may be created. This intersubjective dialogue Melville points to may enable the development of bonds between individuals that transcend their one-sided thinking parameters or communitarian affiliations reinforcing separatism; toward an 'interhuman' (borrowing Martin Buber's concept) disposition, or a 'being-with' (Jean-Luc Nancy's), which embraces more fluid forms of relating and belonging that break through interpersonal boundaries while preserving both individuality and plurality. This intersubjective universalism that, I contend, is created by Melville's *Clarel* is a political process with a democratizing potentiality that may be transformative of the ways we conceive ourselves, not as separated individuals but as interconnected "singular plural" beings (in Nancy's terms).[278] This may have an ethical and social impact on human relationships, and contribute, thus, to the imagining of a non-national(ist) world-order. Melville analyzed repreatedly in his works the coexistence of good and evil, potentiality and destruction, in the human heart, and he also investigated the ways in which such imperfect and limited human nature stood in the way of the creation of interpersonal democratic relationships. As Knapp notes, "Before Melville could justify or accept democracy – theoretically or practically – he tackled again the thorny question: […] What is man? Is he naturally good or naturally bad, or is he composed of good and evil? […] What is society? Is it a state of brotherhood or a

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[278] Buber's views on intersubjectivity and Nancy's conception of Being as 'being-with' are analyzed in Section 8.1 and Section 5.2 of chapter One, respectively. Arguments on global ethics by thinkers such as Hannah Arendt, Judith Butler, Emmanuel Levinas, or Zygmunt Bauman are also analyzed in Sections 8.2 of the same chapter.

Hobbesian *Leviathan* of egotism? […] What is the universe? Is it benevolent, hostile, or indifferent? […] What is God? […] is Christianity compatible with society?" (1971: 13).

The analysis of the (im)possibilities of the democratizing potentiality of intersubjective universalism constitutes, in my opinion, the pilgrimage that *Clarel* poses. Melville's choice of the subtitle "A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land" (as opposed to, for example, "The poem of a pilgrimage in the Holy Land") places the terms 'poem' and 'pilgrimage' at the same level, interlacing them and suggesting an intrinsic connection between form and content. As a matter of fact, the *Galaxy* reviewer of *Clarel* (August 1876) criticized the analogy in the title as ackward:

> We confess that we are puzzled by the title of Mr. Herman Melville's last volume […]. How a book can be a poem in the Holy Land, or a pilgrimage, we really cannot discover. The fact of the matter, set forth in simple English, is, that *Clarel* is a poem which narrates and comments upon a pilgrimage in the Holy Land. We are by no means in a captious, or a dissenting, or even a fastidious mood, but we cannot praise Mr. Melville's poem or pilgrimage, or poem-pilgrimage. It is not given even to the gods to be dull; and Mr. Melville is not one of the gods. (qtd. in Kenny 1973: 55)

Melville connected form (the poem) and content (the pilgrimage) in the very title of the poem, thus placing form at the service of the political project he created in and through *Clarel*, a poem-pilgrimage. It is relevant that this subtitle also undermines any possible readerly expectations of a light narrative account of adventures in the exotic east, a genre which enjoyed great popularity in mid-nineteenth century United States.[279] Conversely, it may also fool readers into believing that this might be about a (religiously) successful pilgrimage. As I interpret it, *Clarel* becomes, therefore, not only a universalist poem but a pilgrimage in different levels, with the potentiality of becoming a democratizing exercise to those willing to undertake it. The most obvious of these pilgrimages occurs at the level of plot, centered on the fictional journey in which the

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[279] See Section 3.5 in the present chapter.

characters embark, and which, as has already been noted, is based on the actual trips in the Holy Land that Melville took in January 1857. As I hypothesized earlier in this chapter, it may have been the loss of his eldest son Malcolm in September 1867 that might have caused Melville's necessity to (re)turn to his Mediterranean voyage and his journal more than a decade later, in the months following Malcolm's death, since, in my opinion, Malcolm's suicide may have reminded Melville of his own disheartened mood and even determination "*to be annihilated*" (Nathaniel Hawthorne, qtd. in Bezanson 1991: 511) during that trip. This association may have led the poet to choose Palestine as the context for his new literary (ad)venture, as well as to conceive the general topic of the pilgrimage and of the existential crises upon which *Clarel* was to be structured. At the level of character-construction, the motif of the pilgrimage acquires a transcendental dimension as a potential process of maturation through which the protagonists (perhaps also the late 1860s-1870s Melville himself) expect to alleviate their personal existential crises. Despite embarking on a collective pilgrimage, the pilgrimage means differently to each of the characters in the poem,[280] some of whom undergo a gradual process of unlearning[281](from which their eventual maturation comes) through the many intersubjective dialogic encounters with different fellow travelers that they experience throughout their journeys. The pilgrimage, thus, becomes a common 'space' for these characters' explorations.[282] Through the polyphonic

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[280] What the pilgrimage signifies to each of the characters in *Clarel* is a question that is almost impossible to grasp. The reader is invited, this way, to pursue the possible rationales behind each character's decision to go to the Holy Land and join the several-day excursion in the environs of Jerusalem from the sketchy information that is available about each of them. I will examine some of these sketchy motivations throughout the present chapter.

[281] I do not regard learning and unlearning as concepts which exclude one another in *Clarel*, as unlearning is the means which makes possible any learning or gradual maturation that characters are capable of.

[282] Following the work of Sharon Cameron and Giles Deleuze, Michael Jonik has studied the relationship between character and space in *Clarel*: "The space of the poem—as a written space, as a physical space of desert and rocks, and as an imaginative space of striated biblical, literary, philosophic, and scientific references—does not merely serve as backdrop to the movements of Melville's pilgrims

dialogues that the poem creates the traditional separation between the particular and the global is blurred without eliminating any of these two interconnected elements (the elimination of particulars would derive into a totalitarian universal while the elimination of the universal would propitiate segregation in the form of scattered particulars, with negative consequences in both cases). These dialogic exchanges in the poem-pilgrimage, however, enable the construction of universalism while, at the same time, reveal the limitations and difficulties of such process, as characters are unwilling to transcend their individualisms or abandon their monologic thinking, and fail to both 'receive' and respond to[283] the other character(s) in the intersubjective dialogue to which the poem incorporates them. In this respect, the poem shows the collapse of the very universalist dialogue it constructs due to the egotisms and one-sided mentalities which determine the different characters' respective unresponsivenesses. As Stan Goldman claims, "Dialog often fails in *Clarel* for lack of reciprocity" (1993: 45). Neither does it ultimately lead to the answers characters seek: "If one enters into conversation or dialog with the premise that the speaker will communicate something, listen to something, and reveal or learn something—if dialog is seen as an attempt to clarify one's position, to persuade, or to advance mutual understanding—then dialog in *Clarel* is a failure. For dialog is often cut off in *Clarel*; ideas are left unfinished or not pursued" (1993: 44). This clinging to monologism and resistance against dialogism also mirrors the neutralization of the possibility to develop interpersonal bonds between characters. At the authorial level, the very act of writing –the "manufactur[ing]" of the poem as the Chicago *Tribune*

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but resonates with them in dynamic, reciprocal tension. Characters become compressed by Jerusalem's narrow corridors and closed-in spaces or expand to take on aspects of the barren topography of the Palestinian wilderness. They become constituted and deconstituted by these spaces, purged by the desert's subtle air or wracked by its irresolvable dubiousness. They write across disfeatured brows of rock and become sites of inscription and erasure. They press on uncertain thresholds between the personal and impersonal, between the human and inhuman. In *Clarel*, characters become stones and stones become characters" (2011: 70). See Jonik 2011.

[283] I am evoking here Derrida's concept of 'hospitality' and Levinas's notion of 'response' and 'responsibility'. See Section 8.1 and 8.2, respectively, in Chapter One.

reviewer phrased it (Higgins and Parker 1995: 534)– may be read as a poet's pilgrimage;

an evolving act of self-exploration, testing, experimentation, by which the author can

not only dialogue with himself but also place several worldviews in conversation and

temporarily imagine and dwell in the 'mindsets' of his fictional characters, and generate

a relationship with potential readers through the particular 'space' of the text which, as

in Arendt's metaphor of the table, both separates and brings author, characters, and

readers together in an intersubjective encounter which transcends inter-personal walls

and even temporal and spatial boundaries yet protects the individuality, and temporal

and socio-cultural specificity, of each of the parties. This brings us to the last of the

different types of pilgrimages I want to distinguish here, the one produced at the level

of readers, who are invited into the poem-pilgrimage as critical listeners and potential

interpreters in the dialogue the text generates, becoming thus participants in the

intersubjective creation of universalism of the poem and being exposed to the

democratizing potential that such universalist exercise may bring about in its

deconstruction of essential(ist) and monolithic Truths and the transcendence of inter-

personal walls.[284] As Wyn Kelley has claimed, Melville "understands the relationship

between writer and reader as an ongoing dialogue, a collaboration" (2008: 23). Samuel

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[284] There are moments in the poem in which the narrator addresses readers directly. One of these moments is, for example, canto 2.13 "Flight of the Greeks", in which, after Glaucon has left the group of pilgrims, Melville asks readers if they are "fled" too, and advises them to depart with a cheerful heart at this point if they are unwilling to confront the dearth to follow:

> They fled. And thou? The way is dun;
> Why further follow the Emir's son?
> Scarce yet the thought may well engage
> To lure thee thro' these leafless bowers,
> That little avails a pilgrimage
> Whose road but winds among the flowers.
> Part here, then, would ye win release
> From ampler dearth; part, and in peace. (*Clarel* 1976: 2.13.112-119)

Glaucon and the Elder's departure is significant, as the two hedonists, overwhelmed by the barrenness of the desert, return to Jerusalem soon after having started their journey. These two characters may be grouped with optimist monomaniacs such as the Lesbian and even the English priest Derwent, as they refuse to contemplate the "ruin" and the "wreck" of the 'Holy' Land (2.13.125).

Otter beautifully explains the exigencies and rewards of the readerly collaborative pilgrimage: "To read *Clarel* is to wind through these labyrinths, to develop a sense of their forms, rhythms, and recesses. In the mazes of *Clarel*, God, Palestine, America, faith, science, sex, and doubt all become strange. It is a notoriously dense, yet surprisingly spacious poem – a work of complex pleasures" (2006: 480). These "complex pleasures" include the acceptance of the conclusion that there are no 'Conclusions'. As a matter of fact, the poem-pilgrimage gives no answers but poses more questions to readers, challenging them to develop their own independent thinking by moving beyond fixed 'Meanings'.

In the way I interpret it, *Clarel* is a poem-pilgrimage which explores the im/possibilities of universalism: constructing plural thinking through dialogic encounters between the characters and the worldviews they represent, *Clarel* reflects the 'walls' those dialogues encounter, how plural thinking clashes with monolithic ways of thinking and with the individuals' inflexibility and inability to trespass their egocentric or communitarian ways of belonging. It is significant that Melville expresses this universalist project through the form of a poem with a particular meter, as poetry itself is a vehicle that normally enforces formal boundaries and molds language into fix structures of meter, rhythmic schemes, and verse patterns. Wyn Kelley has remarked the importance of the poetic form to the pilgrimage in *Clarel* claiming that "*Clarel* is a poem, not a prose work, and that poetry makes the pilgrimage meaningful. […] *Clarel* shows the importance of 'verse' itself for holding the pilgrimage together and keeping its ephemeral materials alive" (2011: 59). Noting how "many scholars, having dismissed Melville's crabbed verse, go back to talking about the text as something of a novel",[285] Kelley marks that even though "thinking of *Clarel* as narrative is certainly valid, we may

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[285] Basem Ra'ad, for example, has called *Clarel* "a verse novel" (2006: 129).

miss its more fluid, fragmentary nature by focusing exclusively on its unity, coherence, and design", thus overlooking the fact that, like Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* (ca. late 14th century), *Clarel* has what Kelley terms a "collective spirit": "It collects poems, stories, songs, and odd specimens of humanity" (60). Melville places form at the service of his democratic project and, as has already been noted, connects form and content –poem and pilgrimage– in the very title. Importantly enough, Melville puts himself through the boundaries of meter[286] in the creation of his universalist project, experimenting with both the possibilities and constraints of the poetic form, at the same time that he breaks through those boundaries and constructs new forms of poetic discourse that open up possibilities of dialogue and interpretations, in a similar way as he 'walks without' the interpersonal walls he depicts in the poem, in the very construction of *Clarel* itself. As the Chicago *Tribune* reviewer noted: "the manufacture of the poem must have been a work of love. It bears internal evidence of having been labored over as a blacksmith hammers at his forge, and only a mastering passion for the severest task-work could have sustained the author through it all" (1 July 1876, qtd. in Higgins and Parker 534).[287] Even though in the 1860s, Melville's critics protested against the poem's meter as too tedious and restraining (a complaint which would accompany most of *Clarel*'s twentieth-century critical reception),[288] *Clarel* scholars such as Walter E. Bezanson have claimed that the poem represents "a wholly new mode of

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[286] The poem is for the most part written in iambic tetrameter. It is important to note that Lord Byron, one of Melville's most beloved poets, used this form of meter in his long narrative poems. Hershel Parker also claims a possible source of metrical inspiration in John Greenleaf Whittier's *Snow-Bound* (1866), which became very popular at the time despite having been written in iambic tetrameter, which according to Parker was an unpopular meter (2002: 686).

[287] This consideration of *Clarel* as a "work of love" has been noted in earlier sections of this chapter. See introduction to Section 2 and Section 2.5.

[288] Melville scholar James E. Miller, for example, argued that "Only the supremely uncritical and enthusiastic admirer of Melville can read *Clarel* without tiring of the monotonous, rhyming iambic tetrameter and yearning for a return to the vigorous, unrestrained but subtly disciplined style of *Moby Dick*", agreeing with "those who persuasively argue that there is more poetry in the prose of *Moby Dick* than in the metrics of *Clarel*", and concluding that "But for all its defects of form, *Clarel* has a fascination peculiarly its own which the critics have been slow in affirming. Their hesitance may have been caused by the poem's formidable length" (Miller 1962: 195).

contracted discourse" (1991: 507). Samuel Otter has remarkably reviewed the ways in which *Clarel*'s "four-beat lines, twisted syntax, and contrived rhymes" have been interpreted as formal devices confining Melville's thought and constraining his creative freedom:

> Other critics, following Bezanson, have interpreted the meter as appropriate to the theme of the poem, deliberately reinforcing the confinements of antithesis (Knapp [1971:] 23) or the truncated qualities of thought (Kenny [1973:] 98). Varying this approach, Bryan C. Short [1979] has described a contest between the metrical regularity of Clarel's [sic.] tetrameter and the imaginative freedom of its lyrics and its pentameter Epilogue. Impatient with the obstacles presented by Melville's rhetorical choices, Stan Goldman [1993] has suggested that *Clarel* should be read primarily as narrative, akin to prose fiction, rather than as poetry. (Otter 2006: 469-470)

Otter marks the importance of analyzing "how *Clarel* works"[289] in order to be equipped with further tools which may allow us to enhance our understanding of the exploration the poem undertakes. This importance is reinforced by the fact that, as has been seen in the early pages of this section, Melville himself connects form and content in the very title of the poem. It is my opinion that Melville's conscious decision to struggle with boundaries in the creative act itself may well be interpreted as a voluntary challenge to tussle with the very 'walls' that, the poem shows, block the possibilities that may be conductive of intersubjectivity and universalism. Another possible way to read this wrestling with the constraints of meter, I believe, is as suggestive of the fact that the democratizing potential of the intersubjective universalism the necessity of which the poem underlines is enclosed within the boundaries imposed by the poetic form, in the same way that the democratic potentiality of universalism is impeded by the incapacity of individuals to transcend their egocentric subjectivities, communitarian affiliations, and monolithic modes of thought (three elements that frequently go hand in hand), and

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[289] This phrase is the very title of Otter's chapter, quoted here.

be aware of their mutual interconnectedness. Yet, "do the series of twos and fours", Samuel Otter wonders, "confine or redeem?" (480). At the same time that he places himself through such "wrestl[ing] with the angel" ("Art" [ca. 1870], *Published Poems* 280), Melville manages to exploit the possibilities of poetry, transforming the formal boundaries of the poetic form into creative tools enabling him to construct a narrative poem where the limits between poetry and narrative, form and content, language and knowledge, art and reality, coalesce. This creates a text which resists categorization under the fix label of 'traditional poetry', as the poet gives new and different uses to poetic forms and rhythmic patterns that may be considered traditional. I agree with Samuel Otter that "Instead of treating Melville's meter as the cage for his thought, we might consider it as the structure in relation to which the poet articulates and deviates his lines" (2006: 473). Ironically enough, these formal 'constraints' also constitute the very means through which the universalist project that I interpret in the poem is constructed. Also ironically, these formal 'walls' would constitute barriers intimidating, for many decades and still nowadays, those Melville readers and scholars who approach *Clarel*'s "complex pleasures" (Otter 480).

As noted earlier, this dissertation defends that *Clarel* is a poem that, on the one hand, emphasizes the natural interconnectednesss of human beings (an interconnectedness, however, to which humans remain blind) and, on the other hand, constructs universalism as a political project that might enable individuals' understanding of the walls separating human beings. The text conceives universalism not as a fix essence but as a process that may reconnect human beings to their natural bonds, which is permanently in the shaping and subjected to continuous contestation, perhaps even unmaking, in every intersubjective encounter. Poetics contribute to emphasize this lack of totality; in the words of Samuel Otter: "*Clarel* is filled with end

rhymes that aspire to perfection but often are partial or proliferate into larger, less regular designs" (475). Such rhyme patterns reflect the poetic effort to escape one-sided thought as well as to move away from binary-thinking; this goes hand in hand with the poem's rejection of monolithic conclusions (fragmentation of verses, sketchy information of characters' personal histories, etc.) and serves the universalist project in *Clarel* by pushing through the walls of the one-sided worldviews it critically portrays. In this respect, Cody Marrs importantly reads the poem's use of the dash as a democratic device that "simultaneously ties together, complicates, and disorders the poetry's syntax: it divides and sets apart meaning while also expanding signification and providing detail" (2011: 112). I agree with Marrs's argument that the dash

> Expresses stylistically the logic of Melville's theory of democracy. If the latter, as *Clarel* and Melville's many novels attest, is marked by both a vexing absence and a superabundance of meaning, the dash is the form of democratic punctuation *par excellence*. Uniting fragments while insisting on totality's incompleteness, it, as much as *Clarel*'s rhyme and meter, redirects the text's engagement with the Centennial, creating on the level of form innumerable broken cycles. (112)

In terms of content, in the same way as with the dash, Melville places the debates between the different worldviews that his characters represent within a plural system of interpretations that is enabling in the infinite combinations of dialogic encounters it allows. Dialogue serves Melville's democratic project in *Clarel*: while centering the poem on the teleological and progressive plot-motif of the pilgrimage, the heart of *Clarel* is an ongoing, sometimes multidirectional, sometimes circular, and constantly overlapping dialogue which often subverts from whithin the very sense of teleology or progress that the lineality of the plot seems to provide. As Marrs claims, "Invested more in regress than progress, *Clarel* is a story of broken returns: arguments that continuously reappear but rarely terminate; […]. The poem is about circles that never complete themselves

and returns that never quite occur" (99) Melville tumbles down the walls between form and content in *Clarel*, at the same time that he also eliminates the separation between the particular and the global, and underlines the mutual constituencies of the individual and the universal. In this respect, poetics serves Melville to mirror the very divisions, fragmentation, multidirectionality of thought, possibilities, inconsistencies, oppositions, ambiguities, silences that characters (and readers) find throughout their pilgrimage, in intersubjective dialogic encounters which generate a multiplicity of interwoven trails to explore. The connection between form (the poem) and content (*Clarel*'s universalist project) that Melville insisted in emphasizing in the title and in private correspondence, becomes, thus, evident. As I have noted earlier, and like the intersubjective universalist project the necessity of which he was defending in the poem and had been defending in previous works, Melville was well-aware that *Clarel* would probably suffer from oblivion –that readers, demanding for easy reading journeys, would be unwilling to 'break through the wall'–, and for that reason chose to offer it to the world leaving the poem to its own fate. The negative reception that the author had anticipated, however, does not make *Clarel* less political. This potentiality is as relevant today as it was at the moment of *Clarel*'s publication in 1870s, divided, postbellum America.

3.3. Questioning Progress. *Clarel* as Centennial

> "It is but a floral superstition, as everybody knows, that this plant flowers only once in a century. When in any instance the flowering is for decades delayed beyond the normal period, (eight or ten years at furthest) it is owing to something retarding in the environment or soil."
> (Herman Melville, "The American Aloe on Exhibition", 1891, In Cohen 1964: 162)

> "Believing in progress does not mean believing that any progress has yet been made."

(Franz Kafka, *Blue Octavo Notebooks*, [1917-19]: 28)

"And is the age of wonders passed? Is the world too old? Is it barren?"

(Herman Melville, *The Confidence-Man* 1857: 884)

In the poem "The American Aloe on Exhibition", Melville portrays an ironic Centennial exhibition-related event whereby anonymous visitors gather to witness the once-in-a-century blossoming of an American aloe on a ten-cent admission-rate. What one expects will develop into a big occasion, however, soon becomes a scene of criticism against the "Roses" who have despised the aloe as a weed, a sarcasm that is explicit not only in the content of the poem but also in its sing-song-like rhyme-pattern, which provides the poem with a mocking and playful quality of an almost Dickinsonian tone. The imagery of the weed bears obvious resonances of the title of Melville's late unpublished poetry volume *Weeds and Wildings* (1891), in which the aloe poem belongs. In an important way to the analysis of *Clarel* presented in this chapter, "The American Aloe on Exhibition" may be regarded as a symbolic reflection about art and posterity on Melville's part. Historically, it is also a reference to the U.S. Centennial. Scholars April Gentry, Lisa Paddock, and Carl Rollyson (2007) have noted that Melville did actually see the American aloe in Philadelphia, when he visited the Centennial Exhibition in October 1876, yet more than being interested in developing a realistic representation of the plant as one of the "bon-bon[s] of the hour" within the Exhibition, Melville turned the plant into a symbol of potentiality, an inner force that might yet find obstacles in order to be able to be. Such potentiality, which readers may interpret not only as literary but also as historical or sociopolitical (e.g., the potential unfolding of American ideals, as Gentry, Paddock and Rollyson note [2007: 17]) remains undiscovered, since the flower only blooms once every hundred years –the "environment or soil" allowing it–, as stated in the introductory prose epigraph. It may

well be thus that the blossoming is retarded or, even, that there ever may be no blossoming at all.[290] Yet the value of the flower does not diminish for this reason: its potential, however hostile be the soil or conditions in which it has to come to full realization, remains intact.

This poem, I believe, serves as a relevant introduction to the present section for three reasons. First, it is connected to my reading of *Clarel* as a poem that points to the democratizing potentiality of intersubjective universalism to human relationships. Second, the idea of potentiality it expresses can be claimed to be connected not only to Melville's artistic blossoming –who, being despised as a 'weed', would not 'bloom' until some more favorable 'conditions' in the soil and the environment allowed it, alas only posthumously and, in the case of *Clarel*, in a very slow way. Third, this notion of potentiality may be interpreted as evocative of the wishes for the renewal of the United States which Melville had expressed in *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War*, at the close of the U.S. Civil War, in the particular context of postbellum U.S., and, more generally, to the discourse of progress that seemed to have suffused most Western nations by then. These three potentialities, in my opinion, blend in *Clarel*, in the same way as the poem places the 'local' context of postbellum United States in close relationship to a more global context of wreck, waste, desolation, hopelessness, and dearth. Abandoned to "whatever future await[ed] it" (*Clarel* 1876: xiv), the poem provides a severe –global as well as local–[291] evaluation of progress, continuing the political project in Melville's

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[290] In a 1850 letter to Evert Duyckinck Melville compares *Mardi* to a plant, stating that it may "flower like the aloe, a hundred years hence — or not flower at all, which is more likely by far, for some aloes never flower" (*Correspondence* 154).

[291] The poem thus provides an evaluation of progress on a universal level without losing touch of more specific contexts (the Holy Land, postbellum America, revolutionary Europe, etc.). On a more 'local' level of interpretation considering the American context, *Clarel* denounces how 1870s United States stopped being the country of hope and possibility which many American citizens expected to emerge from the Civil War, and became, instead, like the Palestine the poem portrays, a country of hopelessness, human divisions, and violent hatreds.

previous works and using form as well as content (i.e., the interwoven poem-pilgrimage) as a means to disrupt teleological development.

Clarel was published on June 3, 1876, the year the United States was celebrating its centennial anniversary. The World's Fair Exhibition in Philadelphia was conceived as a display of progress and modernization, receiving over 6 million visitors (Gross and Snyder 2005: 9). The celebrative mood, however, had started flooding public life since well before 1876. As Cody Marrs explains: "The Centennial was a topic of wide-ranging conversation long before its actual celebration in 1876, and during the years of *Clarel*'s composition, innumerable artists, poets, journalists, and politicians used the coming commemoration as an occasion to discuss pressing political, historical, and aesthetic issues in the United States" (2011: 99). Marrs explains how literature became a means expressive of, and reinforcing, this triumphant mood, as numerous texts, both poetry and prose, praised U.S. national progress, even conceiving it as paving the way to a future advancement of humanity (e.g., Charles Francis Adams's essay on the Fourth of July). As Marrs notes, "The most prominent poets of the day—John Greenleaf Whittier, William Cullen Bryant, James Russell Lowell, and Bayard Taylor—also joined in this celebrative nationalist mood, publishing (and publicly delivering) Centennial odes" (101). In their verses, these poets represented the Centennial as a symbolic new beginning for America (e.g., Bryant), or as the crowning moment in America's progress in world-history (e.g., Taylor) (101).

Melville's *Clarel* certainly moves away from such celebratory images of national progress and patriotism, at the same time as the poem formally undermines any sense of teleology. The image of the U.S. that is presented in *Clarel* clashes with the image of a united nation relishing abundance and material wealth promoted by the government in the Philadelphia Exhibition at a time of violent hatred between the nation's different

human groups as well as of deep economic crisis. Melville saw, concealed behind the official rhetoric of progress, the economic depression that the U.S. had been suffering since the Panic of 1873, which had brought to an end the times of national discourses on prosperity and affluence that Mark Twain had baptized as the "Gilded Age".[292] He also realized the rampant corruption of the postbellum years, the internal divide –based on race, ethnicity, loyalties, regionalism, social class, religion, etc.– which had aggravated since the Civil War, the consolidation of a capitalist industrial system of production and consumption based on the exploitation of labor which had increased social differences and class conflict, and the social tension and rise of xenophobia derived from the growth of the county's immigration. Joseph G. Knapp has argued that "the post-Civil War era tested, altered, and sometimes destroyed unconscious assumptions held by pre-war America", emphasizing that "America was losing its innocence; it was losing its typical American dream" (1971: 2). Even though I regard with skepticism Knapp's reproduction of the rhetoric of innocence of antebellum America, I also believe that Knapp is right in pointing out how changes in industrialization and population numbers throughout the post-Civil War period made Americans come face to face with the question of how to reconcile individualism and the collective, or, in Knapp's words "how was individualism and self-reliance to be reconciled with the larger concept of community?" (2). Furthermore, in the Exhibition, the U.S. was being presented as a white Angloprotestant country: as Eric Foner points out, African Americans were visibly absent from the exhibition, immigration was equally invisible, and Native Americans were presented as counterparts to Anglo-American civilization (1988: 565). In a letter to his cousin Kate Gansevoort from October 12, 1876, Melville describes the Centennial Exhibition as a "sort of

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[292] This phrase comes from the title of Twain's 1873 novel *The Gilded Age: A Tale of Today*, a satire on the corruption and materialism of postbellum U.S.

tremendous Vanity Fair" (*Correspondence* 447). This is further emphasized by the fact that, at the same time that the Exhibition boasting the progress of the United States was taking place, scandals of corruption were becoming public (Knapp 1971: 8), and, as I have noted earlier, Melville was exposed to such corruption in the New York Customs House. *Clarel* is critical of this illusion of national unity, whiteness and progress, and skeptical of postbellum U.S. democracy. The poem shows how, more than a decade after the end of the Civil War, the nation was still deeply –even violently– divided and obsessed with making money and colonizing new territories. One of the most direct references to the Centennial in *Clarel* comes from Habbibi, the 'mad' (according to the Lesbian and Derwent) monk, now dead, who had once dwelled in the caves surrounding the monastery of Mar Saba, and whose voice is recovered from the past through the writings he left on the walls:

> "—What's here
> Half faded: '… *teen .. six,*
> *The hundred summers run,*
> *Except it be in cicatrix*
> *The aloe—flowers—none.'—*" (*Clarel* 3.27.129-133)[293]

Habbibi's words return to the motif of the aloe, the "*hundred summers*" not having enabled the blossoming of the flower but, instead, precipitated a "*cicatrix*" at the time of the Centennial (the partly erased "…teen.. six" maybe a reference to the year of the American national centenary commemorations in 1876). Like "The American Aloe on Exhibition", the blossoming of the potentiality of the flower –which may be taken as the democratic potentiality and dreams projected onto the young nation at the moment of its foundation– has been kept from unfolding. Instead, uncivil confrontations,

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[293] The dots in this passage do not denote ellipses but are Melville's own, as they appear in the poem.

unneighborly cohabitation, social fracture and national wounds were precipitated reaching their maximum climax in the Civil War, the "*cicatrix*" *Clarel* so well exposes.[294] Peter Norberg has claimed that Melville "attempted more than an ironic memorial to the republican ideals of the nation's founders, in *Clarel*. He sets out to write an epic poem […] that might foster a reformation of those ideals" (2004: 47). Melville's "reformation" in *Clarel*, however, is not nationalist or centered on the nation-state, but engendered within a wider global movement that is based on the universal interconnection of human beings across the globe. This "reformation" also denounces a global corruption of the democratic ideal. While, on the one hand, the poem evaluates what the United States had become by 1876, and how the young nation had failed to raise to the hopes expected from it at the moment of its foundation, *Clarel*, on the other hand, connects the 'national' failure of the U.S. to "keep true to the dreams of thy youth" –as the note found on Melville's desk at the time of his death expressed– to a more global crisis in democracy and democratic values which is masked behind, and propitiated by, the confidence in progress of the postbellum years. National progress was in fact what the Centennial was made to become the epitome of. Yet, if it was progress that the U.S. Centennial exultantly celebrated, Melville would severely criticize in *Clarel* such confident discourse of progress, by problematizing progress itself and creating a poem-pilgrimage which emphasizes circularity and regression before lineality and teleological progression. That is not to say that *Clarel* does not progress, yet I believe that the characters' maturation is enabled by a dialogic nature that makes them travel in circles, back and forth, and causes some of these characters' (especially Clarel's) *un*learning. Melville proposes a circular movement (a tour) to his characters'

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[294] *Clarel* exposes this national wound most evidently through the character of Ungar, even though, as I will discuss (see Sections 3.5 and 3.6 in this chapter), Melville importantly uses the context of Palestine –the land of sectarian hatred, violence, and confrontation– as a mirror to the fragmented 1870s America.

search for belief and wisdom, significantly setting his literary exploration in the east. As Dorothy M. Finkelstein has claimed, Melville may have regarded the East as "the 'ur' of our world history, the original location of man's window to the unknown" (1961: 121). Like the West, the East, however, fails to provide answers or peace in *Clarel*.

Even at the level of form, and despite the leimotif of the pilgrimage, *Clarel* favors a disruptive rather than linear sense of development. As Dennis Berthold has claimed: "Frustrating any sense of personal discovery […] the narrative's circular structure—it begins and ends in the same place, Jerusalem—implies endless questing in a wearisome cycle of seeking, finding, and losing" (2004: 340). While such circular structure might also signify the means of completion (departing and returning to the same place after an 'enlightening' journey that provides comforting answers to initial questions), such completion simply does not take place, as the text rejects any sense of teleological development leading to a final meaning, 'Truth', or conclusion. As Cody Marrs has noted "The poem is about circles that never complete themselves and returns that never quite occur" (2011: 99). Marrs locates the poem's disruption of teleology in its very poetics. As he explains:

> *Clarel* answers these questions indirectly, as it were, by making progress an immanent problem of poetic form. Melville's coiled sentences, four-beat lines, and varied uses of the canto […] evince a poetics of declension. The powerful timespace of *Clarel*'s poetic form thereby permits us to rethink those fictions of descent and expectation upon which celebrations of progress depend. (Marrs 99)

Repetition, breaks, splits, labyrinthine syntactic structures, caesurae, silences, etc. become mechanisms that both resist and disrupt linearity and problematize progress(ion).[295] So does dialogue, which disrupts the teleological sense of development promoted by the plot by provoking a movement away from the binary logics of

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[295] To a thorough analysis of poetics in *Clarel* see Samuel Otter's "How *Clarel* works" (2006).

monoglossic discourse into a plural thinking space where language and discussion travel multidirectionaly. In *Clarel*, dialogue interweaves different individual perspectives in a movement that connects separate readings of the world to a global quest for knowledge and meaning (to which the reader is also incorporated), and that also makes possible the creation of new threads of possibilities from such interconnectedness. The dialogic system in which these diverse interpretations are integrated is not closed but infinitely fluid and enabling. These encounters, and therefore the resulting collaborative process of interpreting 'meaning', are not finite in number, but never-ending in possibilities, since new human beings are continuously begotten into the world bringing with them new perspectives and readings of reality: as Hannah Arendt reminds us, "Each man is unique, so that with each birth something uniquely new comes into the world" (1958: 178). The interconnectedness of human beings through the common world that both unites and separates us not only transcends spatial boundaries but also, as Arendt notes, generational or temporal borders: "The common world is what we enter when we are born and what we leave behind when we die. It transcends our lifespan into past and future alike […]. It is what we have in common not only with those who live with us, but also with those who were here before and with those who will come after us" (55). Melville recurrently incorporates transhistorical as well as transcultural and transnational connections into the system of interpretations constructed by the dialogic encounters of the varied group of characters he portrays in *Clarel*. These multidirectional movements disrupt linearity, opening up new lines of thought, in the same way as dialogues *per se* constitute spontaneous paths of exploration within the apparent linearity of the pilgrimage plot. Thus, the blending of different epochal interpretive frameworks, together with different co-existing systems of knowledge and beliefs –which, in turn, integrate multiple philosophical, religious, political, etc. traditions past

and present–, are placed at the service of the intersubjective production of possibilities that expand relational thinking (what the poem praises as "Manysidedness" in the character of Rolfe [3.16.263]) and moves away from monolithic thought. *Clarel*'s dialogical nature places characters through (and presents readers with) multiple thinking threads, thus disrupting teleological progress(ion). Nevertheless, it is this dialogism and disruption of teleological progress(ion) that paradoxically enables the poem's progress(ion) in its denunciation, not only of monologic dispositions, one-sidednesses, and monolithic 'Meanings', but also of how 'progress' has been traditionally appropriated to serve economic interests and imperialist ends. As the poem opens up multiple paths of exploration and ways of thinking, the reader is left to imagine and critically evaluate their potentiality. Thus, *Clarel*'s conclusion is that there are no conclusions; even if the young Clarel is left to ponder on his own the "murmurs" from "beneath the stones" (4.34.50 and 4.34.53, respectively) by the end of the pilgrimage, he is also aware that these murmurs may never become any clearer. Not even the final and enigmatic "Epilogue" (the iambic pentameters of which releases readers from the harsh tetrameters) in the pitying and heartening voice of the narrator, enables readers to 'fix' the 'meaning' of this closing canto or of the poem.[296]

While, as I noted earlier, Melville's evaluation of progress in *Clarel* may be connected to the particular context of postbellum United States and, more specifically, to the exultation of national progress that the Centennial Exhibition was made to become a commemoration of, Melville's critique of progress is not exclusively limited

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[296] In relation to the poetic form of the iambic pentameter, Terry Eagleton has argued: "In fact, the iambic pentameter – the most common kind of English metre – is itself saturated with social meaning. What makes it so supremely serviceable is the interplay it sets up between the spontaneous flexing and flowing of the speaking voice, and the unobtrusive, impersonal framework which undergirds it. The line is a triumph of reconciliation between order and freedom, necessity and spontaneity, the rule-governed and the open-ended. In blending the distinctive tone of an individual voice with a sense of stability, it allows for just the kind of balance between the individual and the social order which liberal societies tend to favor. In avoiding the individualist anarchy of free verse, it equally rebuffs the kind of cultural form in which the collective dominates over the individual" (2007: 162).

to the American context. If, as Section 3.4 shall analyze, the poem criticizes how

postbellum America degenerated from a mother-like figure "purified from stain" (*Battle-*

Pieces 1866: 162) –a still hopeful nation despite the disturbing image of "law on her

brow and empire in her eyes" (162)– which Melville had portrayed in the poem

"America" in *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War* (1866), to the "great Diana of ill fame!"

(*Clarel* 1876: 4.19.137)[297] –a "harlot" who perverts its own supporters (4.19.135)– which

the author portrays in *Clarel*, it also seems to universalize this general 'wreck'[298] in that

not one of the continents analyzed in the poem presents the least amount of hope to

either narrator or characters. While I fully agree with Cody Marrs's remark that "This

viewing of the poem through the lens of the American Centennial helps clarify *Clarel*'s

politics" (Marrs 2011: 100), I believe it is important to widen the scope of such lens

since, in my view, *Clarel*'s politics is not exclusively restricted to the American context

but reflects what Hennig Cohen provokingly calls a universal "degradation of the

democratic dogma" (1964: xi). Even if its plot is set in the Holy Land, this context plays

both a particular (i.e., the desolated and divided Palestine) and a global dimension, as it

allows for the evaluation of other national contexts at the same time that it constitutes a

universalist context where characters of multiple nationalities, cultures, and religious

beliefs convene, and which give way to multiple dialogues on different human societies,

past and present, from a representative variety of textually available perspectives.

Moreover, the context of the Holy Land also interrelates the different societies the

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[297] Wai-chee Dimock notes the practice of personifying the nation in order to confer agency to a material form, which accommodated to the narrative of Jacksonian individualism and to the colonialist discourse of Manifest Destiny (1989: 26). Melville makes use of the personification of America –"the making of a corporeal self out of a geographical expanse" (26)– in the *Battle-Pieces* poem "America", as well as in *Clarel*, with critical purposes.

[298] This word appears repeatedly in the poem, especially as applied to Jerusalem and the Holy Land, seemingly suggesting differently to the many characters in the text (wrecking dreams and hopes as in the Jewish dream of return to the Holy Land ending in murder and death; waste, as the Brook of Kedron that passes through Jerusalem gathering the dirty waters of the city; the vanishing of faith in religion, democracy, humanity, throughout Clarel's process of unlearning; Mortmain's disbelief in democracy; or Agath's literal wreck and experience of inhumanity, among others).

poem analyzes both trans-nationally and trans-temporally. It is to this global dimension of Palestine and the city of Jerusalem that I turn my attention to in the remaining pages of the present section.

Walter Bezanson has defined *Clarel* as "[…] an intricate documentation of a major crisis in Western civilization" as well as "[…] a historical document almost of the first order" (1991: 506). The poem captures the ideological, political, religious, and class revolutionary atmosphere of nineteenth-century continental Europe, together with the increasing social agitation that was already emerging in other parts of the world (e.g., Great Britain, Mexico). Despite examining different nation-states, *Clarel*'s political analysis moves beyond the nation-state model –and beyond any form of communitarian belonging based on 'identities' such as nationality, religion, culture, 'race', etc. Melville's political project in *Clarel*, instead, responds to the tensions between the different fractions of the mind of which Jerusalem/the Holy Land has traditionally been a site, in order to point toward a polyphonic universalism constructed from the grounds of human interconnectedness and plurality. In this respect, Melville proclaims in *Clarel*, as he does in his entire literary production, what Timothy Marr has named a "declaration of interdependence" (2005: 163). *Clarel* critically evaluates different nation-states, yet, coherent with the universalist political project articulated in Melville's literary production,[299] the poem moves away from the internationalism or federation of states defended by cosmopolitan agendas, in order to destabilize the 'walls' separating human beings, (con)fuse the boundaries between the local and the global, the particular and the universal, and reinforce human beings' universal interconnection. In terms of its critique of progress, the world of *Clarel* is one of universal waste and disillusionment, as no society analyzed in the poem seems to provide a higher degree of hope or relief than

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[299] See Section 3.7.1 in this chapter.

the others. Critical of exceptionalist assumptions about nationality and nationhood (the notion of the Jews as 'the chosen people' or the self-conception of the U.S. as a new 'promised land', etc.),[300] the poem situates the different societies it portrays (Palestinian, French, British, American) side by side and shows how each of them fails to live up to the hopes or satisfy the needs that different characters have placed upon them. At no point in *Clarel* are readers informed of the exact year in which the portrayed pilgrimage happens, and therefore of the moment in which this sociopolitical analysis should be placed. However, there are evidences that indicate that this critical evaluation needs to be located in the early-mid 1870s, a time-span which corresponds approximately with the years Melville was writing the poem,[301] and which finds the support of textual evidences such as the inclusion of the Civil War as a past, yet recent, event in U.S. memory whose divisive consequences are evaluated by both narrator and characters in retrospect,[302] the incorporation of Ungar as a character who decided to go into exile after experiencing the effects of Reconstruction in the South, the clime of social agitation in the United States and echoes of the Depression of 1873, the evaluation of the French Revolutions of 1848 and 1871, etc. This negative universal evaluation is perhaps best expressed by Don Hannibal, a Mexican ex-revolutionary maimed in the war for Mexico's independence, whom the pilgrims meet in Bethlehem, and who connects different societies across the world in his belief that they are all equally incapable of generating hope or respite. Questioned by his old friend Derwent about what brings him to Palestine,[303] Don Hannibal confesses he is a refugee from progress,

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[300] I analyze Melville's critique of exceptionalism in Section 3.5 of this chapter.

[301] For a discussion of the writing process of the poem see Section 2.2.3 in this chapter.

[302] The two voices that make explicit reference to the U.S. Civil War are Rolfe's and the narrator's, who conceive the war as a past historical event: "That evil day" (4.5.74 [a phrase repeated in 4.5.80]), "Sad arch between contrasted eras" (4.5.79); "But now all that was over—gone" (4.5.153).

[303] It is characteristic of Derwent's personality that, as Vincent Kenny notes, the English priest does not connect Don Hannibal to the war that has crippled him but to their happy times together in London (1973: 169).

which pushed him to a restless roaming around different countries and continents and

led him to find that none of those societies could satisfy his desire for retreat:

> "But, tell:
> What wind wafts here Don Hannibal?
> When last I left thee at '*The Cock*'
> In Fleet Street, thou wert like a rock
> For England—bent on anchoring there."
>   "Oh, too much agitation; yes,
> Too proletarian it proved.
> I've stumped about since; no redress;
> Norway's too cold; Egypt's all glare;
> And everywhere that I removed
> This cursed *Progress* still would greet.
> Ah where (thought I) in Old World view
> Some blest asylum from the New!
> At last I steamed for Joppa's seat,
> Resolved on Asia for retreat.
> Asia for me. Asia will do.
> But just where to pitch tent—invest—
> Ah, that's the point; I'm still in quest […] (4.19.31-48)

The social agitation to which Don Hannibal makes reference may be read as an echo of

the social and political agitation generated by working-class revolts spreading in Britain

throughout the 1830s and 1840s.[304] By the end of his report, Don Hannibal confesses

that his quest is still ongoing at present, as not even Asia has proved a good refuge

from "cursed *Progress*". It is, however, the ex-Confederate and mixed-raced Anglo-

Cherokee soldier Ungar who becomes the most explicit detractor of the "impieties of

'Progress'" (4.21.28), even denying, as Joseph G. Knapp notes, the Western dream of

progress in itself (1971: 95). Ungar condemns the perversion of spirituality and

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[304] Don Hannibal's insight of British society comes from an English city which is not specified
in the poem, but which might be associated with London. The last time he met the Mexican, Derwent
informs us, was in a place called "The Cock" in Fleet Street. As Melville's journals reflect, "The Cock"
was a famous tavern in London's Fleet Street, which Melville himself had visited in November and
December 1849 and revisited in April 1857, on his way to Palestine. The tavern was demolished in 1888
and replaced by the Bank of England until 1975, when it was rebuilt as the Old Bank of England Pub
(today number 194 at Fleet St.). This returned it to its old origins as a tavern today named 'Ye Olde
Cock' (Gale 2010).

democratic ideals in the Western world (the U.S. becoming a central, yet not the only, target of his critiques), which has embraced the "*new* ways" (*Clarel* 4.21.32) of material and economic progress and abandoned spirituality: "Where He is not, corruption dwells, / And man and chaos are without restraint" (4.21.42-43). To Ungar, humanity has replaced God for Mammon in their thirst for material wealth. They have also placed themselves at the service of the quick rhythms of an economic progress which has made the U.S. resemble the 'Old World' it sought to distinguish itself from. Ungar thus undoes the myth of American exceptionalism, the conception of the New World as a land of promise and a New Eden (Knapp 1971: 2): while Rolfe tries to soothe his countryman's dark views on the future of the U.S. claiming that America's "inland freshets" and "vast reserves" of "untried fields" will prevent a class war in the United States, Ungar predicts that it is just a matter of time that America's "Thirty Years (of) War" (*Clarel* 4.21.117) arrive, since the U.S. is not a vast rural prairie anymore but an increasingly industrialized and urbanized country where, severely divided on different fronts at the social level, class conflict is rapidly increasing (4.21.99-119).[305] In the same way, Melville had already warned in *Mardi* (1849) that, as it had happened to Dominora (Britain), Vivenza's (the U.S.) "great experiment might have proved an explosion; like the chemist's who, stirring his mixture, was blown by it into the air" (1849: 1182).[306] Ungar's critique of progress needs to be placed within the particular context of 1870s America, and connected to the soldier's fierce evaluation of postbellum U.S.

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[305] Eric Foner remarks that the Great Strike of 1877, after Hayes's election, put an end to "one of the most deeply rooted articles of American faith—the dream of exceptionalism, the belief that the nation could have capitalism without class conflict, industrialization without the 'dark satanic mills' of Europe" (1988: 585). Class conflict was not exclusive of the 1870s but, as historians such as Howard Zinn have brilliantly argued, it was a dominant feature determinant of the history of what is now the United States since its colonial times (see Zinn's *A People's History of the United States. 1492 - Present* [1980]).

[306] By the 1870s, Britain was the furthest-reaching and most powerful empire in the world, as well as a highly industrialized country. In *Clarel* Britain is most severely evaluated by Ungar, who criticizes in a ferocious way the Anglo-Saxon history of colonial expansion and economic progress, comparing postbellum United States to Britain. See Section 3.5 in this chapter.

democracy, in particular (which in the ten years separating *Battle-Pieces* and *Clarel* is degraded from 'mother' to 'whore'),[307] and of democracy, in general, the paradoxes of which the poem evaluates. An exile from the United States, Ungar is a fierce critic of the notions of progress and democracy that the 'New World' proclaims to represent to the world. In the words of Walter Bezanson, Ungar condemns "THE FALL OF THE NEW WORLD itself, the debasement of the last Eden"; he is "a merciless critic of democratic America, lamenting its spiritual collapse, its capitulation to speed and demagogy, materialism and ignorance" (1991: 633). In a similar way as Mortmain and Don Hannibal, Ungar's experiences have made him skeptical that revolution can amend the ills of the present age and create "That uncreated good" (*Clarel* 2.4.49) which his predecessor in the poem, Mortmain, had so unfruitfully pursued; as Joseph Knapp points out:

> Ungar expects no help from war or reform. He has seen too much to hope for peace from war, and he has seen too much of man to hope that reform will cure man's social evils. Man, singly or in the mass is evil. […] Ungar is especially perceptive of man's inhumanity to man. The mere sight of the mutilated shepherds whom he sees at the Church of the Star causes him to flush angrily at this confirmation "Of evil, and malevolence / In man toward man" (IV, xiii, 229). (1971: 77)

Posing a critique of the mechanisms generating class divisions, *Clarel* also problematizes revolutionary politics and radical action at a time when the 1871 French Revolution and the final stages of the Italian wars of unification were resurrecting the phantom of the revolutionary waves which had spread in the German states, Hungary, and, most

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[307] As has been noted earlier, whereas *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War* (1866) portrays America as a suffering mother who may still recover from the nightmarish fratricidal war of her children, in *Clarel* Ungar represents America as a prostitute. Section 3.4 complements the analysis of Ungar's views on postbellum American democracy, which I examine in this section in relation to postbellum U.S. progress.

relevant to *Clarel*, Italy and France throughout the year 1848:[308] "Whole nations now philosophize, / And do their own undoing now.— / Who's gained by all the sacrifice /Of Europe's revolutions?" (*Clarel* 2.26.134-137).

Dennis Berthold has found traces of Risorgimento politics in Melville's *Clarel*,[309] connecting Melville's to Northerners' interest in the Italian revolutions and its leaders at a time when U.S. national identity was being submitted to severe evaluation, as the United States was dramatically trying to reconcile the divide between the 'pluribus' and the 'unum' in its own 'war for re-unification'.[310] Thus, the Italian revolutions were

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[308] As a matter of fact, Melville had experienced the atmosphere of revolutionary Paris in his 1849 trip to Europe. However, it is interesting to note that, in his journal about the trip, Melville does not refer directly to the 1848 revolution in France. As a matter of fact, Melville's only mention of the revolutionary atmosphere in the city is in the following lines: "Crossed the Seine towards the Chamber of Deputies. Returned & met great numbers of troops marching all about. Like a garrisoned town" (*Journals* 30). In his 1849 novel *Mardi*, Melville does address directly the 1848 revolutionary uprisings in France: "Then, as all held their breath, from Franko there spouted an eruption which seemed to plant all Mardi in the foreground. As when Vesuvious lights her torch and in the blaze the storm-swept surges in Naples' bay rear and plunge toward it, so now showed Franko's multitudes as they stormed the summit where their monarch's palace blazed fast by the burning mountain" (1848: 1154). The violence of the rebellion, as well as Melville's own repulsion by such violence, is expressed in the phrases the author uses to refer to it: "the fiery storm", "flames", "blast", "the red volcanoes", "this conflagration", "this fire", etc. (1155-1156).

[309] See "'The Italian Turn of Thought': Risorgimento Politics in *Clarel*" (2004) and, most especially, *American Risorgimento* (2009). In an earlier publication, Berthold similarly asserts that "The discourse of Risorgimento politics runs through both *Battle-Pieces* and *Clarel* (1876), connecting those works' personal meditations on art, politics, and religion with the typologies and iconography of Italian and Roman history" (1997: 436). Berthold locates traces of the Risorgimento in three characters: Celio –a "revolutionary of the spirit" (2009: 234)–, his secular idealism and questioning of the Roman Catholic Church, and his concerns for democracy in face of materialist progress; the Dominican, his defense of the Catholic Church and the Pope; and Salvaterra, a Franciscan (see Berthold 2009: 230-250).

[310] As Andrina Stiles points out, the *Risorgimento* was a movement leading to Italian unification (2000: 15). This unification was the final accomplishment of a gradual process which started well before 1848 (Stiles considers the failed revolutions of 1820 in Piedmont and of 1831 in Modena, Parma, and the Papal States [15], and Derek Beales claims that the beginning of the *Risorgimento* can be traced back to 1748, when the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle put an end to the war of the Austrian Succession and brought about a period of peace in Italy which allowed for the development of this nationalist movement [1971: 2]). Most historians, however, locate in the year 1848 the beginning starting point of the war for Italian unification. In *The Italian Risorgimento* (1998), Martin Clark distinguishes three major stages in Italian unification, from the revolts of 1848 to the proclamation of Rome as the Italian capital in 1871: (1) On the one hand, 1848 was a year of local insurrections inspired by anti-Austrian sentiment in states such as Lombardy, Venetia, or the Papal States, which were finally suffocated. 1848 placed the power of the Pope and of the Church as an institution under attack, as Pope Pius IX made explicit that he would not support Italian nationalism against foreign rule. (2) On the other hand, 1859-1861 marked a second period of wars for unification. The outcome of the war of 1859 was the independence of Lombardy from Austria. This initiated a process by which Lombardy would gradually annex other states such as Sicily, the Kingdom of Naples, and Umbria, eventually leading to the first elections to the Italian parliament in January 1861 and to the proclamation of Victor Emanuel II as King of Italy. (3) Finally, between 1866 and 1871, the process of annexation was completed with the incorporation of Venetia and

closely followed by many of Melville's contemporary writers such as William Cullen

Bryant, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, John Greenleaf Whittier, James Russell Lowell,

and Margaret Fuller, among others, who were supporters of the revolutionary leader

Giuseppe Garibaldi and the Risorgimento movement (Berthold 1997: 426).[311] Both the

lecture "Statues of Rome" (delivered in several Northeastern American locations in the

winter of 1857-1858, after Melville's trip to the Levant in 1856-57), and most especially

Melville's rendering of Garibaldi in the poems "At the Hostelry" and "Naples in the

Time of Bomba" –which remained unpublished in the author's lifetime and may have

been part of a larger literary project combining prose pieces and poems that was

probably being written in the 1870s–,[312] demonstrate that Melville himself may have

followed the events in Italy closely, together with his particular interest in the figure of

Garibaldi. However, as Dennis Berthold remarks, Melville may not have shared his

contemporaries' idealization of the Italian leader:

> Melville's imagination, always driven to see 'Two Sides to a Tortoise' (*Writings* 9: 130),
> found in Garibaldi a living example of the bewildering complexity of history, a case
> study of the reciprocal influence of individual purpose, political idealism, and blind

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the Papal States. The overview presented in this footnote is assembled from different sections in Clark's historical study. For a more detailed analysis of each of these stages, see Clark 1998.

[311] Especially in the 1860s, briefly before the start of the U.S. Civil War, American newspapers brought constant news to the United States on the developments of the wars in Italy, which Melville, among many of his fellow citizens, seems to have followed closely. See Berthold 1997: 430-436.

[312] This literary project, unpublished and unfinished at Melville's death, may have been simultaneous to *Clarel*. This might be taken as an indication that, perhaps, Melville chose not to develop a direct evaluation of Italian unification in *Clarel* because he may have already started or planned to start writing a separate poetry-prose project which would directly analyze these revolutions. For a detailed analysis of the figure of Garibaldi and the Risorgimento movement in "At the Hostelry" and "Naples in the Time of Bomba" see Berthold 1997 and 2009. Melville's unfinished book of combined poetry and prose, which may have been being written at the time the author was engaged in the composition of *Clarel* (1876), has been traditionally known as *Burgundy Club* and was first edited by Raymond Weaver in 1924 and, then, by Howard Vincent in 1947. In 1989, Robert A. Sandberg was the first academic to integrate both the poems and the prose pieces in a reading edition of the text edited from the manuscript, which he prepared as his doctoral dissertation. More recently, Sandberg has found manuscript evidence indicating that the title Melville intended for this volume was *Parthenope* and not *Burgundy Club*, the latter having been used by Merton M. Sealts Jr. in his essay "Melville's Burgundy Club Sketches" (1958). I am grateful to Robert A. Sandberg (Charter College of Education, California State University) for his generous information on Melville's unfinished book, as well as for having so kindly provided me with a copy of his complete, manuscript based, edition of *Parthenope*, in November 2009.

historical event. Garibaldi showed how tyranny could merge with magnanimity in one person, how authority and freedom might be two sides of the same coin, how violence might be necessary to ensure peace. (1997: 426)[313]

Yet, despite Melville's interest in the Italian revolutions, it is the French context that *Clarel* most directly addresses, expressing a general distrust of revolutionary action and exploring the paradoxes and problematics of choosing revolution as the means to create democracy and social justice. Berthold explains the distinction between the Italian and French revolutions to the American mindset:

> […] the Risorgimento, despite its history of political assassinations and terrorist attacks, avoided the anarchy of regicide and the sheer horror of the guillotine, the symbol of revolt gone mad, and thus fell within territory susceptible to the meliorizing ideology of American politics. Like the American Revolution, the Risorgimento was supported by the middle and upper classes and sought to overthrow foreign rule, not institute universal suffrage or state socialism. Furthermore, it challenged Papal authority, thereby appealing to American anti-Catholicism and extending Enlightenment secularism into the stronghold of the anti-Christ. (1997: 451-452)

Hershel Parker notes that, in March 1871, as Melville was writing *Clarel*, a red flag was crowning the Hôtel de Ville in Paris, in proclamation of the Paris Commune[314] (1991: 758). Parker argues that this event must have impressed Melville, inspiring him to explore the revolutionary theme repeatedly in *Clarel* (758). By the early 1870s, Melville was already capable of discerning how the U.S. Civil War and the following period of Reconstruction[315] had not materialized the more democratic and just society he had

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[313] These characteristics may also, I believe, be applied to Abraham Lincoln in the particular context of the U.S. Civil War.

[314] The Paris Commune was a government formed by the working classes, inspired by the principles of the First International, a government which lasted barely 72 days in Paris from March to May 1871. It is often considered the first assumption of power by the working classes in industrial Western civilization. This government was, nonetheless, not only, as we have seen, short-lived but also violently repressed. See Gluckstein 2006: 7.

[315] Historian Eric Foner also refers to the period of Reconstruction as "America's Unfinished Revolution", a phrase that is actually the subtitle of his 1988 volume. Foner conceives Reconstruction as "not merely a specific time period, but the beginning of an extended historical process: the adjustment of American society to the end of slavery" (1988: xxv). As a matter of fact the unfinished work of Reconstruction (the federal government officially withdrew from it after the 1877 election) would give

hoped for in *Battle-Pieces*. Even though *Clarel* provides direct references to such revolutionary atmosphere,[316] the most evident revolutionary presence in the poem is Mortmain, a middle-aged man at the present time of the pilgrimage who had been a young leader in the 1848 French Revolution, originally from Sweden, and who brings the subject of revolution into the poem providing an evaluation of the (im)possibility and paradoxes of democracy. This evaluation is connected to Melville's questioning of progress in *Clarel*, as well as to his critique of war and violence. Melville underscores the irony of fighting in order to eradicate evil and consolidate goodness when both goodness and evil coexist in an indissoluble marriage within the human heart; as Joseph G. Knapp explains, "Melville saw that if goodness cannot exist without evil, neither can evil exist without good. Truth was not to be found in destroying or negating evil but in accepting the organic intermixture of both" (1971: 115). This interlacing of evil and good determines Melville's analysis of democracy in *Clarel*. Like progress, democracy is fragile and unstable:

> And what is stable? find one boon
> That is not lackey to the moon
> Of fate. The flood weaves out – the ebb
> Weaves back; the incessant shuttle shifts
> And flies, and wears and tears the web. (2.4.93-97)[317]

Melville presents democracy as a project permanently in progress, incomplete and imperfect. Slavoj Žižek summarizes this imperfection of democracy when he claims that "the democratic project is inconsistent, in its very notion an 'unfinished project,' but its very 'paradox' is its strength, a guarantee against totalitarian temptation.

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way to over a hundred years of violence against African Americans and racial segregation in the South, a reality that only started to improve after the Civil Rights Movements in the 1960s.

[316] There is an explicit reference to the 1848 revolutions in canto 3.1.156-164.

[317] These words by Mortmain also express the ex-revolutionary's belief in the cyclical character of history and delusiveness of progress (Knapp 1971: 70).

Democracy includes its imperfection in its very notion, which is why the only cure against democratic deficiencies is more democracy" (2008: 106). Melville's full contemporary Walt Whitman would argue in his essay *Democratic Vistas* (1871), published just five years before *Clarel*, that American democracy was a dormant abstraction awaiting realization: "We have frequently printed the word Democracy. Yet I cannot too often repeat that it is a word the real gist of which still sleeps, quite unawakened, notwithstanding the resonance and the many angry tempests out of which its syllables have come, from pen or tongue. It is a great word, whose history, I suppose, remains unwritten, because that history has yet to be enacted" (37). Democracy is a project that is actively created, through the continuous interaction of human beings in their plurality and diversity, and conditioned by its own provisionality, processual character, and imperfection, as well as by the limitations of those who might create it. Yet if democracy is unquestionably a positive ideal, it is also an ideal that is often perverted. Thus, when 'democracy' is, instead, seized by an *unum* (i.e., a single individual in the form of a president, king, political party, etc.) who speaks for, but does not give voice to, all the parts it represents, the equilibrium between the 'many' and the 'individual' is directly endangered. In these cases, democracy becomes paradoxically undemocratic: a homogenizing movement that dangerously absorbs plurality into an abstract, singular 'One', and neutralizes the different parts by which it is composed in an impersonal 'mass,' consequently invisibilizing difference and, therefore, eliminating the very pillar on which democracy is sustained: i.e., plurality.[318]

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[318] In *The Human Condition* (1958), Hannah Arendt notes that plurality is the indispensable condition for the public realm and, consequently, for democracy, arguing that the abolition of plurality signifies the abolition of the public realm and therefore of democracy itself (220). Arendt dismisses "those forms of democracy in which the many form a collective body so that the people 'is many in one'" (221), characteristic of monarchy, she argues, and, I add, also of most contemporary republican or monarchical parliamentary systems of government which have proclaimed themselves to be democratic since their foundation. The questions that remain impossible to answer are, of course, if the modern

At the end of the 1848 French Revolution, Pierre Joseph Proudhon would lament that "[…] We have been beaten and humiliated […] scattered, imprisoned, disarmed and gagged. The fate of European democracy has slipped from our hands — from the hands of the people — into those of the Praetorian Guard" (qtd. in Breunig 255). A young idealist expressing yearnings for peace and social equality,[319] Mortmain had participated as a leader in the French Revolution of 1848, afterwards experiencing betrayal and persecution by fellow revolutionaries. These experiences turned him into a disillusioned exile "Rov[ing] the gray places of the earth" (*Clarel* 2.4.130) for many years before finally reaching Palestine, where the rest of *Clarel*'s characters meet him. Mortmain's life-experiences in contact with man's evil side have turned him into a nihilist who has abandoned any belief in democracy. This disappointment experienced by certain sectors of the French population in France after the revolutions of 1848 and 1871, which Mortmain embodies in *Clarel*, may be related, in my opinion, to the disappointment suffered by many American citizens at the outcome of the Civil War after seeing defeated their expectations of the form that American democracy should take in the postwar period. Through Mortmain, Melville places the analysis of revolution at the service of the exploration of the (im)possibilities, limitations, paradoxes, and problems of democracy. If works such as *Mardi* (1849) had made evident Melville's repulse at the use of violence –both by government and citizens– to solve sociopolitical problems, *Clarel* too incorporates a critique of revolutionary action as a means to create "That uncreated good" (2.4.49) out of war, for, as Melville would

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nation-state model, with its homogenizing and assimilationist tendencies, can engender true democracies, and even if 'true democracies' can be engendered at all.

[319] "This son of earth,
   This Psalmanazer, made a hearth
   In warm desires and schemes for man:
   Even *he* was an Arcadian.
   Peace and good will was his acclaim—
   If not in words, yet in the aim:
   Peace, peace on earth: that note he thrilled" (2.4.28-34).

write in *White-Jacket*, "How can it be expected that the religion of peace should flourish in an oaken castle of war?" (1850: 157). Mortmain's idealist fight for democracy in the past is used by Melville to evaluate the revolutionary waves in continental Europe during the late 1840 as well as revolutionary action in general. France, together with the Holy Land and the United States, constitutes a paradigm of shattered expectations and hopes in the poem, as it is narrated to have become a place of persecutions, betrayals and pessimism, supplanting the possibility of social justice and democracy with a new form of tyranny.[320] Thus the poem criticizes the negative turn of democratic ideals into a new totalitarianism, and also offers a critical stance toward the use of violence in revolutionary action as a way to bring forth –and impose– social and political change. In the following passage, the narrator condemns the use of violence even when it responds to violent systems, presenting such violent action as paradoxical to a "Prophet of peace" like Mortmain, and problematizing the amendment of "questionable wrongs" with a "yet more questionable war":

> Wouldst meddle with the state? Well, mount
> Thy guns; how many men dost count?
> Besides, there's more that here belongs:
> Be many questionable wrongs:
> By yet more questionable war,
> Prophet of peace, these wouldst thou bar?
> The world's not new, nor new thy plea.
> Tho' even shouldst thou triumph, see,
> Prose overtakes the victor's songs:
> Victorious right may need redress:
> No failure like a harsh success.
> Yea, ponder well the historic page:

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[320] Originally conceived as an uprising of both the working classes –who wanted to lead an international 'crusade' in defense of democracy– and a more conservative middle class –who rebelled against the king Louis Philippe because it felt excluded from politics, dominated by the monarchy and the upper classes–, the 1848 Revolution gave the power to its more conservative factions, which restored the old ruling class and removed both republicans and socialists from power, eventually giving way to the Second French Empire in the dictatorial regime of Napoleon III (1852-1870) (Williams 1969: 3-4).

Of all who, fired with noble rage,
Have warred for right without reprieve,
How many spanned the wings immense
Of Satan's muster, or could cheat
His cunning tactics of retreat
And ambuscade? Oh, now dispense! (2.4.71-88)

Even when a revolution is nourished by positive intentions, history has often proved how, in the end, the democratic ideals defended by revolutionary action may be perverted by power to the extent that "Victorious right may need redress" again. This was also the caveat that Melville expressed in *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War* (1866); that the victory of the Union might turn into an oppressive system of 'justice'. Afraid of what the meaning of 'Law' would become in postbellum America, Melville warned against an America with a thirst for revenge produced by the horrible fratricidal war, and with "Law on her brow and empire in her eyes", as he would point out in the poem "America" (*Battle-Pieces* 1866: 162). The question, of course, is if democracy, the positive ideal, is at all possible to be materialized. Žižek understands democracy as an imperfect project, whose deficiencies are impossible to escape from; in a more optimistic tone, Zygmunt Bauman conceives democracy as an unremitting revisionary force that struggles against its imperfections: "Democracy expresses itself in a continuous and relentless critique of institutions; democracy is an anarchic disruptive element inside the political system; essentially, a force of *dissent* and *change*. One can best recognize a democratic society by its constant complaints that it is *not* democratic enough" (*The Individualized Society* 2001: 55).

Melville's analysis of progress, democracy, revolutionary action, and violence, in *Clarel*, as I have claimed, is based on particular national contexts (Britain, Italy, France, the U.S.) yet also on a global denunciation of the degradation of democracy. The interconnection between the local and the global, as well as among different 'localities'

CHAPTER TWO

which the poem juxtaposes, is expressed in the very context of the Holy Land itself, which, while portraying the specific city of Jerusalem and the land of Palestine, also constitutes a microcosm of the global, a context representative of the diversity of humanity. Moreover, in my opinion, Palestine, a land divided by hatred and inter-human divisions, may also be read as evocative of the racial, social, political, inter-human segregation of postbellum America. As I anticipated earlier, Melville articulates in *Clarel* a loss of hope in postbellum America, a feeling that the poet had already expressed in his 1866 volume on the U.S. Civil War *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War*. The next section turns to *Battle-Pieces* as an important literary work to analyze not only the disappointment with American democracy that Melville would express in the 1876 *Clarel*, but also the difficulties faced by Melville's universalist project.

3.4. From Battle-grounds to Mounts of Stones: Postbellum U.S. and the Universal Degradation of Democracy

> "The world has arrived at a period which renders it the part of Wisdom to pay homage to the prospective precedents of the Future in preference to those of the Past. The Past is dead, and has no resurrection; but the Future is endowed with such a life, that it lives to us even in anticipation. The Past is, in many things, the foe of mankind; the Future is, in all things, our friend. In the Past is no hope; the Future is both hope and fruition. The Past is the text-book of tyrants; the Future the Bible of the Free. Those who are solely governed by the Past stand like Lot's wife, crystallized in the act of looking backward, and forever incapable of looking before."
>
> (Herman Melville, *White-Jacket* 1850: 150)

> "Unmoved by all the claims our times avow
> The ancient Sphinx still keeps the porch of shade;
> And comes Despair, whom not her calm may cow,
> And coldly on that adamantine brow
> Scrawls undeterred his bitter pasquinade."

(Herman Melville, *Clarel* 1876: 4.35.3-7)

"In all things, and toward all, we are enjoined to do as we would be done by."
(Herman Melville, *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War* 1866: 268)

"Let us pray that the terrible historic tragedy of our time may not have been enacted without instructing our whole beloved country through terror and pity; and may fulfillment verify in the end those expectations which kindle the bards of Progress and *Humanity*" (*Battle-Pieces* 1866: 272; my italics). These are the words with which Melville concludes the "Supplement" to *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War*, and which at the same time bring the entire volume to a close. The paragraph emphasizes Melville's expectations that the whole country has learned from the tragedy, and the final sentence expresses the hopes the poet may still have retained, at the close of the Civil War, that the U.S. government would enact a responsible politics of reconciliation which reunited the confronted North and South without enforcing divisions between 'victors' and 'defeated'. In this section, I will argue that *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War* constitutes a critique of the (both Union and Confederate) patriotism and nationalist apparatuses that lead human beings to sacrifice their lives and kill others equally human and equally trapped within the dehumanizing machinery of war. This critique of the dehumanizing "aspects of the war" (phrase which subtitles the volume) embeds a critique of nationalism that, I claim, is not a breach within Melville's oeuvre, as has been traditionally considered, but a continuation of his universalist project. It is necessary, I believe, to briefly turn to the 1866 *Battle-Pieces* in this section in order to look for the seeds for the lack of hope in postwar U.S. that Melville would express in the 1876 *Clarel* through the deeply divided contexts of Jerusalem and Palestine, in which, I shall defend, the context of postbellum United States resonates.

The "Supplement" to *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War* is the conclusion of a poetry journey by which Melville tries to become a "bard[…] of Progress and Humanity", a mediator-reconciler who brings readers –for the most part white, middle-aged, Northern civilians who are patriotic to the Union and moderate in their political views–[321] closer to the pathos of the war. Melville's prose essay empowers readers to become humane citizens who may act a fundamental part in the future of their country. Before the "Supplement", the poems in *Battle-Pieces* are poised to move readers to personal transformations that may ensure responsible citizenship, through a poetry journey of recognition of the dehumanizing effects of the war. Some scholars such as Dennis Berthold, Carolyn Karcher, Carme Manuel, Deak Nabers, or Michael P. Rogin have read *Battle-Pieces* as expressing a conservative political voice which clashes with Melville's global exultation of human brotherhood in his previous literary production. This conservative perspective, these critics argue, endows a conservative agenda that supports a white supremacist vision of America:

> Melville addresses a victorious North and demands clemency and generosity toward the defeated South so that the Union can be reestablished and national reconciliation carried out. Nonetheless, the South Melville had in mind is a white South; thus, the existence and the future of slaves who have been emancipated are relegated to a second status, since the only thing that matters is the restoration of what Lincoln had called "the house divided in two". (Manuel 2009: 46, my translation)[322]

Melville's particular emphasis on the reconciliation between Northerners and Southerners over the then newly acquired freedom of former slaves is certainly

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[321] This potential reader, as I will analyze, is essential for the volume's careful construction of patriotism, a 'patriotism' which Melville connects to humanity and not to overzealous –divisive– nationalist discourses privileging certain groups of citizens over others for the creation of a 'national identity'.

[322] "Melville s'adreça a un Nord victoriós i li demana clemència i generositat cap al Sud vençut perquè es puga refer la Unió i es puga portar a terme la reconciliació nacional. Ara bé, el Sud que té en ment és el Sud blanc, de manera que l'existència i el futur dels esclaus que han estat emancipats queden relegats a un segon pla, ja que l'únic que importa és la restauració del que Lincoln havia anomenat 'la casa dividida en dos'" (Manuel 2009: 46).

problematic. However, the poet's prudence as regards to imperative questions such as the meaning of the newly acquired freedom and civil rights of African Americans or the cohabitation between racial groups who hate one another in the South does not in itself constitute a white supremacist vision of the United States[323] (similarly, before the war, Melville was clearly opposed to slavery, but he never proclaimed himself an abolitionist,[324] for example, and his attitude toward the abolitionist revolutionary John Brown, as expressed in "The Portent" is ambivalent).[325] The concluding essay to *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War*, I contend, transcends the limits of American nationalism –at that time constructed as white and Angloprotestant and, therefore, excluding a significant number of the U.S. population–[326] in its claims for interhuman responsibility ("In all things, and *toward all*, we are enjoined to do as we would be done by" [*Battle-Pieces* 268; my italics]). While Melville's voice is constrained by the nationalist discourses in which his volume is inscribed, and in which, as a consequence it participates, his conception of 'Americanness' is connected to "Humanity" (*Battle-Pieces* 272), and is as embracing of African Americans as it is of Southerners, at the same time that it expresses the urgency to avoid whites' racist hatred toward freed slaves. Moreover, as Robert Milder has analyzed (1989), Melville's voice in *Battle-Pieces* is constrained by the readership it aims to address, for the most part, patriotic, racially prejudiced and wondering both about the meaning of the war and about the deaths of close relatives, friends, and neighbors in the conflict. However, Melville's allegiance, I claim, is not

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[323] As a matter of fact, the poet shows the same prudence in avoiding falling into a celebrative attitude about the victory of the Union in the final poems to *Battle-Pieces* and the closing "Supplement".

[324] Melville's attitude toward abolitionism or violent revolutions, I believe, is expressed in the following lines of a letter Melville sent to his friend Evert A Duyckinck: "And this pulling down is easy enough — a keg of powder blew up Brock's Monument — but the man who applied the match, could not, alone, build such a pile to save his soul from the shark-maw of the Devil" (3 March 1849, 122).

[325] As a matter of fact, at the same time that it enabled African Americans' long struggle to be incorporated into the political sphere and to be given equal civil rights, the post-Civil War years also marked the beginning of a long period of violence and crimes against blacks and of segregation.

[326] The image of the U.S. publicly displayed in the 1876 Exhibition was that of a white country. See Section 3.3 in this chapter.

with the Union but with "Humanity" (272). In the same way as in "Benito Cereno" (1855) or "The 'Gees" (1856), two of Melville's short stories which most directly deal with 'race' and ethnicity (which Melville also connects to humanity: in "The 'Gees", the narrator significantly asserts that "there is no call to which the 'Gee will with more alacrity respond than the word 'Man!'" [2001: 262]),[327] the poet could only present his personal racial views covertly and between the lines in his Civil War volume. These views I conceive as avowing for racial equality rather than racial supremacy or subordination, in a program for Southern Reconstruction based on the necessary political equality of North and South, which was already a much controversial issue at the time *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War* was published. In a similar line of thought to Carme Manuel's or Deak Nabers's –the latter of whom claims that the fact "That *Battle-Pieces*, especially in its 'Supplement,' presents a conservative agenda for Reconstruction is undeniable" (2003: 25)–, Michael P. Rogin has argued that this closing prose addendum enforces divisions rather than eliminates them: "The Supplement made nature a standard to create boundaries not to dissolve them. It distinguished the natural, familiar bonds among whites from the obligations whites owed blacks. The Supplement proposed that we 'be Christians toward our fellow-whites' and 'philanthropists toward the blacks'" (1985: 280). Rogin claims that Melville's concluding essay merely offers paternal guardianship to the freed slaves and claims for their assimilation (1979: 280). I move away here from these scholars' beliefs that Melville endorses a white supremacist agenda in *Battle-Pieces*. Melville is not –cannot– be explicit about his views on racial equality, and the hopes for reconciliation expressed in the essay are overshadowed by his fears that Reconstruction would become in the end a turbulent period characterized

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[327] These two short stories are included in the volume *Tales, Poems, and Other Writings* (2001), edited by John Bryant.

by brutal racist violence –as it actually did.[328] Nonetheless, Melville includes African

Americans in his political project as racial equals to whites, in the same way as he

regards white Southerners as equal to white Northerners. I, therefore, disagree with

Rogin's opinion that there is a hierarchy between 'being Christian' and 'being

philanthropist' (the etymological meaning of 'philanthropia' is 'love of humanity', and it

is precisely such love that Christianity also predicates), and that Melville is leaving black

Americans out of his political project for Reconstruction. The end of the war left a

political wound between Northerners and Southerners (victors and defeated) but also a

racial divide between white and black Americans,[329] which expanded into other forms

of social divides as new human groups arrived in the U.S., and class divisions increased.

Melville's encouragement to "be Christians toward our fellow-whites, as well as

philanthropists toward the blacks, our fellow-men" (*Battle-Pieces* 1866: 268), I believe,

abridges, not deepens, this inter-human gap, as it is immediately followed by a sentence

that brings together both forms of non-discriminatory kindheartedness: "In all things

and toward all, we are enjoined to do as we would be done by" (268) The fact that the

author emphasizes the need to do "In all things, and toward all" "as we would be done

by" does not exclude or establish a hierarchy but, it seems to me, stresses a moral

obligation *toward all* emphasizing a bond in common humanity. This sense of

compassion and humanity informs the 'Christian charity' that Melville vindicates at the

beginning of the "Supplement" (before the poet exposes his arguments on racial

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[328] The Ku Klux Klan appeared simultaneously in different states in the late 1860s and was officially outlawed in 1870, even though violence against blacks continued for decades (Quarles 1999: 95). Racial tension in many parts of the South reached the level of an internal 'civil war'; with violence characterizing the everyday lives of many blacks. The tension was such that the governor of North Carolina, David L. Swain, asserted in 1865 that "With reference to emancipation, we are at the beginning of the war" (qtd. in Foner 1988: 123). Chester L. Quarles notes that the Klan flourished again in the twentieth century, especially in the late 1950s and early 1960s, and also that it lives on in the present (95).

[329] In Southern states of the 'cotton belt' region such as South Carolina, Georgia, Mississippi, Louisiana, or Alabama, African Americans constituted almost or over 50% of the total population (see figure in McPherson 1988: 101).

politics), as the fundamental pillar upon which Reconstruction –"if admitted to be feasible at all", Melville adds (260)– needs to be grounded. It is this same exercise in humane Christian charity, which Melville vindicates not only toward white Southerners but also toward African Americans. As has been claimed earlier, it is informative to compare Melville's racial views in *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War* to those expressed in earlier texts, such as the shorter pieces "The Chola Widow" (1854), "Benito Cereno" (1855), "The 'Gees" (1856), or novels like *Moby-Dick* (1851); yet it is also important to read them side by side with the exercise in global consciousness, democracy, and universalism that Melville would perform ten years later in *Clarel* (1876).[330] Considered within this context, the "Supplement" to *Battle-Pieces* does not abandon, but is expressive of, Melville's universalist conception of humanity beyond race, ethnicity, nation(ality), ideology, or religion; for, while it is true that the essay clearly establishes reconciliation between empowered, white Northerners and empowered, white Southerners as the national priority at the time, it also encourages white (Anglo) Americans to treat blacks according to the reciprocity of the golden rule, which applies universally, and understands the wellbeing of emancipated slaves as directly dependent on how the North treats the South after the war. Melville, therefore, was not envisioning a white South at the close of the war. However, he was aware, as Nathaniel Hawthorne would put forth, that "whoever may be benefited by the results of this war, it will not be the present generation of negroes […] who must henceforth fight a hard battle with the world, on very unequal terms" (Hawthorne, qtd. in Garner 1993: 154).[331]

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[330] As has been argued, however, Melville may have started conceiving/writing *Clarel* merely a few years after the publication of *Battle-Pieces* in August 1866, soon after Malcolm's death. See Section 2.2.3 in this chapter.

[331] It is here relevant to differenciate between Melville's ideological sympathies at the time of the Civil War and his friend Hawthorne's. As Melville biographer Lewis Mumford stated in 1929: "Melville's attitude towards the Civil War was, in sum, just the opposite of Hawthorne's; and if the men had been still in communication during this period, it would probably have opened a final breach between them. For Hawthorne, New England was as large a piece of earth as he had any affection for,

Melville knew that the coexistence of the two races in the South would be a difficult matter and that ex-slaves would be the most vulnerable victims as well as the beneficiaries of emancipation.[332] The abolition of slavery was achieved through violence and received with further violence in certain areas of the country; it did not automatically bring about equal citizenship or civil and political rights, and much less did it feature the end of racism. Aware of such complex reality, Melville consequently places upon the North the responsibility of national reconciliation and peaceful transition: only by treating the defeated South magnanimously, and holding from giving vent to Northerners' punitive wishes for revenge on the 'rebels', the "Supplement" I believe advocates, might such dangerous "exterminating hatred of race toward race" (268) –so strong at the time– be made to diminish. The future of ex-slaves in a period of fragile peace when the meaning of 'freedom' was still awaiting definition,[333] therefore, was directly connected to the South's, brutally devastated due to the military campaigns resulting from the North's resolution to bring the war to a close.[334] If Southerners were deprived of sociopolitical rights as punishment for four years of rebellion against the national government, and blacks were given sociopolitical rights, this would only contribute to deepen racist hatred. The challenge the U.S. faced at the end of the war was an enormous and extremely delicate one. This is precisely the

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and whatever happened next, he asserted in the early days of the conflict, he rejoiced that the old Union was smashed. 'We never were one people, and never really had a country since the Constitution was founded'" (297).

[332] This is seen, for example, in the poem "Formerly a Slave", where Melville writes that it is only the "children's children" of the black woman portrayed in the poem –based on Elihu Vedder's portrait of Jane Jackson– who "shall know / The good withheld from her" by "too late deliverance" (*Battle-Pieces* 154).

[333] In 1864, as the war was in its final stage and the U.S. Senate had just passed the Thirteenth Amendment proclaiming the end of slavery. President Abraham Lincoln expressed his uncertainty about the meaning of liberty at such crucial moment: "The world has never had a good definition of the word liberty, and the American people, just now, are much in want of one. We all declare for liberty; but in using the same *word* we do not all mean the same *thing*" (qtd. in Burlingame 1994: 33).

[334] Melville explicitly denounces Sherman's violent campaigns against Confederate States such as Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina in the *Battle-Pieces* poems "The March to the Sea" and "The Frenzy in the Wake".

tension that Melville is facing in the "Supplement", as his political voice is constrained by his own anxiety at the difficult task of reunion and the potential white readers, for the most part deeply racist, in front of whom he needs to find the literary means to champion his views on humanity and social justice including white and black, Northern and Southern, Americans.[335] Melville is, in my opinion, integrative, not segregative, in his political views: "For the future of the freed slaves we may well be concerned; but the future of the *whole* country, *involving the future of the blacks*, urges a paramount claim upon our anxieties" (1866: 267; my italics). Analyzing *Battle-Pieces* and *Clarel* together enables us to realize how the divisions, internal wounds, and confrontations the Civil War had caused were present in 1870s U.S., as Melville would expose in *Clarel*.

As has been noted at the beginning of this section, Melville's program for reconciliation places the hopeful "Progress" of the United States in "Humanity", a "Humanity" which certainly transcends the nation and other communitarian affiliations, among which 'race'. He, thus, rejects to participate in the construction of any nationalism, necessarily sectarian and biased in all its forms. It is, I believe, no coincidence that, in the closing line of the volume, Melville places "Progress" and "Humanity" at the same level (272), importantly capitalizing the two words.[336] Even though, in dealing with such a, by definition, national(ist) event as a civil war –a violent wrestling which agitated and redefined U.S. nationality, and which would consolidate the U.S. as a more centralized nation-state–, *Battle-Pieces* as a political project is confined within national borders –the borders of U.S. nationality and nationhood–, and

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[335] Robert Milder has described the profile of the reader *Battle-Pieces* addresses: "The reader that *Battle-Pieces* implicitly assumes is Northern, white, middle-class, and almost assuredly male; educated but not necessarily intellectual; patriotic to the Union (overzealously at times) yet fundamentally humane; and 'empowered' in the sense that he and his like will define the moral character of the postwar America-to-be" (1989: 175).

[336] This may also evoke the closing line to "Bartleby, the Scrivener", "Ah Bartleby! Ah humanity!" (1853: 98).

Melville's voice, in a parallel way, is constrained by the type of public his poetry volume targets and the nationalist even it addresses. Despite these limitations, Melville's political project on the American Civil War 'walks without the walls' of patriotism and expresses a more global dimension that breaks through the national boundaries which coerce his political agenda. The author, thus, creates a poetry project that sings the Union (Melville's voice in *Battle-Pieces* is not that of a patriotic Unionist but he supports that the country should hold together), but, at the same time, he employs literary licenses to address potential "eagle-eyed readers", which are non-apparent (and, therefore, not offensive) to those patriotic readers, some of them overzealous, who may read the volume. Melville, therefore, distances himself from the very patriotic premises which nourished Unionist nationalist fervor justifying the human sacrifice in the war. The volume's honoring inscription to the "three hundred thousand / who in the war / for the maintenance of the Union / fell devotedly / under the flag of *their* Fathers" (iii; my italics) is intriguing, in this respect. Some may regard the distance expressed by the poetic persona through the possessive 'their' in this dedication as merely indicative of the fact that Melville did not fight in the war and, therefore, did not sacrifice his life as "the three hundred thousand", to whom the volume is dedicated, did. This, however, does not explain Melville's ambiguous use here of the possessive, especially because 'their' seems a clear reference to the nation's Founding Fathers[337] for whom the author's own ancestors had fought.[338] From the beginning of the volume, Melville

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[337] It is interesting to note here that both sides of the war justified their separate projects by appealing to the Constitution: Confederates clung to the Constitutional rights of the states to establish their supremacy in their separatist agenda, whereas Unionists equally appealed to the Constitution to not recognize secession and to claim that the Union should hold together. See Joseph M. Flora and Lucinda H. Mackethan *A Companion to Southern Literature* (2002).

[338] The history of Melville's family –the Melvills and the Gansevoorts– was directly connected to the national history of the United States. Melville's grandfather on his mother's side, General Peter Gansevoort of Albany, had participated in the defense of Fort Stanwix in 1777. Similarly, Melville's grandfather on his father's side, the Brahmin Thomas Melvill, had been a veteran of the Boston Tea

separates himself from U.S. nationalist and patriotic discourses foundational to the construction of American national identity. It is interesting to compare Melville's voluntary self-exclusion from the nationalist 'we' in *Battle-Pieces* to the young Redburn's remarks in *Redburn* (1849) that American ancestry, in the same way as every nation's, is lost in universal parentage:

> For who was our father and our mother? Or can we point to any Romulus and Remus for our founders? Our ancestry is lost in the universal paternity […]. We are the heirs of all time, and with all nations we divide our inheritance. On this Western Hemisphere all tribes and people are forming into one federated whole; and there is a future which shall see the estranged children of Adam restored as to the old hearthstone in Eden. (1849: 185)[339]

It is certainly surprising that the author who, so often in his literary production (both pre- and post- *Battle-Pieces*), had connected the origins of the United States to such "universal paternity", and expressed his conception of the world and humanity as a "federated whole", should abandon his universalist ideals to defend a nationalist agenda or a patriotism (of either side) for which over a million Americans had been either killed or wounded. In *Battle-Pieces*, instead of embracing the Fathers of the nation, Melville detaches himself from the very principles informing and sustaining U.S. nationalism and patriotism, opening up a pathway for potential human progress that is not based on nationalist worldviews (always inevitably divisive) but rooted upon the universalist understanding of human interconnection he had defended in his previous

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Party in 1773 and became a Major of the Massachusetts artillery regiment in 1777 during the Revolutionary War (Karcher 2005).

[339] Similarly, Melville's unsigned review of Francis Parkman's *The California and Oregon Trail* (1849) expresses such universalist consciousness of the unity of humankind by underlining human interconnectedness: "When we affect to contemn [sic] savages, we should remember that by so doing we asperse our own progenitors; for they were savages also. Who can swear that among the naked British barbarians sent to Rome to be stared at more than 1500 years ago, the ancestor of Bacon might not have been found?—Why, among the very Thugs of India, or the bloody Dyaks of Borneo, exists the germ of all that is intellectually elevated and grand. We are all of us—Anglo-Saxon, Dyaks, and Indians—sprung from one head and made in one image. And if we reject this brotherhood now, we shall be forced to join hands hereafter" (231). Melville's review was published on March 31, 1849, in the New York *Literary World*, with the title "Mr. Parkman's Tour".

literary works and would continue to do so in the postbellum *Clarel*. In *Battle-Pieces*, I claim, Melville transcends U.S. nationalism and patriotism, rejecting the confining and dividing elements of these discourses in an effort to connect the future of American democracy to the exercise of interhuman responsibility and humanity toward all he vindicates. As the author would have the young protagonist in *Redburn* exclaim, the United States is "not a nation, so much as a world; for unless we may claim all the world for our sire, like Melchisedec, we are without father or mother" (1849: 185): it is impossible, thus, to "spill a drop of American blood without spilling the blood of the whole world" (185). Melville's views on U.S. national identity in *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War* resemble, in my opinion, the kind of American 'nationalism' that the author had earlier explicitly defended in *Redburn*, as the previous passages illustrate, or in "Hawthorne and His Mosses. By a Virginian Spending July in Vermont" (1850):[340] "But it is not meant that all American writers should studiously cleave to nationality in their writings; only this, no American writer should write like an Englishman, or a Frenchman; let him write like a man, for then he will be sure to write like an American" (56). As I claimed earlier, it is important to analyze *Clarel* in relation to *Battle-Pieces*, since the internal wound the Civil War had opened was still bleeding in the 1870s, and Melville would expose this still open wound in his 1876 *Clarel*. It is also significant to my analysis of *Clarel* as a universalist poem that the conclusion to *Battle-Pieces* –Melville's poem on such a *national* event as the Civil War– is no exaltation of nationalism or of the Union, but a defense of responsibility in the America that may now be, and which the poet connects to interhuman responsibility pointing beyond the boundaries of

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[340] "Hawthorne and His Mosses" first appeared in *The Literary World*, on 17 and 24 August 1850. The subtitle "By a Virginian Spending July in Vermont" is indicative of Melville's efforts to 'unite' at a time in which divisions between North and South were already strong, by adopting a fictional Southern persona (a Virginian) and connecting this persona to a Northern location (Vermont) and to a review of a writer so well-known among Americans such as Nathaniel Hawthorne.

communitarianism, and therefore of the nation. It is relevant that, almost twenty years after *Redburn* (1848) in *Battle-Pieces* (1866), and thirty in *Clarel* (1876), Melville was still "keep[ing] true" to the [universalist] dreams of his youth.

In the years following the publication of *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War*, Melville's hopes in the emergence of a more democratic and humane U.S. gradually evaporated. Neither did *Battle-Pieces* sell more than half of the 1,260 copies that were printed. Both reviewers and public paid little attention to it.[341] According to Robert Milder, *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War* would become Melville's last open attempt to address the American public (2006: 186).[342] After the Civil War, the possibilities of a new America grounded on knowledge and responsibility vanished as the U.S. (Northern) government became gradually unconcerned with Southern Reconstruction, turning its attention, instead, to colonize the west of the country –where thousands of acres of land were taken– and to consolidate a capitalist system which launched the United States as one of the wealthiest countries in the world with a potent industrial capacity (Foner 1988: 18-19). Southern economy was devastated after the war, and so were many cities and towns that had suffered the attacks of the Union army in battle. Southern politics, though not Southern mentality, shifted from the conservative and white-hegemonic Democrats to the progressive Radical Republicans as a result of the en-mass African American vote. To Southern whites, the feeling that blacks were now controlling Southern politics increased their sense of disempowerment, as well as their rage and violent actions against African Americans (the Klan was active in the South

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[341] Robert J. Scholnick provides detailed information about the poor sales of *Battle-Pieces* in his article "Politics and Poetics: The Reception of Melville's *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War*" (1977).

[342] Garner shares Milder's opinion that *Battle-Pieces* was Melville's last attempt to be recognized as an author during his lifetime: "His hopes for national rededication were shattered and his poetic aspirations were crushed. Never again would he delude himself into thinking that he might be recognized in his own time, nor would he ever again see himself as the bard of national destiny" (1993: 455).

over the postbellum period and lynchings were common against African Americans who defied white superiority). As blacks were fighting for the difficult task of asserting their rights, they found themselves in direct competition with whites for lands and jobs, and white peasants, in turn, also feared the competition with black labor (Du Bois 1935: 237). In the North, corporate capitalism was consolidated, and corruption became widespread in the nation: "All this was not simply the corruption of the Republican Party, as some writers insist; it ran across all lines of party and geography; it embraced all sections, classes and races. It was the disgrace of a whole nation" (Du Bois 582). Over the postwar years, laws continued to be passed which dispossessed Native Americans of their lands; ex-slaves were abandoned at their own luck in their recently acquired 'freedom' and frequently entered new forms of 'bondage' and discrimination, suffering from daily intimidations and violence; and political, ethnic, religious, social, and sexual, divisions continued increasing amidst American citizens, provoking a social (rooted on racist, xenophobic, nativist, and anti-immigration attitudes, as well as widening class differences) and political (the divide between Democrats and Radical Republicans, and the eventual impeachment[343] of U.S. President Andrew Johnson by

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[343] Seen as Lincoln's continuator, Andrew Johnson assumed the Presidency in 1865, after Lincoln's death, and proceeded, without the support of Congress, to offer amnesty, pardons, and restoration of property to ex-Confederates who swore loyalty to the Union. These proceedings met with the opposition of Congress, at the time dominated by Radical Republicans, who perceived that the President was restoring to power the very same elite who had supported secession and who, merely a few months ago, were fighting the Union. This situation led Congress to pass a new legislation, without Johnson's approval, which recognized the civil rights of former slaves as American citizens, and dispossessed the ruling Southern elite of their power to make sure that no representative of the former Confederacy would participate in politics after the war. The Congress's measures reversed Johnson's procedures to restrict the freedom of blacks and ensure the hegemony of whites. The irreconcilable divide between the President and the Congress eventually terminated with Johnson's impeachment and acquittal in 1868, after which Ulysses S. Grant became President. A Civil War symbol, Grant counted on the support of Radical Republicans (and therefore Congress) when he was elected President in 1868, and the Congress believed that he would provide stability to the federal government and make important advances in Southern Reconstruction. For a detailed study on Johnson's administration see Steward 2009.

the U.S. Congress) fracture that was far from leading to reconciliation.[344] As Stanton Garner notes, after the Civil War, "A new America was emerging, but it was not [Melville's] chastened mother" (1993: 455). Under the national(ist) discourse of progress, affluence, and expansion, which was being heralded in the Centennial celebrations, the internal wound the Civil War had opened was still bleeding in the 1870s, a fracture Melville would expose in *Clarel*. The growth in knowledge that Melville had hoped for in *Battle-Pieces* was not materialized, neither did postwar United States feature the "Progress" and "Humanity" the poet had yearned for. *Clarel* expresses Melville's loss of hope in the United States born from the Civil War, as well as a critique of American 'progress', as I analyzed in the previous section. Melville anticipated in the "Supplement" to *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War* that if "The years of the war tried our devotion to the Union, the time of peace may test the sincerity of our faith in democracy" (*Battle-Pieces* 271). As has been analyzed, if in *Battle-Pieces* Melville still expresses hopes for a progress to be developed through humanitarianism, *Clarel* features a critique of progress that is reflected in the very form and poetics of the poem. Ungar is the character who expresses the fiercest critique of progress in *Clarel*, connecting it to the corruption of (American) democracy. As a matter of fact, the Cherokee American Southerner compares America to a prostitute:

> "Ay, Democracy
> Lops, lops; but where's her planted bed?
> The future, what is that to her
> Who vaunts she's no inheritor?
> 'Tis in her mouth, not in her heart.
> The Past she spurns, though 'tis the past
> From which she gets her saving part—
> That Good which lets her Evil last.
> Behold her whom the panders crown,

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[344] This overview is intended as a summary of a number of much more thorough and detailed studies on Reconstruction, especially Foner 1988 and Ferrell 2003.

> Harlot on horseback, riding down
> The very Ephesians who acclaim
> This great Diana of ill fame!
> Arch strumpet of an impious age,
> Upstart from ranker villanage,
> 'Tis well she must restriction taste
> Nor lay the world's broad manor waste:
> Asia shall stop her at the least,
> That old inertness of the East.
> She's limited; lacking the free
> And genial catholicity
> Which in Christ's pristine scheme unfurled
> Grace to the city and the world." (*Clarel* 4.19.126-47)

Ungar's voice in the poem is eloquent and attractive, but his critique of democracy is

infused with a markedly Catholic perspective through a biblical discourse that he uses

to relate 1870s American democracy to immorality, materialism and paganism.[345] Ungar

portrays democracy as a "great Diana of ill fame" (4.19.137), a biblical reference to the

Ephesians' worshipping of the goddess Diana, which is condemned by St. Paul in the

New Testament as an immoral practice connected to paganism, prostitution and

money-making.[346] Economic progress and atheism are, according to Ungar, the

perverters of democracy. The soldier claims that, in the past, democracy was more

authentic due to its closeness to religion and spirituality. These positive qualities

democracy used to possess are, in Ungar's eyes, the characteristics that still allow it to

continue surviving in the present, even though it be in the form of a corrupted system

which perverts its own followers —"panders" (4.19.134), who acclaim their infamous

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[345] Joseph G. Knapp, however, differs from this interpretation of Ungar's fierce Catholicism, claiming that, even though Ungar is a Catholic by birth whose ancestors go back to the early Catholic settlers in Maryland "he 'himself had spared to feed / On any one elected creed' (IV, x, 184)" (1971: 78). Yet Ungar, Knapp admits, feels closer to Catholicism.

[346] The Bible narrates the widespread veneration of Diana among the Ephesians. The Temple of Diana in Ephesus attracted large crowds of pilgrims who would worship the goddess and buy representations of her, which, at the same time, had a positive impact in the local economy. In "The Epistle of St. Paul to the Ephesians", the tenth book of the New Testament, St. Paul conceives the veneration of Diana as immoral, arguing that it promotes the manufacturing of false idols and also the practice of prostitution in the temple, a sinful way of life which destroys traditional family structure. These are arguments used by St. Paul to convert Ephesians to Christianity and to 'purify' them of their 'paganism' and 'immorality'.

goddess and solicit new 'clients' for her. The only solution to 'purify' democracy, according to Ungar, is that humans approach God again, but until this happens, Ungar claims, the advance of democracy should be refrained. It is relevant that Ungar himself is an exile of American democracy and a fierce critic of the myth of American exceptionalism. As Knapp claims, Ungar –also a soldier and survivor of the U.S. Civil War, and a mixed-raced American who is a victim of Anglo colonization of the "Indians east and west" (4.9.120)– "dissipates America's dream of itself as a harbinger of democratic rule: 'Our New World bold / Has fain improved upon the Old […]' (IV, v, 62)" (Knapp 1971: 74). While it criticizes U.S. progress and the perversion of American democracy, *Clarel*, I have advanced, connects the postbellum American context with a global context of universal degradation of democracy and progress, engaging in the examination of the different attitudes adopted by different human beings in order to replace what Hennig Cohen calls "the degradation of democratic dogma" (1964: xi) and attempt to find 'Meaning' in a world where Meaning may never be found. Melville connects the local and the global in his analysis of Western democracy, a connection which is made evident in the very choice of the context of the Holy Land itself, and which the author uses to problematize the notion of exceptionalism.

3.5. Connecting the Local and the Global: The Holy Land and the United States

"What city's this? town beautiful
Of David ? […]"

    "'City, that dost the prophets stone,
How oft against the judgment dread,
How often would I fain have spread
My wings to cover thee, mine own;
And ye would not! Had'st thou but known

The things which to thy peace belong!'
    Nehemiah it was, rejoining them—
Gray as the old Jerusalem"

"How solitary on the hill
Sitteth the city; and how still—
How still!"
    (Herman Melville, *Clarel* 1876: 1.24.29-30; 1.33.84-91;
    1.34.1-3)

In the same way as the young Clarel wanders intensely around the Jerusalem in the poem, Melville wandered in New York over the years he was engaged in the composition of *Clarel*. The quick rhythms of the growing metropolis, the diversity of its population, the mixture of sounds and smells, and the everyday encounters with an increasing number of anonymous faces –Walt Whitman's "passing stranger[s]" in the 1860 "Calamus" (*Leaves of Grass* 127)– were part of Melville's daily routines as he walked or took the elevated railroad from his house on 24th street to the Customs House every day (Garner 1986: 9, and Kelley 1996: 239). By the second half of the nineteenth century, the United States was experiencing its own 'clashes' of peoples due to the increasing diversity of its population, especially in great urban centers such as New York. Walt Whitman captures the vivacity of New York in the poem "Mannahatta" (written ca. 1860), which exalts the life of a global city that is growing in population density and diversity with "Immigrants arriving, fifteen or twenty thousand in a week", peopling the "Numberless crowded streets" of a noisy metropolis possessing America's busiest port and commercial activity, iron high buildings "splendidly uprising toward clear skies",[347] overlapping voices mixing with the rattling of carts and the "trottoirs" of vehicles. A micro-world of "a million people", Whitman concludes, of "manners free and superb—open voices— / hospitality—the most

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[347] Although multi-leveled buildings were constructed in New York already in the 1850s, skyscrapers, as Wyn Kelley notes, were not built until the 1880s. An important invention at this time was that of the elevator in 1846 (1996: 238).

courageous and friendly young men" who inhabited an already fast-moving city by 1860 which, Whitman exclaims with love, is "my city!" (*Leaves of Grass* 475). There is no evidence of Melville's feelings about the New York of the 1870s, whether he felt saturated by its crowds and quick rhythms or if, like Whitman, he felt thrilled and aroused with the sense of streaming humanity and motion. What seems clear is that, by the 1870s, the New York Whitman describes had increased in size, density of population, diversity of human faces and noise in comparison to the New York Melville had been born in in 1819 and left for Pittsfield, MA, in 1850. After the Civil War the city became a metropolis which many considered a microcosm of America, yet which, at the same time, Kelley notes, was closer in analogy to old world cities such as Rome or Jerusalem rather than American ones (1996: 237). At the same time, the city became a site of representative social divisions based on racial, ethnic, and class grounds, leading to separation between neighborhoods and frequent social tensions. Class divisions and social inequality also widened: Sven Beckert explains how the postwar period consolidated the rise of an upper class bourgeoisie whose love of luxury and active social life marked the beginning of a "golden age of New York society" (Beckert 1993: 154) only shattered by the depression from 1873 onwards. The counterpart of these huge fortunes was a growing industrial working class composed of wage laborers. The gap between these wealthier and poorer social groups was often expressed in the form of class conflict, which was sometimes interwoven with racist and xenophobic prejudices within the latter as diverse working-class groups competed for labor in the job market. Gillis J. Harp notes that the 1870s was also a time of a higher crime rate (1995: 64). These social conflicts were aggravated by the economic depression,

especially between 1873-74, when workers started to mobilize in massive demonstrations (Beckert 1993: 210).[348]

As he wandered the streets of New York, Melville was simultaneously mentally rambling through the crowded and labyrinthine streets of Jerusalem as he wrote *Clarel*, perhaps his way to 'walk without the walls' of the Customs House. The literary context of the Holy Land, in general, and the city of Jerusalem, in particular, was certainly not an accidental choice, since in them fuse and become confused the boundaries between the local and the global. As Amy Kaplan has remarked, Melville underscores in *Clarel* the global and plural character of Palestine, presenting it as a polyglot world where cultures and peoples circulate and interact (2010: 51): "[…] the lax Levant, / That polyglot and loose-laced mother? / […] / Where creeds dovetail into each other" (*Clarel* 3.13.24-27):

> —Medes, Elamites,
> Egyptians, Jews and proselytes,
> Strangers from Rome, and men of Crete—
> And parts of Lybia round Cyrene—
> Arabians, and the throngs ye meet
> On Smyrna's quays, and all between
> Stamboul and Fez:— (3.13.29-35)

While constituting 'local' contexts –a city (Jerusalem), a region within the extended Ottoman Empire (Palestine)–, both the individual city of Jerusalem and the Holy Land in general are also global contexts where multiple cultures come together in what constitutes a representative local sample of humanity: Americans, Europeans, Asians,

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[348] In New York, Melville was aware of the draft riots in January 1863, as well as other episodes of racial and/or class conflict over the 1870s, for example, the Tompkins Square riots of 1874 (Melville lived close to Tompkins Sq. Park), or the Great Strike of 1877. Even earlier, as Dennis Berthold notes, Melville not only witnessed the Astor Place riots in 1849 but was also directly implicated in signing the petition that would derive in the demonstrations of the rioters and the following police violence against them (see Berthold 1999).

Africans; Muslims, Jews, Christians; Roman Catholics, Orthodox, Calvinists, Anglicans; Dominicans, Franciscans, atheists, devout believers, hedonists and lunatics, encounter one another in the emblematic city, which becomes the core of such collisions. The Palestine in *Clarel*, therefore, does not correspond to the glorious city that humanity has for centuries idealized, but is portrayed as a land divided by hatred, where the different human groups inhabiting it (especially the Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholics, Armenians, Muslims, Jews, etc.) compete for the territorial control of the land within the dynamics of religious and/or cultural imperialism. As Walter Bezanson indicates, "The Zion of *Clarel* is no theater of miracles and mysteries. This Holy City is not the City of God, not even the City of Man. Neither promise nor refuge is here. This is a Fallen City. It is *Città Dolente*, the City of Dis (1.36.29)" (1991: 555). In such "deicide town" (4.29.127) no trace of God is to be found; what is found, instead, is widespread spiritual dearth and desolation, reflected in the desolation of the land itself.[349] Both in 1857, when Melville visited Palestine, and in the 1870s, when he was writing about it, Palestine was a region within the Ottoman Empire, encompassing the territories corresponding to the present-day states of Israel and Jordan, the Gaza strip, and the occupied Palestinian territories in the West Bank.[350] In general terms, the Holy Land which Melville and other travelers encountered in the mid nineteenth century reflected the decay of the Ottoman Empire. In the 1850s, Palestine was a poor, largely deserted

[349] Basem Ra'ad carries out a thorough analysis of the landscape in *Clarel*, with reference to other Melville's works, in "Ancient Lands" (2006).

[350] Together with Egypt, Syria, and Lebanon, Palestine became part of the Ottoman Empire in 1517, and remained under Turkish occupation until World War I, when the Ottoman Empire was defeated and the British occupied the territory and acquired its control. In times of Turkish occupation, there was a brief decade of Egyptian rule in Palestine, between 1831-1840, which was followed by the reestablishment of the Ottoman government (Krämer 2002: 63). In his trip to the Levant in 1856-57, Melville not only visited Palestine but also Egypt and Lebanon. Both Melville's visit and his writing of *Clarel* took place at the time of the period known as Tanzimat (1836-1876) ['tanzimat' literally meaning 'regulations' or 'reorganization'], which was a time of reform aimed at strengthening state apparatuses within the empire (Krämer 71). This reformation period brought about constitutional and political changes, but also the introduction of agricultural, industrial, educational, and security improvements, and the stimulation of tourism in the area (see Krämer 71-92).

country with unsafe roads (Khatib 2003: 30 and Krämer 2002: 38).[351] To many American travelers, like Melville himself, the landscape (which almost becomes a character in itself in *Clarel*)[352] evoked desolation, as the author would actually describe in his journal. According to them, the 'glorious' Palestine was little more than wilderness and waste-land, an image which differed considerably from the glowing place that many pilgrims or travelers expected to find as a materialization of the Holy Land of their imaginations. Animals were also part of the usual landscape, and it was frequent to find camels along the roads or see oxen being employed in agricultural tasks.[353] Economic activity in Palestine was very limited and mostly reduced to agriculture, which constituted the basic means of subsistence of the population, even of those living in cities. Urban areas such as Jerusalem, with a high density of inhabitants, and Nablus concentrated most of the population, together with other smaller cities or towns like Bethlehem or Nazareth (Grossman 2011: 86).[354] These cities and towns, however, constituted for the most part rural spaces as well. In terms of population,

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[351] As a matter of fact, Melville seems to have experienced a constant feeling of insecurity and fear while visiting Constantinople and Egypt, also part of the Ottoman Empire, in 1856-57. Upon his arrival in Constantinople, he wrote: "Staid in all night. Dangerous going out, owing to footpads & assassins" (12 December 1856, *Journals* 58). This sense of fear of being murdered in a city where there are "Assassinations every night" (64) did not diminish over the following days, in which he even suffered episodes of persecution: "After dismissing my boy, was followed by two or three hours by an infernal Greek, & confederates. Dogged me; in & out & through the Bazaar. I could neither intimidate nor elude them. Began to feel nervous. […] At last escaped them" (64).

[352] According to Obenzinger, "The landscape of the Holy Land, 'Terra Damnata,' is a key character in the poem, particularly its stones" (2006: 191).

[353] Animals are also significantly present in *Clarel*: e.g., Nehemiah's donkey, Djalea's mare, suffering camels and tortoises, anonymous horses, etc. While, in some cases, animals become noble companions and even alter-egos to some characters (Djalea's relationship with his mare can, I believe, be interpreted as a bond of love; and Nehemiah's donkey, which later carries Agath, reflects the patient nature of both characters), in most general terms, they are depicted as fellow sufferers ("Or man or animal, 'tis one" [4.34.42]) or as victims of human cruelty (Rolfe feels empathy for the suffering of the Banker's horse, and Ungar suggests horse mistreatment as an example of Anglo-Saxons' cruelty: "'As cruel as a Turk: Whence came / That proverb old as the crusades? / From Anglo-Saxons. What are they? / Let the horse answer […]'" [4.9.112-115]).

[354] Justin McCarthy notes the difficulty of determining the exact population figures of Palestine due to the Ottoman authorities' lack of interest in registering their populations until after 1860 (1990: 5). McCarthy includes figures estimating the Ottoman citizen population in Palestine in approximately 369,000 people in 1860. Of these, around 300,000 might have been Muslims, 27,000 Christians, and 13,000 Jews, without counting other human groups such as Bedouins or Caucasian refugees. See McCarthy 10.

Palestinians were a variety of ethnic and religious groups, the major ones being Arabs –who constituted the largest group of the population– Jews –who concentrated mainly in the four holy cities (Jerusalem, Safed, Tiberias and Hebron– Christians –who resided largely in Jerusalem and Bethlehem, holy cities to them– and Bedouins –who lived outside the cities, in the desert. These groups were socially divided on grounds of their ethnicity and religion. Some also counted on governmental support and protection: while Arabs were favored by laws which, in turn, were discriminatory against other ethnic groups, over the second half of the nineteenth century the Turkish government passed a number of laws which favored a higher degree of equality between different citizens across the Empire, regardless of their ethnicity or religious belief. These laws were introduced slowly, and they gradually brought about greater social recognition of Christians and Jews, the latter being the most discriminated segment of the population at that time (Ben-Arieh 1975: 255).

Of all Palestinian cities, Jerusalem was one of the largest, even though it was a small one if compared to other Western cities.[355] In the late 1850s, when Melville visited the Holy Land, Jerusalem was what today constitutes its 'Old City'. At that time, Jerusalem might have been densely populated (Yehoshua Ben-Arieh estimates the population of Jerusalem in 1860 in approximately 18,000 people [1975: 262])[356] and it was a walled city, the gates of which would close at sunset in order to prevent potential attacks from groups of Arabs or Bedouins living in the desert beyond the confines of the city, which forced travelers who arrived past that hour to spend the night outside

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[355] David Grossman estimates the population of Jerusalem ca. 1850 in almost 25,000, over 20,000 of whom were Muslim.

[356] For a discussion of figures and of maps of population growth in Jerusalem see Ben-Arieh 1975.

the walls.[357] Some governmental measures also prohibited at the time to build near the limits of the city for safety reasons. It would not be, in fact, until the 1860s that Jerusalem would start expanding outside its walls, since, by that time, the population of Jerusalem had increased significantly from around 8,750 inhabitants at the beginning of the nineteenth century to approximately 18,000 in 1860 (Ben-Arieh 262). Three major religious communities –Muslims, Christians and Jews– inhabited Jerusalem, all of which grew considerably over the nineteenth century, especially the Jewish community –which increased from 2,000 people in 1800 to around 8,000 in 1860 (Ben-Arieh 262). These three major communities lived in separate areas of the city, as close as they managed to their respective holy centers in order to guard them: Muslims lived right by the Temple Mount, Christians surrounded the Holy Sepulcher, and Jews lived in the vicinities of the Western Wall.[358] Each of these three communities was, in turn, not homogeneous either (e.g., Palestinian Arabs, Egyptian Arabs, Maghribi Arabs, etc., within the Muslim community; Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholics, Armenian, Syrian, Abyssinians, [German and English] Protestants, etc., in the Christian community; Sephardim, Ashkenazim, Hasidim, etc., in the Jewish community), which usually lived together in their corresponding neighborhoods. Even though, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, it was uncommon for these communities to mix, because each group lived in a separate area of the city, by the mid-nineteenth century this situation changed due to Jerusalem's growth in population, which forced communities to face one another within the walls of the city, especially in areas which had not yet been settled by any community.[359] Another important factor which favored some relative mutual exposure

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[357] In *Clarel*, finding the gates of the city closed at night, Celio sleeps outside the walls in canto 1.14 "In the Glen".

[358] According to Ben-Arieh, Jews were not allowed to settle by the Western Wall because Muslims did not want them to be so close to the Temple Mount (255).

[359] See figures 3 and 5 in Ben-Arieh 257.

between members of different communities was the gradual incursion of Christians into the Muslim area, particularly in the Via Dolorosa –which crosses the Muslim Quarter to St. Stephen's Gate– since the 1850s (Ben-Arieh 259). In 1857, when Herman Melville visited Jerusalem, the area outside the city walls was largely unpopulated (excepting the presence of nomad Bedouins and Arabs who dwelled in the vicinities of the city), featuring only some agricultural plantations and a few buildings which were starting to be constructed mostly by English and German Protestants who had settled in Jerusalem (Ben-Arieh 262-263). The 1860s and 1870s, however, would see in the extramural areas the gradual establishment of private dwellings by all three major religious communities, each of whom would build housing projects in different directions of the periphery of the city. This gradual occupation of the lands outside the walls would increase the size of Jerusalem considerably in the last decades of the nineteenth century.[360]

In *Clarel*, Jerusalem is a city of ghettos and sects and, eventually, of crowds formed by individuals who are alone and incapable of creating bridges across the inter-personal walls that separate them.[361] As Joseph G. Knapp claims, "Within the walled town, each person further walls himself within his own house, hoping to keep others from seeing 'that strange innocence or sin / Which locked itself so close within' (I, vii, 6)" (Knapp 1971: 28-29). In *Clarel*'s analysis of human relationships within a context of divisions and separation, the Holy Land plays a local as well as a more global role, since in my opinion it is made to represent, on the one hand, the particular context of

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[360] For a more detailed analysis of the growth of Jerusalem and the gradual settlement of the different human groups beyond the city's walls, see Ben-Arieh 262-268.

[361] The poem ends with the image of Clarel in the midst of the crowds in the Via Dolorosa, in which each individual is alone and carrying a cross symbolizing his or her own grief. As I shall analyze in Section 4 of this chapter, this image condenses what I conceive as the mutual constituency and inseparability of the universal and the particular, since, while the poem portrays a scene of universal pain in the Via Dolorosa (4.34), with all individuals partaking in the same universal feeling –"Or man or animal" (4.34.42)–, it, at the same time, depicts pain as a deeply private feeling, given that only the individual who experiences it is able to understand the intensity of his or her pain.

Ottoman Palestine, its human transit, diversity of peoples and the estrangement of these peoples from one another, and, on the other hand, it evokes the universal segregation of individuals within separate (national, cultural, ethnic, religious, etc.) communities that keep them oblivious of their real universality and global interconnection as human beings. On a more specific level, I also interpret the context of the Holy Land in *Clarel* –a land divided by hatred– as bearing resonances of the segregation, racist hatred, and social conflict of postbellum United States, Melville's own local context, and the context of his main possible target readers, and itself a land divided by violent animosity and segregation at the time the poet was writing the text. *Clarel* is a poem of peoples, communities, and individuals, which reflects on the complexity of human relationships that Melville could not only learn about in his 1856-57 trip to the Levant, but also witness directly in his own contemporary society in the 1870s. On a more global level, *Clarel* also analyzes a world of both inter-national and intra-national conflicts, segregations, and social unrest. This context of segregation, I claim, evokes the divisions of postbellum U.S. As a matter of fact, Melville himself connects the Palestinian and the American contexts by "alluding to the 'blank, blank towers' of 'Salem' in the first canto", which, as Hilton Obenzinger has noted, "draws parallels to the early Puritan town established in New England and to biblical stories in constructing the national myth of what later became the U.S." (2010: 37). Reflecting on the United States, and reflecting on 1870s United States in particular (the years in which he was writing the poem and imaginatively 'traveling' in the Holy Land again), Melville may be evoking in *Clarel* the racist hatred of his contemporary society, as well as indicating how the reality of blacks and whites freely cohabiting together –the difficulties of which, as the previous section analyzed, he had anticipated in the "Supplement" of the 1866 *Battle-Pieces*– was not much more heartening than the reality

of Jews, Muslims, Christians, etc. freely cohabiting the Holy Land yet hating one another deadly. As he was writing *Clarel*, cities as different as Jerusalem and New York may have born some resemblance in the eyes of a poet that was every day exposed to the "stony eyes & stony hearts" (*Journals* 90) of those working with him at the Customs House –itself a context of widespread bribery and corruption (Rogin 1983: 292)–, particularly due to the diversity and global character of their populations. The New York of the 1870s was a city gone global, especially due to the arrival of immigrants from regions as diverse as Ireland, Italy, China, Eastern Europe, or Russia, who added to the African Americans who moved to the city in search of jobs.[362] At the same time, the evolution of the urban landscape of New York (the development of higher buildings, for example) provided the city with a sense of multiple layers and levels. Wyn Kelley notes that this stratification may explain why Jerusalem may prove an appropriate analogy for 1870s New York:

> Of course, the modern traveler and urban archaeologist know that New York is not, as ancient Jerusalem was to its many pilgrims, a City of God. Jerusalem can provide only an ironic analogy to the New World metropolis. Jerusalem is the repository of the ages, a marker of "deep time," such as New York could never be. And yet, as New York developed northward, upward, and outward, as new buildings moved in to replace the old at a bewildering rate, as streets changed their appearance seemingly overnight, a New Yorker might search as patiently as an archaeologist to find evidence of the old neighborhoods – especially if, like Melville, he had been away from the city for a

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[362] In works such as *Redburn* (1849) or *Israel Potter* (1855), Melville makes explicit his regard for immigrants and exposes the belief that "the whole world is the patrimony of the whole world" (*Redburn* 1849: 318) and, therefore, that human beings should be allowed to live where they want. A Melvillean moment of universal connection between these immigrants and 'castaways' takes place in *Israel Potter* (1855): "The peace immediately filled England and more especially London, with hordes of disbanded soldiers; thousands of whom, rather than starve, or turn highwaymen […] would work for such a pittance, as to bring down the wages of all the laboring classes. Neither was our adventurer [Israel Potter] the least among the sufferers. Driven out of his previous employ […] by this sudden influx of rivals, destitute, honest men like himself, with the ingenuity of his race, he turned his hand to the village art of chair-bottoming. An itinerant, he paraded the streets with the cry of 'old chairs to mend!' furnishing a curious illustration of the contradictions of human life; that he who did little but trudge, should be giving cosy seats to all the rest of the world" (1855: 607).

while.[363] New York might not *be* a City of God, except perhaps to a deluded immigrant, but it did resemble one in its stratified complexity. (1996: 241)

Kelley notes how the growth in population also "tested the waters of a new social tide" (240). The continuous arrival of peoples –immigrants, travelers, merchants, businessmen, sailors, ex-Civil War soldiers, etc.– is also a characteristic of *Clarel*'s Jerusalem, which becomes the meeting ground of multiple ethnic groups, religious devotees from diverse congregations, pilgrims, and travelers from around the world in search of the mythical sites of the city. As has been noted at the beginning of Chapter Two, Melville dedicates lengthy passages in *Clarel* to describe these "human wave[s]" (*Clarel* 1876: 1.5.186):

> Then crods pell-mell, a concourse wild,
> Convergings from Levantine shores;
> On foot, on donkeys; litters rare—
> Whole families; twin panniers piled;
> Rich men and beggars—all beguiled
> To cheerful trust in Allah's care;
> Allah, toward whose prophet's urn
> And Holy City, fond they turn
> As forth in pilgrimage they fare. (1.5.151-159)

The description above corresponds to the narration of the arrival of "troops" of Muslims in Jerusalem through Damascus gate, followed by turbaned Indian peasants, who temporarily flood the street as they "pass" and "fade" (1.5.185), in the same way as the human groups that came before and that will come after them. This description of Muslim and Indian pilgrims comes immediately after Clarel has portrayed the different devote Christian groups inside the Holy Sepulcher. The frenetic comings and goings to, and from, the 'holy' city are endless: Georgians, Maronites, Armenians, Greeks, Italians,

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363 After twelve years in Pittsfield, MA, Melville returned to New York, his city of birth, in 1863, spending there the rest of his life. The New York Melville encountered in 1863, as Kelley notes, was probably quite different from the New York he had left in 1850, before setting in Pittsfield.

Abyssinians, Syrians…, all of whom fill the streets like "tides [that] together dash" (1.6.13). The Jews from different "tribes" are not an exception. It is "Wailing Day" (1.16.80), the American millennialist Nehemiah remarks, and the Jews are going to the synagogue.[364] First alone and later accompanied by the old Nehemiah, Clarel rambles around Jerusalem, feeling estranged from the devout pilgrims whose worshipping practices escape the young American's understanding and religious curiosity, and meeting different fellow travelers each time who accompany him in his wanderings. Clarel is immersed in Jerusalem in the quick rhythms of a city that is in itself a universalist microcosm which, he soon realizes, is deeply segregated due to the enmities and rivaling tensions between its different human groups. Thus, the Jerusalem in Part 1 is not a glorious place but a land of segregated communities and separate ghettos, –symbolized by sealed windows and blind alleys– which, as the poem advances, become spaces of separate individuals. The American character Rolfe notes how even the very natives of Jerusalem would go away from it if it were not for that terrible "curse which is its crown", that is, poverty (1.33.80). Both Jerusalem and New York constitute microcosms of the global where the boundaries between the local and the global, the particular and the universal, are brought together and eventually disrupted, at the same time that inter-human walls, in an opposite movement, are eagerly erected to keep 'strangers' apart.

As the following section analyzes, walls have a central presence in *Clarel*, criticized in the poem for their segregating capacity and the monolithic conceptions of

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[364] Some of the cultural pilgrimages to which I refer in this section are dreamed by the young Clarel when he falls asleep inside the Holy Sepulcher. James Duban considers that the "dream-reverie about Moslem, Brahman, Buddhist, and Christian worship raises the challenge for Christians to express tolerance of other faiths" (1999: 81). In this chapter, however, I am interested in these descriptions in order to note the endless multitudes and plurality of human beings that frequently 'invade' *Clarel*'s Jerusalem –or the young Clarel's consciousness of Jerusalem–, and to underline the separation that stands between these different human groups.

humanity that they (r)e(i)nforce. *Clarel*'s Jerusalem is oppressive and, for this reason, Melville points toward the transcendence of –and the "walking without" (*Journals* 86)– these inter-racial, inter-religious, inter-sectarian, social, and, in all cases, inter-personal and psychological walls, often imposed physically and reinforced through discourses legitimizing the superiority of one group in relation to others, for example, exceptionalism. The remaining paragraphs in this section shall analyze how *Clarel* exploits the foundational connection between the United States and biblical Israel to the construction of U.S. national identity, and how the poem lays bare the discourse of exceptionalism, abused by the U.S. and by Zionists in their –often mythical rather than historical– construction of collective memory and nation(ality) or sense of peoplehood.

After having recorded his impressions on the dearth, greyness and stony character of Palestine, Melville writes in his 1857 journal the poignant question "Is the desolation of the land the result of the fatal embrace of the Deity? Hapless are the favorites of heaven" (*Journals* 91). Drawing from materials in this journal,[365] *Clarel* too dissipates any possible "romantic expectations" (*Journals* 91) about Jerusalem and the biblical land of Israel. According to Vincent Kenny: "Together, the stones and dust control the wasteland imagery of the poem and reinforce a pervading atmosphere of sterility and death" (1973: 106). As has already been noted, Melville's choice of the Holy Land as a context to represent irreconcilable divisions –the land divided by the violent hatred that different human groups profess toward one another– is certainly not gratuitous. Quoting Kenny again:

> All these clustered images of dust, stones, sea, the Cross, death, birds, light, colors, trees, and towers constitute the one fractured image of Jerusalem, the central image of the poem. The city for Melville's contemporaries held a different meaning, a sacred one nurtured by Christian evangelists and fostered by tourist agents. Provincial usage of

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[365] See Sections 2.2.1 and 2.2.2 in this chapter.

> "New Jerusalem" for America and acceptance of the Holy Land as the handwork of God were facts of life in the nineteenth century. (116)

In *Clarel*, Melville establishes an analogy between the biblical portrayal of the land of Palestine as God's land of glory and promise,[366] and the discourse of American exceptionalism, based on the mythical conception –and actual re-creation upon the land, upheld by Holy Land topography and naming– of the United States as a New Israel, which served to legitimate, in Wai-chee Dimock's words, the aggrandizing conception of America's "unexampled greatness", as well as its position in history as "the culmination of progress" and "fulfillment of history" (1989: 13-14).[367] William Potter's reading of the poem has also pointed at *Clarel*'s critique of Angloprotestant exceptionalism –legitimized through religious discourses which intermingle with nationalist rhetoric–, connecting it to Melville's denunciation of racial exploitation, capitalism, and colonial expansion (2004: xv-xvi). As Potter analyzes, throughout the nineteenth century, America was proclaimed as a new religion of evolution and democracy, promising to expand and export such democratic advancement throughout the world (25-26). The character of Nathan is of central importance for *Clarel*'s critique, since Nathan is representative of how the notion of exceptionalism has been used to justify violent colonizing ends in different regions (Angloprotestant colonization and supremacy throughout the North America continent, on the one hand; Jewish colonization and supremacy in Palestine, on the other). The discourse of American

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[366] Even though the poem features no African American characters (Abdon, the black Jew, is a primordial global being, however), one might also read in the hopeless Palestine of *Clarel* an echo of the shattering of the many hopes African Americans had placed on emancipation, together with how the promise of freedom materialized instead into a reality of everyday violence, death, racism, segregation, and new forms of oppression, discrimination, and labor exploitation.

[367] Dimock notes that the conception of America as a "fulfillment of history" was combined with its perception as an "emancipation from history", since "Unfolding in time, America remained ultimately timeless" (Dimock 1989: 14). Such timelessness is closely related to the mythical conception of the youth of America used to justify the newness, potentiality, and innocence of the 'young' nation (cf. Native American genocide, slavery, etc.).

exceptionalism is as old as the history of the United States. This early analogy between America and the Holy Land, and Angloprotestant Americans and the Israelites, nourished a discourse of American exceptionalism which has persisted to our days. As Howard Zinn noted, the notion that "the United States alone has the right, whether by divine sanction or moral obligation, to bring civilization, or democracy, or liberty to the rest of the world, by violence if necessary" (2005) dates back to John Winthrop's conception of the Massachusetts Bay Colony as a 'city upon a hill' or as the 'New Jerusalem', and has continued to be present throughout four hundred years of U.S. history as a discursive mechanism to justify territorial expansion and military occupation, concealed behind the exportation of 'civilization' and 'democracy', wars of 'liberation', 'preventive' detentions, or, more recently, the so-called 'war on terror' (Zinn 2005).[368] Melville had reproduced in earlier writings such as in *Redburn* (1849) this discourse of exceptionalism[369] deeply rooted to U.S. national identity, in passages like the following, where the narrator overstates:

> Escaped from the house of bondage, Israel of old did not follow after the ways of the Egyptians. To her was given an express dispensation; to her were given new things under the sun. And we Americans are the peculiar, chosen people—the Israel of our time; we bear the ark of the liberties of the world. Seventy years ago we escaped from thrall; and, besides our first birth-right—embracing one continent of earth— God has given to us, for a future inheritance, the broad domains of the political pagans, that shall yet come and lie down under the shade of our ark, without bloody hands being lifted. God has predestinated, mankind expects, great things from our race; and great things we feel in our souls. The rest of the nations must soon be in our rear. We are the pioneers of the world; the advance-guard, sent on through the wilderness of untried things, to break a new path in the New World that is ours. […] Long enough have we

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[368] It is interesting to note that, at the time of the Civil War, the discourse of exceptionalism was adopted by the federal government in order to legitimize the Union. Confederates, in turn, also used this discourse to support their claims of state-rights in what they defended was a struggle against the absolutism of a centralized government.

[369] Among other scholars, William V. Spanos has recently analyzed the topic of exceptionalism in Herman Melville's works such as *Moby-Dick* (1851) or *Billy Budd, Sailor* (ca. 1891) in his volumes *Herman Melville and the American Calling* (2009) or *The Exceptionalist State and the State of Exception: Herman Melville's* Billy Budd, Sailor (2011), respectively.

been skeptics with regards to ourselves, and doubted whether, indeed, the political Messiah had come. But *he has come in us*, if we would but give utterance to his promptings. (*Redburn* 1849: 506)

Bearing resonances of both the Indian Removal Act (1830), which forced thousands of Native American tribes to relocate west of the Mississippi, and of the U.S. war with Mexico (1846-48) by which the United States annexed the vast Mexican lands of what would later become the states of Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, and Utah, the previous passage captures in a precise way the discourse of 'manifest destiny'[370] that dominated the speeches of politicians and public figures of the times: first, the connection of the United States escaping the yoke of Britain with ancient Israel escaping from Egyptian bondage, making America "the Israel of our time"; second, the notion of predestination supporting the confidence that the United States is entitled to the land that God has given it by birth-right and to which, therefore, can lay claims ("embracing one continent of earth", a "New World that is ours"); third, the belief that the U.S. is no less than the "political Messiah" to come –the "pioneers of the world" and God's chosen nation– that, with God's permit –for the land has been given by God–, will "lie down under the shade of our ark" the different "political pagans" it may encounter in the process of fulfilling its destiny ("bloody hands" were indeed "lifted" throughout the process of carrying out this 'divinely ordained' mission).[371] Written merely a year after the end of the U.S.-Mexican war, the previous passage from Melville's *Redburn* (1849) echoes the elated patriotic voices of public figures such as

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[370] The term 'manifest destiny' was first coined in 1845 by John L. O'Sullivan, who would later be a Confederate sympathizer (Potter 2004: 31).

[371] The quotations in this section refer to the passage from *Redburn* cited in the previous page. It is interesting to note that American slaves also established an analogy between black slavery in the United States and the biblical story of slavery and freedom of the Israelites in the Holy Land. Such a parallelism had been recurrent in slave songs and spirituals, which black slaves used to express the injustice of the slavery system and their hopes to be liberated from U.S. slavery in the same way as the Israelites had been, according to the Old Testament, delivered from Egyptian bondage. This biblical analogy has continued to the present in Jamaica, particularly with the Rastafari movement and the 'nostalgia' for Zion and Ethiopia in reggae music.

Robert C. Winthrop, Congressman from Massachusetts and Speaker of the House of Representatives, who asserted that his was "the precise epoch at which we have arrived in the world's history and in our own history" (1852: 74). These voices, however, concealed the other side of American exceptionalism, that is, the systematic annihilation of Native American tribes, the enslavement of four million (Burnard and Heuman 2010: 121) African Americans, wars against other nations, and the legitimization of imperialist narratives of territorial expansion and colonialism masked behind uplifting patriotic claims of national progress.[372] As William Potter has argued, the phrase 'Manifest Destiny", especially in the 1840s,

> became a mantra that saturated the national discourse, strongly appealing to the sense of the nation as "chosen," […]. This idealistic doctrine was used to justify war with Mexico and the respective acquisitions of California, Oregon, and Texas and New Mexico territories. Some even were not satisfied with merely taking these territories; they envisaged America's expansion as being limitless. (2004: 31)

In a similar way as in *Redburn*, Israel Potter's only surviving son, in the novel that bears the name of the exiled protagonist (Israel, significantly), would dream with "the far Canaan beyond the sea", longing for "a voyage to the Promised Land" (*Israel Potter* 1855: 611, 612) while his father Israel Potter, paradoxically, was almost hit by a patriotic triumphal car in a nationalist procession commemorating Bunker Hill, the battle in which the protagonist had fought, but which brought him no glory but a harsh forty-year exile which, the narrator claims, exceeded the Israelites' hardships in the wilderness: "For the most part, what befell Israel during his forty years wanderings in

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[372] The discourse of manifest destiny, overlapping with the notions of exceptionalism, racial superiority and ethnocentrism, was also present in the American press: "We must march from ocean to ocean…. We must march from Texas straight to the Pacific ocean, and be bounded only by its roaring wave…. It is the destiny of the white race, it is the destiny of the Anglo-Saxon Race" (*The Congressional Globe*, February 11, 1847, qtd. in Zinn 1999: 155).

the London deserts, surpassed the forty years in the natural wilderness of the outcast Hebrews under Moses" (606).

In *American Palestine. Melville, Twain, and the Holy Land Mania* (1999), Hilton Obenzinger analyzes how most American nineteenth-century cultural representations of the Holy Land, and especially American Holy Land literature, became vehicles to express –and repress– anxieties about U.S. national identity, to reinforce that national identity as an Anglo, and legitimate, colonizing society, and to justify narratives of economic progress and territorial expansion based on the conception of the U.S. as an exceptional nation with a special covenant with God and a right to expand across the North American continent. Over the nineteenth century –and especially from the 1840s onwards, in the context of the U.S. war with Mexico and the rise of the notion of manifest destiny–, cultural representations of the Holy Land in the United States became very popular among middle and upper-class Angloprotestant Americans.[373] This interest in the Holy Land increased even more after the American Civil War, as travel to Palestine became more affordable and the East was perceived as an exotic context both to evade from the still recent tragic memories of the war and, at the same time, to explore domestic anxieties (Shamir 2003: 34-35). All through the nineteenth century, the Holy Land was used as a mythical context to justify U.S. national narratives

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[373] David Morgan explains how, over the nineteenth century, the U.S. consolidated an early form of mass culture in which citizens –especially middle and upper class Angloprotestant Americans– became enthusiastic consumers of the large assortment of Holy Land-related products: illustrated Bibles, photographs, stereographs, art exhibitions, gift books, prints, newspapers, magazines, encyclopedias, travel narratives and poems, or even souvenirs containing samples of the stony soil of Palestine, among other products (1997: 20-21). The fixation with the Holy Land was such that not only were Americans eager to possess a 'part' of the Holy Land, but actually wanted to literally 'transplant' the Holy Land of their personal and national imaginations to the United States. To this purpose, scale models of Palestine and of the city of Jerusalem were built in the U.S., for example Palestine Park in Chautauqua, NY, inaugurated in 1874 or, later, in the 1904 World Fair of St. Louis, MO. These parks, Lester Vogel claims, "epitomized the popular appeal of the Holy Land for earlier Americans" (1993: 213): American recreations of Palestine (even of Jerusalemites, cattle, etc.) aimed to "make the already familiar more 'real,' to turn the image of the Holy Land –already in the mind's eye– into a tangible though miniaturized landscape" (Vogel 3). To this should, of course, be added Holy Land toponomy, present across all the U.S. territory, which reinforced the notion of American exceptionalism as connecting America with the mythical land of the Bible.

of territorial expansion and economic progress based on discourses of divine election and manifest destiny. This assertion of progress was superseded by a recourse to the past: "As Anne McClintock reminds us (following Walter Benjamin, Benedict Anderson, and Homi Bhabha, among others), a nation can be likened to a 'modern Janus' (in Tom Nairn's term), its forward marching, progressive vision always dependent upon a backward gaze, an invention of myths of origin and of communal bonds" (Shamir 32). Literature was not an exception: most Holy Land literature published in the United States before *Clarel* reinforced the notion of Anglo-American exceptionalism. This type of literature took the form of different genres: religious texts (sermons, biblical exegeses, missionaries' journals, etc.), archaeological, geological or scientific texts, historical romances and poetry about the exotic East –such as Bayard Taylor's widely acclaimed *The Lands of the Saracen* (1854) or *Poems of the Orient* (1855). During this period, accounts of religious and scientific journeys to Palestine and other Middle-Eastern regions started to be published which, at the national level, contributed to cultivate patriotism and the notion of manifest destiny. The most popular literary genre about Palestine among Americans was without a doubt travel narratives, both religious –e.g., Reverend William M. Thomson's *The Land and the Book* (1859), which sold about two hundred thousand copies (Howe 1997: 14)– and secular –e.g., Mark Twain's *The Innocents Abroad* (1859), which "outsold the author's other books during his lifetime" (Howe 14), even becoming a prominent guide to the Holy Land to renown Americans visiting the region such as U.S. President Ulysses S. Grant himself.[374] Lester

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[374] In the nineteenth century, Palestine became a popular destination among American tourists, the number of whom increased considerably after the U.S. Civil War due to improvements in transportation and travel conditions: steamship travel became popular from the 1840s, security increased due to a higher social and political stability after the Crimean War (1853-56) (Rogers 2011: 21), stronger diplomatic relations between the U.S. and the Turkish government were established, and, of course, a class of affluent Americans was consolidated, who were able to raise their fortunes during the postwar period famously referred to by Mark Twain as 'the Gilded Age', and who spent money on travel (Vogel 1993: 58). Melville bought Thomson's volume after visiting Palestine during his 1856-57 trip. There is

I. Vogel notes how prior expectations –i.e., the Holy Land in their imaginations–

permeated what those writer-travelers actually saw in the Holy Land:

> […] the Americans who were rushing overseas and visiting the Holy Land during the
> Gilded Age were an educated lot, newly sobered by a bloody, four-year war and
> capable of astutely observing the reality of what they viewed. They were neither overtly
> sanctimonious nor unrepentantly blasphemous. Nonetheless, it should be clear that
> their impressions and experiences were not derived entirely from what they saw, but
> also from what they anticipated seeing: a land that existed in the remote past, locked in
> a time Americans were aware of only through their most sacred traditions and
> literature. (1993: 58)[375]

Scholars such as Hilton Obenzinger have located the roots of Angloprotestant

Americans' obsession with the Holy Land in the early English colonists who regarded

the North American continent as a new 'promised land', and compared the thirteen

North American colonies to the Biblical Israelites (a symbolic analogy inscribed in the

land itself through Holy Land typological naming). These seventeenth-century colonists

conceived themselves as a community supported and favored by God not only with a

legitimate claim on the land but even with a moral obligation to expand across the

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no record that he read Twain's *The Innocents Abroad*, but, living in New York, Melville must have certainly
known about Twain's volume due to its huge popularity. In 1870, when Melville was starting or had
already started *Clarel*, he got hold of several books about the Holy Land and the Middle East, among
which were several of Bartlett's (*The Nile Boat* [1849], *Forty Days in the Desert, on the Track of the Israelites; or
a Journey from Cairo, by Wady Feiran, to Mount Sinai and Petra* [1851], *Walks about the City and Environs of
Jerusalem* [184?]), Stanley's *Sinai and Palestine in Connection with Their History* (1863), Bartholomew Elliott
George Warburton's *Travel in Egypt and the Holy Land; or, The Crescent and the Cross* (1859), or John
MacGregor's *The Rob Roy on the Jordan, Nile, Red Sea, and Gennesareth, &c. A Canoe Cruise in Palestine and
Egypt, and the Waters of Damascus* (1870). In 1872, he also added to his Holy Land collection E.H. Palmer's
The Desert of Exodus (1872). Melville had also read about this region in Lord Byron's writings, of which
he was a great admirer. He most probably knew John Lloyd Stephens's best-selling *Incidents of Travel in
Egypt, Arabia Petraea, and the Holy Land* (1837) –one of the most celebrated travel narratives on the Holy
Land published in the U.S. by an American traveler to the region–, as well as well-known American
writers and poets such as Bayard Taylor, author of *Poems on the Orient* (1854), or *The Lands of the Saracen*
(1855). The information on books owned by Melville included here is taken from the project "Melville's
Marginalia Online", edited by Steven Olsen-Smith, Peter Norberg, and Dennis C. Marnon, which
includes a searchable database of the books that, there is evidence, Melville borrowed or owned during
his lifetime. The project presented by Olsen-Smith, Norberg, and Marnon is based on Merton M. Sealts,
Jr.'s *Melville's Reading* (1966). Mary K. Bercaw Edwards's has also contributed an important study on the
sources of Melville's works in *Melville's Sources* (1987).

[375] In a similar way, Hilton Obenzinger also notes how "What these writers 'saw' often spoke to
the formation of American cultural structures and had little to do with what was actually Palestine
before their eyes" (1999: xvii-xviii).

North American continent because the land had been promised to them. As Obenzinger claims: "With America conceived as the New Jerusalem—an association assumed metaphorically if not always enforced typologically—the old Holy Land was encountered as a terrain of crucial cultural dynamics both challenging and reaffirming America's narrative of settlement as divine errand" (1999: x). To this end, nineteenth-century Holy Land mania became a means to reinforce such discourse at a time when anxieties about U.S. national identity were becoming more pressing due to crucial social, political and economic transformations (i.e., the need to legitimize the U.S. war with Mexico, expansion to the West and colonization of Native American peoples, as well as slavery and racial superiority before and after emancipation, the resistance to redefine American citizenship, the xenophobia in response to the rise of immigration and consequent diversification of the American population [African Americans, Irish, Italian, Asians, Eastern Europeans, Russians, etc.]). In the preface to his volume *American Palestine*, Hilton Obenzinger claims that nineteenth-century United States "Holy Land mania" was a vehicle to "[…] reassert the core narratives of settler dominance in a colonizing society that must will itself into existence constantly or lose its bearings amid its 'errand'" (1999: xii). Obenzinger's thesis is that Melville's *Clarel* (1876) and Twain's *The Innocents Abroad* (1869) "pertain to the development of America's covenantal settler-colonial culture" (xviii), arguing that both works "undermine the assumptions of American exceptionalism, even as they remain complicitous with colonial expansion" (3). While I disagree with this last affirmation, my analysis of how *Clarel* exploits the symbolic foundational connection between the United States and the biblical land of Palestine in order to question narratives justifying colonialist dominance –such as the belief in Anglo-American, and also Israel's–[376]

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[376] The reference to 'Israeli exceptionalism' in this section points to the biblical concept of 'the

exceptionalism is indebted to Obenzinger's excellent study. Taking Obenzinger's analysis of how American literature about the Holy Land reinforced settler-colonial discourse as a starting point, the present section analyzes the ways in which Melville's *Clarel* not only exposes but shakes the very foundations upon which U.S. national identity was built and has continued to be legitimated for centuries.

The portrayal of Jerusalem, in particular, and Palestine, in general, as a place renounced by God, and not as the glorious land of Israel favored and illuminated by the divinity, as described in the Bible, already opposes the supposedly 'exceptional' nature of Palestine, so dominant in Western thought. Instead, *Clarel* underlines the desolation –both geographic and spiritual–, dearth, emptiness, disappointment, sectarianism, violence, lack of spiritual comfort, and even death[377] that characters of multiple ethnic, national, religious, and cultural backgrounds encounter in the 'Holy' Land. The myth of biblical Israel's exceptionalism is problematized through recurrent images of geographic and spiritual desolation, as well as through the representation of the traditionally glorious city of Jerusalem as a "wreck" and as a "deicide town" (*Clarel* 4.2.187; 4.29.127). This 'wreck' of Jerusalem, I believe, may be read as the 'wreck' of the myth of exceptionalism of the biblical land of Israel, traditionally assumed as historical fact in order to lay territorial claims and pursue colonialist enterprises based on notions of predestination and entitlement to the land directly inherited from God. By analogy, the myth of American exceptionalism is also problematized, since the land to which the U.S. has likened itself since colonial times is presented as wasted, much in the same way as the U.S. is portrayed in the poem. In this respect, I contend that it is possible to read the "wreck" (4.2.187) of Jerusalem as the wreck of the 'city upon a hill' and,

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chosen people' and not to Israel as a state, since Israel did not exist as a state until 1948.

[377] Vincent Kenny points out that the reality of Jerusalem is death, not promise (1973: 118), which is exemplified by the consequences of Nathan's actual 'mission'.

consequently, as Melville's questioning of the U.S. imperial national narrative of territorial expansion and economic progress based on the myth of a divinely sanctioned exceptionalism which the author had portrayed so well in *Redburn* (1849) or *Israel Potter* (1855), as mentioned earlier. As Obenzinger writes: "This 'fatal embrace'",[378] echoing the phrase Melville uses in his journal to refer with irony to the conception of Jews as God's chosen people,[379] "is paired with Melville's contemplation of a covenantal America, the other Holy Land, as yet another cursed favorite of heaven doomed to failure: 'To Terminus build fanes! / Columbus ended earth's romance: No New World to mankind remains!' (4.21.157-9)" (2006: 193). Melville introduces the mythical foundational connection between the U.S. and Israel as 'covenantal lands' through the character of Nathan,[380] a descendant of Puritan settlers in North America, who later in life converts to Judaism, and even becomes a fanatic Zionist fundamentalist who, pushing the notion of exceptionalism to a dangerous and violent extreme, obsessively engages in a personal quest to colonize Ottoman Palestine in order to prepare the land for Jewish restoration and for the Second Coming of God.[381] Whereas the biblical

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[378] Melville used this same phrase in *Typee* (1846) to describe the effect of European colonialism on the Marquesas: "When the inhabitants of some sequestered island first descry the 'big canoe' of the European rolling through the blue waters towards their shores, they rush down to the beach in crowds, and with open arms stand ready to embrace the strangers. Fatal embrace! They fold to their bosoms the vipers whose sting is destined to poison all their joys; and the instinctive feeling of love within their breasts is soon converted into the bitterest hate" (37).

[379] As mentioned earlier, the complete quotation reads: "Is the desolation of the land the result of the fatal embrace of the Deity? Hapless are the favorites of heaven" (*Journals* 91).

[380] As Basem Ra'ad notes, Melville's reference to Jerusalem as 'Salem' at several points throughout *Clarel* also reinforces the imaginary and mythical interconnection between the two nations upholding notions of exceptionalism and divine election: "In calling Jerusalem 'Salem' ('Jehovah's town'), Melville associates the city with the name of the early colonial town in New England" (2011: 15).

[381] Nathan is one of the earliest souls tortured by doubt that is introduced in the poem. Born in the U.S., Nathan spends much of his youth seeking a form of belief that can answer his troubling doubts but, after trying different faiths and philosophies (Christianity, Deism, Pantheism, etc.) he discovers none that gives hope to his disillusionment until he falls in love with Agar, a Jew, and marries her. Through his love for Agar, Nathan discovers Judaism and converts, soon becoming a fanatic Zionist who materializes the Jewish longing to return to Jerusalem and travels with his family to Palestine in order to Judaize the land and establish the mythical ancient glory of biblical Israel. Nathan's mission in Jerusalem, therefore, is a colonialist one justified through religion. The character of Nathan –as well as that of Nehemiah, the other religious maniac, an Evangelical millenialist who aims to prepare the land

resonances of the name 'Nathan' have not received much attention, these resonances are important considering that Nathan is precisely the prophet through whom God establishes his covenant with King David and Israel. 'Nathan' is, therefore, a name with strong covenantal resonances, the character of Nathan being in line with these biblical attributes.[382] Thus, the Nathan in the poem interiorizes the discourse of Zionism and, much like the biblical Nathan, undertakes the mission of becoming an instrument to accomplishing what he believes are God's designs. It is mainly through the story of Nathan that Melville builds in *Clarel* his critique of the discourse of exceptionalism, as well as of Zionism and of other Millennialist movements in Palestine.[383] Most importantly, the poem establishes a parallelism between Nathan's Zionist intentions to colonize Palestine for the Jews, based on the myth of Jewish exceptionalism, and the colonization of North America by Angloprotestant settlers (Nathan's Puritan ancestors), based on the myth of Anglo-American exceptionalism. As Thomas L. Thompson claims, Melville criticizes through Nathan "the Christian roots of the romantic Zionist dream of recreating in Palestine an American utopia drawn from a mysticized 'holy land' " (2010: 60). Even though the narrator does not provide much information about the pasts of other characters in the poem, he recounts Nathan's

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for the Second Coming of God– may have been inspired by actual individuals Melville met during his trip to the Levant in 1856-57. See Bezanson 1991.

[382] For an analysis of the biblical story of the prophet Nathan see Thompson 2010: 58-59.

[383] As William Potter analyzes, "Melville was aware that nineteenth-century Zionism was, at least until the end of the century, as much or more a Protestant millennialist concern as it was Jewish in nature […]—the restoration of the Jewish state, the rebuilding of the temple, and the conversion of the Jews to Christianity were all thought to be necessary (i.e., scripturally ordained) steps to prepare for the Second Coming of Christ in Protestant eschatology. It is thus that Zionism and Millennialism are treated in the poem as being related by common interest" (2004: 193). In the Journal of his 1856-57 trip to the Mediterranean, Melville had explicitly criticized such colonialist enterprises legitimized by exceptionalist discourses, as he claimed that "It is against the will of God that the East should be Christianized" (*Journals* 81), and described the missions of several Americans whom he met in Jerusalem (e.g., Mr. Dickson –a possible source for the character of Nathan–, Bishop Gobat, Mr. and Mrs. Saunders, etc.) as Quixotic Jew maniacs "half melancholy" if not "half farcical" (*Journals* 94). For an extended analysis of Melville's views of Americans' Zionist or Millennialist missions in Palestine, see Potter 2004: 193-195 and Obenzinger 1999: 114-137. In turn, Milette Shamir (2003) has also analyzed the foundation and development of the American Colony in Jerusalem over the 1880s.

story in great detail[384] starting from the history of the first American settlers from whom Nathan descends, and describing how Nathan's forefathers –"the landing patriarchs" (*Clarel* 1.17.34)– gradually peopled the lands of America and expanded westward:

> Nathan had sprung from worthy stock—
> Austere, ascetical, but free,
> Which hewed their way from sea-beat rock
> Wherever woods and winter be.
>   The pilgrim-keel in storm and stress
> Had erred, and on a wilderness
> […]
> Those primal settlers put in train
> New emigrants which inland bore;
> From these too, emigrants again
> Westward pressed further; more bred more;
> At each remove a goodlier wain,
> A heart more large, an ampler shore,
> With legacies of farms behind; (1.17.1-15)

Guided by a "severer star" (1.17.33), Nathan's father –also, significantly, named Nathan– had moved to the prairies of Illinois with his wife and son; a vast, limitless, 'virgin' land which to him symbolized "a turf divine / Of promise" (1.17.35). Nonetheless, the image of an easy and peaceful occupation of the land by Anglo settlers is juxtaposed to the presence of a Native American cemetery in the bucolic prairie, a sight that very much haunts Nathan and immediately makes present to readers the other side of Anglo colonization, as certainly such gradual process of occupation is not as peaceful as we are first made to believe, nor is the American continent a virgin

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[384] Nathan's story is "transferred" (1.16.203) by the narrator of the poem after Nehemiah anxiously and grievingly details it to Clarel. In his introduction to the "Nathan" canto (number 17 in Part 1) the narrator declares that he has ordered Nehemiah's story and that he has cleared it from the old man's anxiety and grimace while recounting it (see *Clarel* 1.16. 195-204).

one.[385] The presence of the colonized, in the form of the Native American cemetery, in fact, precipitates Nathan's questioning of his Puritan faith and even of the legitimacy of the white European colonial enterprise (the notion of death, evoked by the Native American burial ground and the bones and skulls that Nathan sees there, provokes in him a grieving mood for the "Innocents" (1.17.74) who lost their lives[386] and makes Nathan remember the sudden death of his uncle in a slide which the narrator interprets as a "havoc from the heaven" (1.17.97). Already at this point, the Anglo colonialist project in America is connected to the Middle East, since the mounds of the Native American cemetery are likened to pyramids: "Three Indian mounds / Against the horizon's level bounds / Dim showed across the prairie green / Life dwarfed and blunted mimic shapes / Of Pyramids at distance seen" (1.17.56-60). This association is particularly relevant considering that, to Melville, as he reflected in his 1856-57 journal, pyramids represented something impenetrable, incomprehensible, and terrifying, perhaps even emptiness (and obviously, the terror of actual emptiness itself, the dearth against which characters' hopes and expectations upon their encountering the Holy Land of their imaginations crash):

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[385] This is certainly something that the *narrator* chooses to underline, offering a different story from the one Nehemiah might have narrated to Clarel and to which readers do not have access, since Nehemiah is a millennialist who, despite not being a Zionist like Nathan, also shares in the belief that Palestine needs to be Christianized and prepared for the Second Coming of God. As Stephanie Stidham Rogers claims "The nineteenth century set the stage for the broad public acceptance of the land of Palestine as a spiritual homeland for Judeo-Christian peoples" (2011: 6), encouraging millennial hopes. Whereas Nathan represents a violent kind of colonialism, Nehemiah can be said to evoke the gradual religious occupation ('peaceful crusade') of Jerusalem by other nations and religious colonists, which would become more intense after the 1860s, as shown by the establishment of the American colony in Jerusalem in 1881, etc. For an account of the history of the American Colony in Jerusalem see Shamir 2003.

[386] The poem, however, does not make explicit who these "Innocents" (1.17.74) are, which makes the use of the word deliberately and significantly ambiguous, even leaving space to pity the colonizers who, blinded by their monomania, destroy their own lives. As a matter of fact, the poem mourns Nathan, whose obsessive Zionist beliefs kill his own life and subsequently that of his family's, not to mention the Arabs against whom he wages his personal violent struggle.

Pyramids still loom before me — something vast, indefinite, incomprehensive, and awful. […] Grass near the pyramids, but will not touch them — as if in fear or awe of them. Desert more fearful to look at than ocean. (*Journals* 76)

Old man with the spirits of youth — long looked for this chance — tried the ascent, half way — fainted — brought down. Tried to go into the interior — fainted — brought out — leaned against the pyramid by the entrance — pale as death. […] oppressed by the massiveness & mystery of the pyramids. I myself too. A feeling of awe & terror came over me. […] I shudder at the idea of ancient Egyptians. It was in these pyramids that was conceived the idea of Jehovah. Terrible mixture of cunning and awful. […] The idea of Jehovah born here. (75)

The haunting sight of the Native American cemetery is the origin of Nathan's subsequent crises of both faith and colonizing identity.[387] His eventual conversion to Judaism, as Hilton Obenzinger points out, signifies Nathan's embrace of "the source of the American settler myth itself" (1999: 81). By providing him with a colonialist mission in Palestine legitimized by a religious discourse, Zionism silences Nathan's previous insecurities about the (il)legitimacy of the Anglo colonialist project in America and validates his identity and his forefathers' as rightful colonizers of the land. This parallelism between the Zionist colonizing enterprise in Palestine and the Anglo colonization of America is made evident in the following lines:

> Resolute hereon,
> Agar, with Ruth and the young child,
> He lodged within the stronghold town
> Of Zion, and his heart exiled
> To abide the worst of Sharon's lea.
> Himself and honest servants three
> Armed husbandmen became, as erst
> His sires in Pequod wilds immersed.
> Hitites—foes pestilent to God
> His fathers old those Indians deemed:
> Nathan the Arabs here esteemed

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[387] Nathan's questioning and doubt is portrayed as a heroic process of diving. It is his final acquisition of a sense of 'mission' through Zionism, and therefore his consequent adherence to a monolithic Meaning, that is condemned in the poem and which leads Nathan and his family to perdition.

> The same—slaves meriting the rod;
> And out he spake it; which bred hate
> The more imperilling his state. (1.17.228-311)

The previous passage exposes a connection between Nathan's Zionist project in Palestine and the Anglo colonialist enterprise in America, by establishing an analogy between the Native American tribe of the Pequots and the Palestinian Arabs. Both colonizing practices are fed by hatred of the racial and religious other, and characterized by both the violence of the struggle (they are armed fights) and the belief that it is divinely sanctioned (the enemy is "pestilent to God" whereas colonizers are God's favorites). Melville is very careful to portray in *Clarel* the destructive consequences of Nathan's colonialist enterprise, based on supremacy and on religious fanaticism, even to the colonizer himself. This way, such a 'prophet of God', as Nathan's name ironically evokes, is eventually killed in an Arab insurrection, and his mourning wife Agar and daughter Ruth both die of grief subsequently.

Through the analysis of Nathan's Zionist mission, Melville questions narratives of territorial expansion and colonialist projects, and problematizes notions of manifest destiny and divine election, warning against the dangers of religious fundamentalism.[388]

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[388] One might also read in Melville's evaluation of different colonizing enterprises, through Nathan, a critical echo of the movements promoting the emigration of emancipated slaves to Africa or other territories in Central America where ex-slaves were promised lands. Often supported by paternalist discourses based on the protection of former slaves and the promise to them of the ensuing full enjoyment of their recently acquired freedom, Melville probably knew about such colonialist projects, as well as not only of the racism and nativism underlying many of them, but also of their colonialist ends. These emigration movements were developed as early as 1862-63, even promoted by the government. Most of them, however, turned out to be a fiasco. As James M. McPherson argues: "[…] colonization did turn out to be a damn humbug in practice. The Central American project [promoted by the Lincoln administration] collapsed in the face of opposition from Honduras and Nicaragua. In 1863 the U.S. government sponsored the settlement of 453 colonists on an island near Haiti, but this enterprise also foundered when starvation and smallpox decimated the colony. The administration finally sent a naval vessel to return the 368 survivors to the United States in 1864. This ended official efforts to colonize blacks" (1988: 509). As they grew disappointed with Reconstruction, some African Americans in Southern states such as Georgia or South Carolina decided to emigrate to Liberia between 1866 and 1867 under the auspices of the American Colonization Society (Foner 1988: 289). Although the exact numbers are blurry, Elizabeth Isichei claims that these African Americans emigrants to Liberia amounted to approximately 12,000 (1997: 384), in an emigration project which also had colonialist ends on the part of the United States government. In the late 1870s, realizing about the impossibilities of

The poem also portrays acts of resistance against such expansionist practices by the subjects who most directly experience the violence of colonialism, especially through the Arab insurrection that kills Nathan and, most significantly, through Ungar, a mixed-raced, half-Cherokee and half-white, ex-Confederate Southern soldier during the American Civil War, who becomes one of the most articulate critics of the brutal history of Anglo colonialism, by denouncing "white's aggressive reign" (4.5.108) in poignant speeches denouncing the Anglo-Saxons' long history of colonization and violence, which leave his American compatriots and other characters in the poem speechless. Joseph G. Knapp remarks how Ungar (and, in my opinion, also Mortmain, to a considerable extent) teaches the rest of the pilgrims that "the Anglo-Saxon is not God's chosen people, that America is not the New Eden, that democracy will not save man, and that war and reform are futile since man – the agent and patient of reform – is evil. Ungar has no illusions and leaves his friends none" (1971: 79).[389] However, as Timothy Marr has noted, Melville resisted confining violence and savagery to one particular ethnicity, nationality, or religious creed (2005: 157); rather, the author's interest laid in analyzing throughout his career the "universality of human barbarism" (Marr 158). Melville's Civil War poems in *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War* are excellent examples of such affirmation, and so is the character of Ungar in *Clarel*, himself a wonderful exponent of the universality and intertwinement of different forms of

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integration and cohabitation with whites in the U.S., many blacks demanded internal emigration, petitioning that the government should provide one of the States with available land for their settlement (Foner 600). Eric Foner remarks how some of these movements acquired religious connotations, based on –in my opinion– exceptionalist premises: The Kansas migration movement was also called the 'Exodus' since blacks believed that "The freedment […] might yet be compelled 'to repeat the history of the Israelites' and 'seek new homes… beyond the reign and rule of Pharaoh' " (600). As Foner further argues, "To countless blacks, Kansas offered the prospect of political equality, freedom from violence, access to education, economic opportunity, and liberation from the presence of the old slaveholding class—in sum the '*practical independence*' that Reconstruction had failed to secure" (600).

[389] Vincent Kenny further asserts that "Democracy is a philosophical theory which founders in practice. America, its only possible area for success, testifies the corruptibility and impossibility of such a system. If America cannot make it work, nowhere in the world will democracy survive" (1973: 196). Kenny's assertion, however, in my opinion, reinforces the idea of U.S. exceptionalism, placing the United States as the perfect (and only) context where democracy can emerge.

violence, due to his mixed-raced identity and experience of both colonization and the Civil War itself, on the one hand, and his being a professional soldier for the Ottoman Empire in Palestine, on the other. Problematizing the proverb 'As cruel as a Turk', which he claims was invented by the British in times of the Crusades,[390] Ungar reverses the proverb and exposes the cruelty of the British in their construction of an Empire through the destruction of the cultures this Empire colonized and the subjection of the peoples inhabiting those regions, "Indians East and West", who were deprived of their rights:[391]

> "*As cruel as a Turk*: Whence came
> That proverb old as the crusades?
> From Anglo-Saxons. What are they?
> Let the horse answer, and blockades
> Of medicine in civil fray!
> The Anglo-Saxons—lacking grace
> To win the love of any race;
> Hated by myriads dispossessed
> Of rights—the Indians East and West.
> These pirates of the sphere! grave looters—
> Grave, canting, Mammonite freebooters,
> Who in the name of Christ and Trade
> (Oh, bucklered forehead of the brass!)
> Deflower the world's last sylvan glade!" (4.9.112-125)

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[390] Hershel Parker indicates in his "Editorial Appendix" to *Clarel* how this is a "recurrent theme for several cantos, and one that Melville had explicitly used in his 1860 lecture 'Traveling': 'The Spanish Matador, who devoutly believes in the proverb, 'Cruel as Turk,' goes to Turkey, sees that people are kind to all animals, sees docile horses, never balky, gentle, obedient, exceedingly intelligent, yet *never beaten*; and comes home to his bull-fights with a very different expression of his own humanity'" (*Clarel* 1991: 826). Ungar's critiques also reach the (British) English language, which he qualifies as scornful and unkind: "Ye have the *Sir*, / That sole, employed in snub or slur, / Never in pure benevolence, / and at its best a formal term / Of cold regard" (4.9.149-153).

[391] Ungar is explicitly referring here to both Native Americans within the North American context and to India which had been under British rule since 1858 and would be officially adhered to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland in 1876, the same year that Queen Victoria was proclaimed "Empress of India" (Rappaport 2003: 133). As Kathleen Burk explains: "In 1871, Great Britain was the only truly global power. She had the largest empire in history, which by the turn of the century would include 20 per cent of the surface of the globe and a quarter of the world's population" (2007: 380-381). It is important, I believe, that Ungar establishes this universal interconnection between autoctonous peoples in their common experience of Anglo colonialism.

Brian Yothers has noted how Ungar's use of the phrase "Indians East and West" establishes an explicit connection between English and American imperialist practices under pretenses of religious morality and trade (2007: 132). Yet, if Ungar exposes the open wounds that colonization has left on colonized subjects like himself (the scar in his neck is permanently oozing exteriorizing his internal wounds), he also announces with utter conviction that the so-called 'youth' and the promising potential of the New World died the moment European colonialism entered America. As Obenzinger points out, Ungar poses a fierce critique to U.S. optimism and "sense of special providential destiny": "No destiny is 'manifest' to Ungar; he mocks Anglo-Saxons as 'Mammonite freebooters, / Who in the name of Christ and Trade … / Deflower the world's last sylvan glade!' (4.9.122-5), and he regards America's democracy of diverse communities and the prospect of universal suffrage with revulsion" (2006: 193). It is certainly not accidental that Ungar's critique is addressed to "Anglo-Saxons" and not exclusively to the British, also evoking the imperialist ideology that the U.S. had developed and the colonialist practices it had already carried out throughout its history and was carrying out in the postbellum period.[392] Even though the United States did not regard itself as an Empire, in works such as *Mardi* (1849) Melville had criticized the U.S. narrative of 'manifest destiny' intending to justify the war and subsequent annexation of Mexican lands (which had, in turn, been conquered by the Spanish through colonial practices dispossessing the indigenous population). By adopting such principles, the United States was not only completely forgetting its own former status as a British colony, but also becoming an 'imperial' power itself which was doing "a still more imperial thing— gone to war without declaring intentions. You yourselves were precipitated upon a

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[392] If in works as early as *Typee* (1846) Melville had already condemned U.S. imperialism, *Clarel* continues this lifelong critique, placing it in the particular context of post-Civil War United States and connecting it to a more global history of Anglo colonialism.

neighboring nation ere you knew your spears were in your hand" (*Mardi* 1849: 1185).

Similarly, in *Battle-Pieces*, the poet had expressed fears of an America with "Law on her

brow and *empire* in her eyes" (*Battle-Pieces* 1866: 162; my italics), at the same time as he

tried to convey anxious hopes for a new America matured through the national tragedy

(and also for American citizens matured through personal tragedies) of war. Wai-chee

Dimock's analysis on the meaning of freedom as dominion in nineteenth-century

America's "empire for liberty"[393] is well-known, as well as her study of how, in his

antebellum literary production, Melville was caught in this very discourse of national

imperialist politics as an author who, according to Dimock, "reproduc[ed] in the

province of selfhood an internalized version of the national polity", at the same time as

he struggled with such imperialist nationalist 'ego' (1989: 47). The image of America

standing for both "Law" and "empire" in *Battle-Pieces* is representative of this

interlacing, as well as of a poetic voice that problematizes such nationalist parameters

and denounces the brutal colonialist acts these parameters permitted in the years of the

Civil War (e.g., Sherman's marches through Georgia, South Carolina and North

Carolina). At this point in *Battle-Pieces* the poet struggles to have hope in the future of

his country and prepares the reader for the arguments on the difficulties of national

reconciliation that are elaborated both in the final poems of the volume and in its

"Supplement".

Melville's efforts to believe in the positive potentiality of the U.S. darken in

Clarel. The silence with which the other characters meet Ungar's critiques against

American exceptionalism resonates as loudly as Ungar's heartfelt speeches. This silence

may have two –perhaps three– different interpretations: on the one hand, it is possible

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[393] This is the phrase Dimock uses as the title of her book, which already anticipates the interconnection and inseparability between the notions of dominion and freedom in the constitution and justification of what she calls an American empire.

to read this generalized silence as representative of the failure to assume collective responsibility for imperial national politics, as symbolic of the silence of Western civilization in the face of its own atrocities –with which the majority of characters are complicit, including Ungar in a reversed way, now a soldier for an 'Eastern' empire–; on the other hand, this silence may be interpreted as an acknowledgement of the rightfulness of Ungar's attacks and as a sympathetical response to the personal causes behind the soldier's resentment –Rolfe's silence of empathy and understanding of "the cause, the origin" (4.19.165) of the grief and irate mood of his countryman–; and, finally, as a dismissal of Ungar's speeches as being the product of madness or monomania –Derwent's silence or explicit rejection in his consideration that Ungar is "a man of bitter blood" with whom it is useless to "Argue" (4.9.162). The paradox of Ungar's critiques, of course, is that Ungar himself is the instrument of an Empire, the Ottoman, whose imperialist practices may be not very different from the Anglo colonialism the soldier is denouncing. Ungar is a complex character that deserves a detailed analysis,[394] but I find it necessary to anticipate at this point that his attacks against Western, in general, and American civilization and democracy, in particular, as well as his demystification of the notion of (Anglo) exceptionalism, demonstrate how, in the same way as the Holy Land in the poem, the United States offers neither hope nor consolation to characters who realize throughout their journeys that all nations are equally abandoned by God, providing that God exists at all.

Ungar is one of the characters who most clearly expose the connection between the segregation in Jerusalem and Palestine and the segregation in postbellum United States in the 1870s. In the late 1860s and throughout the 1870s, the United States was not only experiencing important social and political transformations but also significant

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[394] For a further study of Ungar, see the analysis of bleak monomaniacs in subsection "iii" in "b", within Section 3.7.3, in this chapter.

racial, ethnic, religious, cultural, and ideological tensions leading to multiple episodes of violence and confrontation. Going back to the topic of the city, with which the present section opened, New York was one of the American cities which most directly witnessed such tensions, particularly due to the growth in population it experienced especially over the second half of the nineteenth century. These inter-personal and inter-communitarian tensions and violence may be said to find an expression in the context of Jerusalem and the Holy Land, which, I argue, Melville uses both as a global microcosm –a global city in the same way as New York– and as a representation of his particular contemporary society and its multiple fragmentations on many sociopolitical and inter-personal fronts. This way, in my opinion, Jerusalem, and more generally the Holy Land, become microcosms through which the author portrays and evaluates the problems that derive when peoples who are different come together, and the eventual (in)capacity of these peoples to live with one another despite the potentially democratizing possibilities to which such cohabitation might lead. This fragmentation, together with the task of reformulating democracy and togetherness, were the most central difficulties at the close of the Civil War. The 1870s would painfully prove the U.S. failure to develop a truly democratic social democracy and to heal sociopolitical and racial divisions.

3.6. "Separate thyself from me". Segregating Humanity: Walls and Gates

> "Are all nations communing? is there going to be but
>   one heart to the globe?
> Is humanity forming, en-masse?
>   (Walt Whitman, "Years of the Modern", 1881, *Leaves of
>   Grass* 490)

> "Though hurt and even maimed were some
> By crash of the ignited done.
> Staunch stood the walls."

"By what art
Of conjuration might the heart
Of heavenly love, so sweet, so good,
Corrupt into the creeds malign,
Begetting strife's pernicious brood,
Which claimed for patron thee divine?"

(Herman Melville, *Clarel* 1.31.144-146; 1.13.86-91)

"survey the tomb stones of the hostile Armenians,
Latins, Greeks, all sleeping together."
(Herman Melville, "Journal 1856-57", January 1857,
Journals 87)

In Bethlehem, upon visiting what is commonly known as the Valley of the
Shepherds, Ungar describes the brief encounter between two shepherds whom he
observes in the distance. Imagining that the two men are debating about how to divide
the land, the episode acquires a wider dimension, as it exposes not only Ungar's own
internal divisions, which he is incapable to reconcile,[395] but also the segregation of his
country, echoed by that of Palestine itself. The dialogue among the shepherds that
Ungar imagines, and which recreates the biblical episode describing the separation of
Lot and Abraham in order to prevent further violence after a confrontation between
the herdsmen of both men's cattle,[396] is transformed into an inner monologue by which
the "man of scars" (*Clarel* 1876: 4.28.2) expresses the necessity to peacefully –Ungar's
anxious insistence on avoiding confrontation is important in the passage– heal divisions
by building up a 'we' from a 'you' and an 'I' (the accurate use of pronouns and
possessives in the passage is relevant) that stand separate at present: "Let there be no

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[395] Ungar is in a permanent inner struggle with his longings for reconciliation, on the one hand,
and his impossibility to reconcile, on the other, a profound interior division which he finds himself
incapable of healing since, as Bryan C. Short argues: "Rather than finding a way of uniting himself, he
controls his disintegrated personality through relentless mental discipline" (1979: 564).

[396] "And Abram said to Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray you, between me and you, and
between my herdsmen and your herdsmen; for we be brothers. Is not the whole land before you?
separate yourself, I pray you, from me: if you will take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if you
depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left" ("Genesis", 13, vs. 8-9).

strife, I pray thee, between me / And thee, my herdmen and thine own; / For we be brethren" (4.9.69-72). The separation, however, cannot be overcome, and what started as an imaginary attempt to construct a 'we' by transcending the existing space between the 'I' and the 'you' eventually becomes another instance of how separation imposes itself over a potential 'reunification' and over the possibility of developing interpersonal bonding. In the scene described, such divisions materialize in the final fragmentation of the feeble pronoun 'we', which had been provisionally created by the coming together of the two shepherds:

> Then separate thyself from me,
> I pray thee. If now the left hand
> Thou, Lot, wilt take, then I will go
> Unto the right; if thou depart
> Unto the right, then I will go
> Unto the left."—They parted so,
> And not unwisely: both were wise.
> 'Twas East and West; but *North and South*! (4.9.74-81)

This last explicit reference to North and South invites readers to extrapolate the poem's recreation of the biblical episode and transfer it to the particular context of postbellum U.S., as it underlines the still very prevalent separation of North and South years after the end of the war, and, therefore, the impossibility of the re-union that Melville had longed for in *Battle-Pieces*. Further textual instances making evident the failure of national reconciliation in the U.S. postbellum context will be analyzed in future sections, but I want to underline at this point how the previous passage reinforces the connection between the U.S. and the Holy Land, presenting both of them not as promising national contexts (as the exceptionalist narrative of predestination and divine election analyzed in the previous section would have it), but as lands of segregation and irreconcilable internal divisions. This is made evident not only by the introduction of,

certainly non-gratuitous, figures, such as Nathan, but also by the narrator's very descriptions of Jerusalem and of the Holy Land in general as seen through the eyes of the multiple and disparate characters.[397]

As I claimed in the introductory remarks at the beginning of Chapter Two, the Jerusalem in *Clarel* is a city of walls, both physical and psychological. In a similar way as to how Melville expresses his own reactions to the city in his 1856-57 journal, Clarel feels oppressed by Jerusalem, by its narrow streets and thick walls, this feeling of oppression combined with the density of human beings who gather inside them, lead the young American to look for alternative spaces beyond the walls where he may escape the sense of saturation.[398] The physical walls of Jerusalem are also indicative of the segregation between and within the different communities and human groups that inhabit the city –often enforced physically in the different neighborhoods and spaces that each of these communities occupies. This segregating reality of urban walls reinforces the emergence of new and the perpetuation of old egocentric and monolithic (maybe monomaniac) conceptions of humanity which impose themselves as 'Truths' and obliterate other possible ways of interpreting the world. Melville criticizes in *Clarel* such community-based segregationism, focusing especially –though not exclusively– on religious mania(s):

> With these be hearts in each degree
> Of craze, whereto some creed is key;
> Which, mastered by the awful myth,
> Find here, on native soil, the pith;
> And leaving a shrewd world behind—
> To trances open-eyed resigned—

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[397] Ungar will be unable to 'reconcile' with the Northern society that his fellow Americans represent. However, this 'Northern society' is not one characterized by strong bonds or a sense of togetherness among its members but, on the contrary, by individualism.

[398] See Melville's remarks on the "insalubriousness of so small a city pent in by lofty walls obstructing ventilation" and how he walked "without the walls" to escape the saturation of the air in *Journals* 1989: 86-87. I have cited and discussed this passage in Section 1 of this chapter.

> As visionaries of the Word
> Walk like somnambulists abroad. (*Clarel* 1.21.40-47)

It is important to note that Melville marks in the previous passage how this religious madness is interwoven with (and frequently engendered by) myth –which becomes fossilized as Truth–, and how Palestine is thought by many religious followers the container of the core of such myth-Truth because it is conceived as either the imagined or the historical homeland of such creeds. Walls, then, not only separate human beings, but also blind and deafen them by forcing individuals to perceive the world as walled, which contributes to perpetuate such inter-human boundaries and one-sided visions of the world: "Is Zion deaf?", the narrator wonders, as he is moved by the muezzin's call for prayer and the ensuing ceremonious performance of Muslims' reverential rituals. The previous passage, I believe, can also be read as a critique of nationalism, a "craze" which locates the heart of meaning "on native soil", remaining thus blind to a whole sensible world which it leaves outside of the one-sided system of knowledge it produces. The result of these monolithic and usually monomaniac communitarian and self-centered worldviews is the production of "somnambulists" who paradoxically and dramatically present themselves as "visionaries of the Word", and often of the 'World' as well, who cannot contemplate the possibility of approaching the world through those interpretive modes outside their monolithic and univocal parameters. These psychological walls –the tendency to perpetuate them and the incapacity/unwillingness to overcome them– are the principal obstacles faced by the universalist project *Clarel* defends. As a matter of fact, Clarel's task will be to develop his own capacity for plural thinking –a plural thinking which his fellow traveler Rolfe both masters and exemplifies–, and come to learn that walls, physical and psychological, prevent the creation of democratic human relationships, as much as they oppress humans'

conception of the world and attitudes toward their fellow mortals. The democratic and democratizing exercise in universalism that the poem creates and encourages is in line with the "grand belief" Ishmael articulates in *Moby-Dick*, after Captain Bildad informs Queequeg that he must be converted to Christianity to sail on the *Pequod*. To this, both jokingly and derisively, Ishmael astutely replies:

> "all I know is, that Queequeg here is a born member of the First Congregational Church. He is a deacon himself, Queequeg is."
> "Young man," said Bildad sternly, "thou art skylarking with me—explain thyself, thou young Hittite. What church dost thee mean? answer me."
> Finding myself thus hard pushed, I replied. "I mean, sir, the same ancient Catholic Church to which you and I, and Captain Peleg there, and Queequeg here, and all of us, and every mother's son and soul of us belong; the great and everlasting First Congregation of this whole worshipping world; we all belong to that; only some of us cherish some queer crotchets noways touching the grand belief; in that we all join hands." (*Moby-Dick* 1851: 95-96)

Ishmael points to what I conceive as universalism in this dissertation, the 'membership' of which is not acquired through conversion but by birth, by the very fact of existence (Queequeg is a "*born* member" [my emphasis] in this "First Congregational Church"), and which assembles humanity together universally, not only connecting 'here' and 'there', lands and nations, transnationally, but also the different generations, past-present-future, transtemporally. As a matter of fact, Melville might be playing here with the very etymology of the term 'catholic', from the Greek *katholikos*, meaning 'universal'.[399] This "grand belief" of universalism even embraces those who remain unaware of their belonging to or, like Captain Bildad himself, have qualms about it. Captain Peleg is so attracted by Ishmael's irreverent answer to Bildad that he immediately welcomes Queequeg on board praising Ishmael's persuasive argument:

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[399] See footnote 18 on page 46.

"Young man, you'd better ship for a missionary, instead of a fore-mast hand; I never heard a better sermon" (96).

Clarel underlines the segregationist component of communitarianisms of different kinds (nationalism, religion, class, etc.), which is reinforced by the context of the Holy Land and, in particular, Jerusalem, a global city yet a land of deep divisions, violent confrontations (the character of Nathan and his colonizing Zionist mission proves a good example of this affirmation), and irreconcilable differences, where communities are juxtaposed to (yet hardly interact with) one another and where each struggles to assert its supremacy. This segregation is emphasized through the walls of the city itself and the different neighborhoods and areas, as well as by the separation between communities, and the fact that some of the city's human groups are forced to literally live facing the walls that segregate them from other human groups:[400]

> The stone huts face the stony wall
> Inside—the city's towering screen—
> Leaving a reptile lane between;
> […]
> So hateful to the people's eyes
> Those lepers and their evil nook,
> No outlook from it will they brook:
> None enter; condolence is none. (*Clarel* 1.25. 1-10)

Among all, lepers are perhaps the clearest epitome of the rejected in the poem, even though all the characters are, in some way or other, examples of rejection, exclusion, or exile, and therefore fellow travelers in their homelessness and in what Emmanuel Levinas terms their "incondition of strangers" (2006: 66). As Hilton Obenzinger remarks, in *Clarel*, following the example of his previous works, Melville underscores

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[400] Most significantly, as I shall analyze in the next pages, Celio dies facing a wall after his yearning for intersubjectivity is rejected by Clarel, and walls also move Clarel to leave Ruth and her mother and set on the pilgrimage.

"the instability of the word 'home,' particularly when associated with religion, nation, empire, as well as domesticity" (2010: 36), and, I add, also when associated with spirituality, and even sociality and intersubjective relationality.[401] Wondering if lepers were ever considered human, if "These did men greet / As fellows once?" (1.25.15), the narrator presents them as victims of the inhumanity also of the present. In this respect, the narrator contraposes the present abandonment of these human beings to their mercy, to a past when they were at least provided some charity. It is interesting that the canto on the lepers is placed after Clarel feels the wailing of numberless souls grieving "in endless dearth" (1.24.87)[402] which seems to penetrate into his heart and expose him to the pain of such sufferers.[403]

Another example of the rejected in the poem is a character who not only is faced with the walls separating communities but who is made an outcast by his own kinsmen: Celio, the young Catholic Italian, whose doubting nature his community can neither understand nor accommodate. The only possibility that the Catholic community (here the etymology of the term 'Catholic' which I underlined on page 46 emerges as deeply ironical) provides for Celio is to be accommodated within the Catholic family in which he cannot feel at home, as this would force him to renounce his characteristic

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[401] Obenzinger relates Melville's questioning of 'home' to the author's critique of colonialism and empire, connecting such questioning to the particular context of Palestine. Obenzinger connects Melville's analysis of the Palestine he visited in 1857 to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict today, reflecting that: "Decade after decade this sense of entitlement has led to occupations of land, confiscations of property, and one dispossession after another in Palestine as well as in the United States. Is there a spiritual home in Jerusalem if one's physical home cannot be secure? What is a 'homeland'; what is a 'homecoming'? Did our conference [the Seventh International Melville Society Conference, Jerusalem, 2009] 'come home' to Melville's world of inquiry and skepticism, or did we return to familiar precincts of imposition and appropriation?" (2010: 36-37).

[402] The complete passage alluded here is fully quoted on page 382-383 in the present section, as illustrative of my discussion on walls and gates.

[403] Stan Goldman attributes the nature of wails and laments in *Clarel* to the absence of God, reading them as bearing an influence of the biblical genre of the lament that particularly characterizes books such as the Psalms, Lamentations, Jeremiah, or Ecclesiastes (1993: 48). I am regarding the wail here in a more global and primeval way, as expressive of human pain that may be existential (therefore human) yet not necessarily religious.

questioning nature and, therefore, would eventually absorb his individuality.[404] Celio's status as a rejected human being and an outcast is reinforced when he is locked out by the city itself, since, after having been wandering around the Valley of Jehoshaphat, the Italian returns to Jerusalem only to realize that the gates[405] are already closed and that he therefore is forced to spend the night outside in the wilderness: "Alone in outer dark he stood. / A symbol is it? be it so" (1.14.16-18).[406]

Another evident example of how walls are portrayed as barriers between communities and between peoples in the poem is Clarel's own encounter with 'walls' (both physical and symbolic), which eventually leads him to an enforced separation from his beloved Ruth –Nathan's eldest daughter. Although Ruth is an American-born Jewish woman, and therefore the same nationality as Clarel, their relationship is met with reluctance by the Jewish community in Jerusalem, for whom Clarel is a stranger. Through his relationship with Ruth, Clarel comes face to face with the wall that separates him from the Jewish community when Nathan is killed in an Arab insurrection and he is banned from entering "The house of mourning" (1.42.57) as he goes to express his condolences to Ruth and her mother. The rabbi is the authority of the community and, as such, he is the person to impose such a wall, symbolically locking the door connecting the house to the outside world, in Clarel's face:

> He [Clarel], waiting so,
> Doubtful to knock or call them—lo,
> The rabbi issues, while behind
> The door shuts to. The meeting eyes

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[404] "My kin—I blame them not at heart— / Would have me act some routine part, / Subserving family, and dreams / Alien to me—illusive schemes" (1.12.91-94).

[405] Significantly, the poem underlines that Celio stands outside St. Stephen's Gate, thus connecting this young character to the Christian martyr who possessed a doubting nature like his.

[406] William Potter compares Celio's endurance of the night alone in the desert to the Syrian Monk's or to Mortmain's respective retreats alone in Quarantania (2004: 186). Also importantly, in the poem, Rolfe notes that "Man sprang from deserts: at the touch / Of grief or trial overmuch, / On deserts he falls back at need, / Yes 'tis the bare abandoned home / Recalleth then" (2.16.106-110).

> Reciprocate a quick surprise,
> Then alter; and the secret mind
> The rabbi bears to Clarel shows
> In dark superior look he throws:
> Censorious consciousness of power:
> […]
> No word he speaks, but turns and goes. (1.42.59-69)

At this very moment, the Jewish community becomes a sealed fortress that an outsider such as Clarel cannot penetrate. The power dynamics in this passage is interesting, as the Rabbi exerts his superiority in the situation as the most powerful figure within the Jewish community that is barred to Clarel. In face of this, Clarel can not even retort. The Rabbi is actually an interesting secondary figure which, despite being only quickly alluded to in most passages, enacts an active function in keeping watch of Clarel's proceedings with Ruth and her mother Agar,[407] two members of the community that the Rabbi represents and which he is committed to preserve. This patriarchal figure of authority makes it clear to Clarel that he is unwelcome through the "stony" gazes he addresses to the young student: "by the sage was Clarel viewed / With stony and unfriendly look— / Fixed inquisition, hard to brook. / And that embarrassment he raised / The Rabbi marked, and colder gazed" (1.23.59-63). The old man's "will austere", however, combined with Nathan's increasing neglect of his family in pursue of his mad monomania, does not prevent the development of Ruth and Agar's esteem for the young American. From both Ruth's and Agar's perspective, Clarel (the outsider) embodies freedom and fresh breezes to the 'saturated air' of their community, reminding them of the America they left behind. Thus, Clarel provides for both women, a way to temporarily evade the "burdens of the mind" (1.23.58), giving them relief and an illusion of liberation –at least in their imaginations– from the oppressive

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[407] Clarel finds in Agar what Melville describes in *Pierre* as a "maternal Hagar to accompany and comfort him" in his wanderings in the desert (*Pierre* 1852: 109).

air locked within the walls of the Jewish patriarchal community in which they belong.[408]

Such patriarchal control is not only exemplified by the Rabbi's constant observation of

the development of Clarel's relationship with Ruth and Agar, but is also introduced

from the first moment that Clarel sees the Jewish community from its inside, in Clarel's

spell-like description of how the view of the, in his eyes, angelical Ruth is interrupted by

Nathan's stern authoritarian address to his daughter "Ruth!" (1.16.194). Jewish

women's submission to their husbands is embodied by Agar, who –before the events

narrated in *Clarel* and back in the United States– had "mutely" (1.17.273) realized the

zeal in Nathan's incipient craze yet did not dare to contradict his desire to move to

Jerusalem to pursue it, since to complain against him would have betrayed both her

submission to her husband and to her religious community (1.17.281). William Potter

has pointed out how, in the poem, Judaism becomes an inherited burden to women

which keeps them subjected to forms (2004: 89). Agar is a victim of 'walls' too, not only

within the Jewish community but also inter-personally with her own husband, who cuts

off any connection with her. Blinded by his monomania, Nathan places an emotional

wall between him and his family as he withdraws from his wife and children to give

expression to his craze despite Agar's desperate plea that he "Serve God by cleaving to

thy wife, / Thy children" (*Clarel* 1.17.323-324). This emotional wall is literally enforced

by the physical wall that Nathan sets between him and his family, as he places Agar,

Ruth, and his younger child in the walled town whereas he resolves to live in the

wilderness outside and, therefore, away from them, pursuing his 'mission'. On one of

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[408] The narrator describes the segregation between women and men when they enact their praying rituals separately in canto 1.16 "The Wall of Wail". Even today, the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem has two different spaces, for men and women, to pray, separated by a fence that blocks well enough the view of the other group in their praying space, and the women's side is comparatively much smaller in proportion to men's. Melville underlines in the poem this segregation and women's oppression within the Jewish community (e.g., the narrator refers to Jewish laws prohibiting Ruth to walk around Jerusalem alone (1.28.12-15). According to William Potter, Ruth's and Agar's deaths by the end of the poem present to Clarel the "destruction that an unyielding orthodoxy is capable of bringing about" (2004: 185).

his occasional visits, Agar prays him to "Put not these blanks between us" (1.17.320) and return to them, at the same time that, embracing her husband and placing her chest upon his, she painfully feels the emotional emptiness in Nathan's heart, where all possible space for love has been conquered "by inveterate zeal" (1.17.327-328). Ruth, too, comes face to face with these walls at an early age, as she too experiences with her mother the discrimination of women inside the Jewish community: "What tho' the dame and daughter both / In synagogue, behind the grate / Dividing sexes, oftimes sat?" (1.27.94-96). Such oppression leads a very young Ruth growing up in Jerusalem, to whom America is only a faraway dream, to claim that the Holy Land " 'Tis a bad place" (1.27. 86). Agar and Ruth carry out walled existences and it is to this oppressiveness that Clarel brings a temporary illusion of freedom with his talks about the America that both Agar and Ruth had to leave behind due to Nathan's monomania. As their friendship develops, the two women establish an intersubjective connection with Clarel which transcends the walls imposed by the Jewish community, as the community itself, represented by the Rabbi, watches with aversion the deepening of such friendship. The result is that inter-cultural and inter-community separation is neutralized by interpersonal togetherness: "The student, sharing not her [Agar's] blood, / Nearer in tie of spirit stood / Than he she called Rabboni" (1.27.21-23). As a matter of fact, to Agar, the possibility that Clarel and Ruth may marry signifies her daughter's liberation and her own revivification.[409] Nevertheless, even though in Clarel and Ruth's relationship, marriage may represent liberation through a passage back to the U.S. –Agar and Ruth's own 'promised land'–, it is also portrayed by the narrator as women's ultimate

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[409] "With Clarel seemed to come / A waftage from the fields of home, / Crossing the wind from Judah's sand / Reviving Agar, and of power / To make the bud in Ruth expand / With promise of unfolding hour" (1.27.99-104).

renunciation to their personal identities, and therefore their imprisonment. The poem

even compares marriage to death, emphasizing the loss of women's individuality:

> Ruinous all and arid all
> […]
> Young voices; a procession shows:
> A litter rich, with flowery wreath,
> Singers and censers, and a veil.
> She comes, the bride; but, ah, how pale:
> Her groom that Blue-Beard, cruel Death,
> Wedding his millionth maid to-day;
> She, stretched on that Armenian bier,
> Leaves home and each familiar way—
> Quits all for him. Nearer, more near—
> Till now the ineffectual flame
> Of burning tapers borne he saw:
> The westering sun puts these to shame. (1.43.14-30)

While the previous description corresponds to an Armenian bride, it may be connected,

I believe, to Melville's description of Glaucon's wife-to-be. Glaucon is a wealthy light-

hearted Smyrnan engaged to a young woman ("A damsel for Apollo meet; / And yet a

mortal's destined bride—" [2.1.151-152]) whose father –a wealthy Greek, the name

(The Banker) and identity of whom are defined by his profession in the poem–, readers

are left to deduce, has arranged to give in matrimony to Glaucon. Significantly enough,

the bride does not speak at all in the poem and is instead only seen transported as if she

were a good destined to be exchanged between the two men. As a matter of fact, the

girl is listed as one among the possessions of her father. Her description in canto 2.1

"The Cavalcade" is juxtaposed to the description of a piece of land his father owns

which, in my opinion, seems to be (con)fused with the description of the maid herself:

"High walled, / An Eden owned he nigh his town, / Which locked in leafy emerald / A

frescoed lodge" (2.1.138-141). In this "High[-]walled" property, the young woman

seems to be almost a prisoner within her father's fortress, permanently surveilled by

armed servants: "There Nubians armed, / Tall eunuchs virtuous in zeal, / In shining robes, with glittering steel, / Patrolled about his [The Banker's] daughter charmed, / Inmost inclosed in nest of bowers, / By gorgons served, the dread she-powers" (2.1.141-146). Melville playfully uses ambiguous language to describe how Glaucon regards his future marriage, as the Greek young man believes the wedding is a matter which "fortune" and the love of his soon-to-become father-in-law have "dealt" (2.1.159). In this respect, love in the future marriage of the young couple seems to be located between Glaucon –"The youth with gold at free command" (2.1.161)– and the girl's father. In the particular case of Ruth, hers and her mother's liberation from the oppressive walls of the Jewish community and of Jerusalem will never be obtained, since both women will die of grief in their mourning retreat for Nathan. The temporary transcendence of inter-personal and inter-community walls which Agar and Ruth's intersubjective relationship with Clarel had started to make possible –and, therefore, the possibility of universalism– will eventually be truncated by the enforcement of the ultimate inter-human wall itself: that of death.

Walls become constant presences throughout *Clarel* which, although characters may momentarily trespass, are in the end reinforced again. This shows, I believe, the opposing movements that Melville creates in the poem: on the one hand, the construction of universalism as a potentially democratic and democratizing space that tumbles down interpersonal 'walls', and, on the other hand, the continuous abortion of such democratizing potential. Even gates, the bridges or accesses that may connect, and at the same time also separate, different human groups and their conceptions of the world, too often and easily become "massy walls" (1.7.9) in the poem. These gates, thus, are silently locked by spectral figures before one can even realize their presence:

The doors, recessed in massy walls,
And far apart, as dingy were
As Bastile gates. No shape astir
Except at whiles a shadow falls
Athwart the way, and key in hand
Noiseless applies it, enters so
And vanishes. (1.7.9-15)

Yet at the same time that he emphasizes the presence of walls in the poem and shows how even connecting spaces such as gates may, before our eyes, turn into rigid, untrespassable, and dividing walls, Melville also underlines in *Clarel* the artificiality of such walls, which pose barriers to humanity ('humanity' both meaning here 'human beings' and, at the same time, humane values and ethics which these walls restrict to the local and particular), and which segregate human beings into different –well-separated and self-isolating– groups. Melville shows in *Clarel* how those walls not only make humans lose sight of their interconnection with other human beings; the walls also absorb their individuality within the 'common' identity (e.g., nation, 'race', religion, ethnicity, class, sexuality, etc.) that articulates the walled-in group. Walls generate communities, and communities impose disconnection and segregation. *Clarel* exposes the democratizing potentiality versus the practical difficulties of a universalist project, and at the same time reveals the dividing consequences of communitarianism. The poem includes passages which emphasize the artificiality of walls; the fact that walls create two realities that were non-existent before they were erected, an inside and an outside which otherwise would not exist as separate, since they are part of a continuum. The gate stands as this dividing and at the same time connecting symbol in *Clarel*:

"The gate," cried Nehemiah, "the gate
Of David!" Wending thro' the strait,
And marking that, in common drought,
'Twas yellow waste within as out,

> The student mused: The desert, see,
> It parts not here, but silently,
> Even like a leopard by our side,
> It seems to enter in with us—
> At home amid men's homes would glide.
> But hark! that wail how dolorous:
> So grieve the souls in endless dearth;
> Yet sounds it human—of the earth! (1.24.77-88)

The 'foreign' and the 'stranger' are, thus, artificially created by such walls. The previous passage, however, is much more fascinating than a mere critique of 'fences' or communities would be, as I believe it exposes *Clarel*'s universalist conception of humanity. Whereas, to Nehemiah, the Gate of David is a sacred spot due to its biblical resonances, the millenary monument does not speak the same way to Clarel, who sees nothing sacred in it and notices instead the "yellow waste" that provokes in him a feeling of deep grief which is connected to a more global, universal, grieving. Such waste, Clarel remarks, is the same both inside and outside the gate, in the same way that the sands of the desert (or the water in the ocean)[410] are also part of a same continuum. The gate, therefore, is presented as an unnecessary bridge that might potentially separate, instead of connecting, components of the same thing, much in the same way as communitarian worldviews constructed upon identitarian forms of belonging (i.e., nations, nationalities, religions, 'races', gender, etc.) pose artificial and segregating

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[410] Some passages in the poem compare the desert to the ocean. See for example canto 2.11 "Of deserts":

> Sands immense
> Impart the oceanic sense:
> The flying grit like scud is made:
> Pillars of sand which whirl about
> Or arch along in colonnade,
> True kin be to the water-sprout.
> Yonder on the horizon, red
> With storm, see there the caravan
> Straggling long-drawn, dispirited;
> Mark how it labors like a fleet
> Dismasted, which the cross-winds fan
> In crippled disaster of retreat
> From battle.— (*Clarel* 2.11.37-47)

barriers to –as Melville phrases it in his Holy Land journal, "every creature *in human form*" (26 January 1857, *Journals* 83), that is, human beings that are, and should remain, interconnected. It is in passages such as this one that Melville's conception of universalism becomes evident. Most interesting is Clarel's despairing realization that not even walls can prevent the desert from penetrating into the city, the houses, even the human soul. This vision, in my opinion, can be read universally, as expressing the universality of pain and of human interconnectedness.[411] The dolorous cry of human souls grieving universally, which evolves from Clarel's awe-inspiring vision of the desert, becomes, by the end of this passage –as well as by the end of the poem, in the image of universal pain of the Via Dolorosa–, the wail of humanity and of the earth itself, the physical space that connects human beings to one another. Nonetheless, despite being part of a universal wail, human beings cry alone, each of them suffering their own individual pain and none able to fully grasp the pain of others, however sympathetic they may indeed be, or communicate their own. As Ishmael would note in *Moby-Dick*: "Each silent worshipper seemed purposely sitting apart from the other, as if each silent grief were insular and incommunicable" (1851: 49). The fact that pain is experienced individually may make human beings oblivious to the fact that their cry is part of a larger human wail, since, as Ishmael also remarks, everyone is a slave united in a "universal thump" that "sea-captains" may give at their own choice (23-24). As I anticipated in Chapter One,[412] the universal cry portrayed in *Clarel* resembles Alphonso Lingis's description of the "murmur of the world" (1994: 69) reflecting the diversity of the earth and the polyphony of humanity, which communitarianism tries to homogenize, silence, or simply pay deaf ears to, erecting walls that try to leave the

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[411] The vision in this canto, I argue, is connected to the closing cantos of *Clarel* in its expression of the universality of pain. See Section 4 in this chapter.

[412] See page 92.

noise' outside by separating 'insiders' from 'outsiders', an obviously impossible mission because they too are part of the 'noise'. Like the image of universal pain closing the poem as Clarel walks the Via Dolorosa surrounded by fellow-sufferers, the passage from *Clarel* that has just been quoted does not neutralize the voices of humanity: the wail is both singular and plural at the same time, as it is collectively formed and yet sustained by different, individual, cries and sorrows. It will also sound differently according to each ear that pays attention to it. Melville's *Clarel*, in this respect, becomes a vehicle that gives expression to such universal cry. The reality it presents, however, is that, like the solitary sparrow in canto 1.38 whose "lonely cry / No answer gets" (1.38.24-25), characters in the poem remain loners, their individual wails, for the most part, unable to blend with that of others despite their universal connection, as any possibility of intersubjectivity is cut short before it even starts. Yet, instead of neutralizing the different voices into a monophonic cry, the poem affirms the multiplicity that constitutes such wail, in the middle of the fearful immensity of an overpowering desert that may cover with its infinite sands "things all diverse" (3.16.173): the manifold expressions of the varied emotions, questions, concerns, worldviews, wrestlings, etc. that constitute such universal suffering. William Potter speculates that Melville might have been attracted by Schopenhauer's arguments that suffering is shared by all living beings ("Or man or animal", the narrator claims at the end of the poem [4.34.42]) (2004: 144-145).[413] While it remains impossible to prove the impact that the philosopher had upon *Clarel*, I believe that Melville may have possibly agreed with Schopenhauer's claim that

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[413] As a matter of fact, Agath's passive resignation is explicitly –and relevantly, as it connects with the interlacing of human and animal suffering fate in the "Via Crucis" canto, "Cross-bearers all" (4.34.43)– attributed an animal-like dimension. The narrator describes the timoneer's vital attitude immediately after providing his "sketch" (4.3.102)"He ended, and how passive sate: / Nature's own look, which might recall / Dumb patience of mere animal, / Which better may abide life's fate / Than comprehend" (4.3.103-107).

One might indeed consider that the appropriate form of address between man and man ought to be, not "monsieur," sir, but *fellow sufferer*, "compagnon de misères." However strange this may sound it corresponds to the nature of the case, makes us see other men in a true light and reminds us of what are the most necessary of all things: tolerance, patience, forbearance and charity, which each of us needs and which each of us therefore owes. (1851: 50)

By the end of his pilgrimage, Clarel seems to realize that life –like the existence of the tortoises described in the canto "The Island" (4.3.)– is the endurance of "a hundred years of pain / And pilgrimage here to and fro" (4.3.86-87).

3.7. Beyond the Walls, Without the Walls, Against the Walls. Intersubjectivity and the Construction of Universalism

"With the problem of the universe revolving in me, how could I—being left completely to myself at such a thought-engendering altitude,—how could I but lightly hold my obligations to observe all whale-ships' standing orders […]."

(Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick* 1851: 153)

"A call he hears behind, in note
Familiar, being man's; remote
No less, and strange in hollowed tone
As 'twere a voice from out the tomb."

"Lay flat the walls, let in the air,
That folk no more may sicken there!"

"*I, Self, I am the enemy
Of all. From me deliver me,
O Lord.*"

"When comes the sun up over Nile
In cloudlessness, what cloud is cast
O'er Lybia?"

(Herman Melville, *Clarel* 1876: 1.28.77-81; 2.20.90-91;
3.27.123-125; 2.11.55-57)

In the final chapter of *White-Jacket* (1850), the young protagonist, from whose name the novel takes its title, explicitly universalizes the particular context of the man-of-war as a microcosm or representation of the entire world. White-Jacket remarks that human beings constitute their own enemies. In a voice which, in my opinion, seems to fuse with that of the author-narrator, the protagonist claims that human beings stand as obstacles blocking our own possibilities of a happy and peaceful existence. While it is true, White-Jacket claims, that we are oppressed by laws and abused by those who serve the application of the law, we are also "blindly" or unconsciously our own oppressors: "Oh, shipmates and world-mates all round! we the people suffer many abuses. […] Yet the worst of our evils we blindly inflict upon ourselves; our officers can not remove them, even if they would" (*White-Jacket* 1850: 399).[414] Two years later, Melville would similarly write in *Pierre* that "men are jailers; jailers of themselves" (1852: 110), and ultimately have Vine wonder in the 1876 *Clarel* if "it is I / […], I that leave the others, / Or do they leave me?" (3.26.8-10). If, as this dissertation argues, *Clarel* constitutes a defense of the potentiality of intersubjective universalism to the development of more democratic human relationships without, beyond, and against the walls that separate human beings, Melville's 1876 poem also laments human beings' generalized incapacity to break through their personal or communal forms of egocentrisms and one-sided thinking parameters. The aim of the present section is to analyze these two tendencies: the potentiality, on the one hand, and the neutralization of such potentiality, on the other. With this purpose, I shall argue that Melville constructs in *Clarel* a universalist poem-pilgrimage which points to the possibility of universalism as a democratizing political project, grounded on the real interconnection of human beings and developed through the intersubjective, dialogic, collaborative exploration of individuals in their

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[414] Melville's use of the phrase "we the people" is of importance here, as it evokes the very phrase used in the U.S. Constitution to design and claim the rights of Americans.

negotiation of multiple ways to interpret the world. At the same time, the poem also portrays how this potentiality is aborted, as characters continuously set walls that block any possibility to participate in the intersubjective encounters which may pave the way for universalism, and thus remain in their one-sided conceptions of reality. In a similar way as the "deicide town" of Jerusalem (4.29.127) where, the Bible relates, humans killed their possibilities of salvation, happiness, and redemption when they killed Jesus/God,[415] characters in *Clarel* also destroy the possibilities of inter-personal communication and togetherness which may lead both to their personal happiness and the well-being of others (love, friendship, sharing) and to democratic human relationships. The present section analyzes the strategies Melville uses to develop his universalist project (and consequent lament) in *Clarel*. The section is divided into three parts: the first one defends universalism as Melville's life-long political project, and situates *Clarel* within the larger context of Melville's literary production. The second part analyzes *Clarel* as a dialogic poem and emphasizes the crucial importance of intersubjectivity and dialogue to the creation of universalism as a democratizing political process. Finally, the third part investigates the obstacles and difficulties faced by the universalist project *Clarel* articulates. These difficulties expose egocentrism as the main disabler of the development of intersubjective universalism, as the perpetuator of one-sided (as opposed to manysided) thinking, and therefore as the preserver of inter-human walls.

3.7.1. Intersubjective Universalism in Herman Melville's Oeuvre

> "The intense concentration of self in the midst of such a heartless immensity, my God! Who can tell it!"

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[415] This brings us back to the entry in Melville's 1856-1857 journal which I claimed as representative of the author's universalist conception of humanity and literary project, in Section 1 of this chapter.

(*Moby-Dick* 1851: 367)

"That hereditary crowd—gulf-stream of humanity—which, for continuous centuries, has never ceased pouring, like an endless shoal of herring […]."

(*Israel Potter* 1855: 603)

"You sojourn with the Latin set,
I with the Greeks; but well we're met:
All's much the same: many waves, one beach."

(*Clarel* 4.28.95-97)

"About 11 A.M entered the Helespont. […] Little difference in the aspect of the continents. Only Asia looked a sort of used up — superannuated."

(10 December 1856, *Journals* 57)

According to Hilton Obenzinger, Melville's works display "elasticity of mind", a characteristic Obenzinger defines as "the ability to cross over and entertain forbidden arguments, identities, and states of being; the persistence to ask ultimate questions; the compassion to reach out to fellow slaves, savages, renegades, isolatoes, common sailors, 'Cross-bearers all' who feel 'the universal thump'" (2006: 195). According to Obenzinger, Melville displays this capacity at the same time as he "creates literary works that become themselves spiritual exercises in belief and unbelief" (2006: 195). Melville's texts constitute extraordinary microcosms in which the writer explores the democratizing potentiality –and the actual (im)practicability– of universalism and intersubjectivity, as well as the social and ethical possibilities that intersubjective universalism may encourage. As I claimed earlier, Melville did not vindicate an abstract kind of universalism in his texts but a democratizing process that may be developed intersubjectively and which may enable more democratic human relationships. His literary project enacted the dialogism and the type of exercise in plural thinking his characters are, for the most part, incapable of. Such intersubjective universalism is not

only different from, but also critical of, both monolithic universalist[416] and cosmopolitan appropriations –and manipulations, as Melville would examine in *The Confidence-Man*– of Kant's vision of the unity of mankind,[417] since the writer not only parodied with great severity the figure of the cosmopolitan (here resonate again works like *The Confidence-Man* [1857]), but was also well-aware of the dangers of imposing Kantianism as a vision of the world that neutralized, invalidated, and absorbed all others.[418] As Timothy Marr claims in the following remarks on *Moby-Dick*: "By accentuating the worldly diversity of his crew, Melville 'federated' a broad latitude of literary characters that empowered his challenge to the ethnocentric claims of universality held by the supposedly civilized" (2005: 136). It is in this line of thought that I conceive Melville's universalist project, as expressed in the author's oeuvre; a universalism which I regard as intersubjective and which challenges monologic depositions and Meanings. Melville's intersubjective universalism, as I have argued in Chapter One, bears significant parallelisms to the theorizations of contemporary thinkers such as Hannah Arendt, Zygmunt Bauman, Martin Buber, Judith Butler, Jacques Derrida, Ernesto Laclau, Alphonso Lingis, or Jean-Luc Nancy, among others, who have rethought the notion of 'community' and vindicated a plural, de-centralized, anti-essentialist, imperfect, and polyphonic politics that transcends the problematic notions of cosmopolitanism, internationalism, and traditional universalism, and enables

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[416] This kind of universalism is referred to as traditional universalism in Chapter One of this dissertation. See section 2.

[417] The use of the term 'mankind' instead of less gender-biased terms such as 'humankind' aims to reflect the sexism in Kant's thinking, and which permeates his cosmopolitan theorizations, together with his racism. See Section 7.1 in Chapter One.

[418] In her volume *Melville's Art of Democracy* (1995), Nancy Fredricks acknowledges that there are no records of Melville's having read Kant's philosophical works. However, she notes that Melville was familiar with Kant's thought, as proved by six references to Kant in Melville's novels *Mardi* (1849), *Moby-Dick* (1851), and *Pierre* (1852), and by the fact that the author seems to have engaged in discussions of Kant and orther German philosophers with German scholar George Adler during his 1849 trip to England (Fredricks 14). Fredricks analyzes these six references and discussion with Adler in the chapter "Melville's Kant", in her volume.

the development of more democratic interhuman bonds.[419] Melville points in the direction of a universalism that is developed interpersonally through the dialogic, continuous interaction and negotiation of meaning between human beings whose individual interpretations of the world and humanity are in dynamic relationships to one another's. Such universalism may not only make individuals aware of their interconnection and of the fact that they are representative "creature[s] *in human form*" (Melville, 26 January 1857, *Journals* 83), but also allow them to move beyond the limitations of the local and of their own imaginations (their individualities and egocentrisms, communitarian affiliations based on identitarian forms of belonging [nationality, religion, 'race', culture, etc.]), and, as a consequence, of their one-sided ways of thinking in order to develop a global democratic consciousness of the kind Judith Butler (2011) advocates in her defense of a necessary global ethics. In this respect, the intersubjective universalism I interpret as constitutive of Herman Melville's literary production, in general, and *Clarel* (1876), in particular, blurs the boundaries between the local and the global, the personal or individual and the universal, yet without falling into the dangerous neutralization of the particular within the collective. The wonderful yet tragic vision, described by the narrator in *Israel Potter*, of human beings as bricks that are part of, and shaped in order to 'fit' within, an aggregate, exposes, in my opinion, the writer's awareness of universalism as existential (the fact that human beings are connected by their very existence), and, at the same time, his concern that the individual or particular be not absorbed within a particular identity or community: "Are not men built into communities just like bricks into a wall?", wonders the narrator, adding that "Man attains not to the nobility of a brick, unless taken in the aggregate" (1855: 601). This does seem initially to be a frightening image where the

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[419] These thinkers' theorizations, as well as traditional universalism, cosmopolitanism, and internationalism, are analyzed in Chapter One of this dissertation (see Sections 5.1 and 7).

individuality of each brick is lost within the wall, their "ragged edges" (*Billy Budd, Sailor* [ca. 1891:] 517) polished in order to 'fit' within the homogeneous and homogenizing whole; it also seems to anticipate the author's affirmation in his 1858 lecture "Traveling" that such communities "shut" human beings "from the outer world" (421). The narrator underlines the singular character of each brick in the passage, which he continues to enumerate, in the same way as he has created a narrative dedicated to one of these anonymous 'brick-men', and rescued his individuality through the writing of the very story of the neglected and forgotten character of Israel Potter. Images of walls permeate not only *Clarel*, as I analyzed in Section 3.6 of this dissertation, but Melville's literary production in general. It is indeed significant that characters such as Bartleby, in the story with the same title, and Celio, in *Clarel*, should die with their eyes fixed on stony walls, which evoke the interpersonal obstacles they encountered in life and which led them to their tragic endings alone and rejected; it seems also important to note that Pierre would "dash[…] himself in blind fury and swift madness against the wall, and fell dabbling in the vomit of his loathed identity" (1852: 203), as he struggles against his inherited social role as an aristocrat. Walls constitute separating barriers in these different texts. First, the image of the bricks in *Israel Potter* comes back to mind, when readers contemplate how Pierre abandons the social class and role-model into which, as a brick within a wall, he has been 'polished' to fit from childhood.[420] Second, both Celio and Bartleby resist being 'molded' into a particular community-wall. The multiple walls these characters find –or, in the case of Pierre Glendinning, erect– in their efforts to develop an intersubjective connection with their fellow human beings, condemn them to their castaway status and, eventually, to their forlorn death, rejected and abandoned by human society.

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[420] Pierre's mother, for example, teaches Pierre to mark the distance with servants, as a sign of distinction and of the aristocratic class he belongs to by birth (see *Pierre* 25).

I conceive the universal constructed in Melville's works not as a complete and perfect totality, but rather as a dialogic way of relating. This universal is as plural and imperfect as different human beings –and, consequently, different interpretations of reality–have existed, exist, or will exist on the earth. I believe that a deep appreciation of plurality and respect for the mysteries and ungraspable depths of the human soul is shown in Melville's dignifying portrayals of characters whom nineteenth-century average readers and society tended to dismiss as mad or 'weird'. In tireless divings, Melville connects multiple forms of existence and human emotions, emphasizing both the common characteristics of life "Or man or animal, […] / Cross-bearers all" (4.34.42-43), and the specificity of such existence and emotions to each individual, being always extraordinarily respectful of plurality and the uniqueness of each person's struggle. Melville honors the different perspectives that join in democratic conversation, at the same time as he himself acknowledges and works with the difficulties, challenges, and paradoxes posed by the exercise of triggering democratic dialogue, and gives expression to such plurality of personalities, moods, and opinions in his works.

In a letter to Nathaniel Hawthorne written on 1 November 1851, Melville describes his feeling of awe for, and at the same time reluctance toward, what he names "the 'all' feeling", while insisting on the danger of universalizing *a* particular and temporary sensation:

> This 'all' feeling, though, there is some truth in. You must often have felt it, lying on the grass on a warm summer's day. Your legs seem to send out shoots into the earth. Your hair feels like leaves upon your head. This is the *all* feeling. But what plays the mischief with the truth is that men will insist upon the universal application of a temporary feeling or opinion. (*Correspondence* 194)[421]

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[421] The paragraph quoted is part of a letter on Ralph Waldo Emerson. As I have noted in my Introduction to this dissertation, Melville was attracted by Emerson's defense of pantheism yet was skeptical of universalizing such temporary feelings of fusion. See pages 11-12 in this dissertation.

The same danger applies to individual opinions and interpretations which are universalized as monolithic Meanings, as those universalized Meanings are the result of promoting one-sided ways of thinking which admit no other views, because of ignorance ("[…] to the people of the Archipelago the map of Mardi was the map of the world. With the exception of certain islands out of sight and at an indefinite distance, they had no certain knowledge of any isles but their own" [*Mardi* 1849: 838]), or monomanias. Melville is critical of one-sidedness and monolithic thinking in his literary production. In *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade* (1857), Melville develops an intricate critique of one-sided thinking ("I will not prescribe my nature as the law to other natures" [1857: 1029], the cosmopolitan asserts as his guiding principle) precisely on the character of the cosmopolitan, ironically named Frank Goodman, as Melville sarcastically portrays this character's efforts to 'convert' to his philanthropic philosophy those fellow travelers whom he conceives as "misled" in their beliefs ("Now let me set you *on the right track*; let me restore you to trust in human nature" [1857: 1091-1092; my italics], claims the cosmopolitan, as he prepares to cheat the barber). Most importantly, in his preachings of fraternal love and universal communion with humanity, the cosmopolitan is actually a charlatan and a trickster who exploits the love for man he vindicates, in order to manipulate and swindle the confidence of his fellow mortals.[422]

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[422] Noting how Europeans conceived the figure of the cosmopolitan as representative of the longings for economic and political unity and progress of the enlightenment, "a champion of all races and a seeker (like the cosmopolitan Goethe) of the one culture that transcends all" (Bryant 1984: 289), John Bryant contextualizes Melville's creation of the cosmopolitan-confidence-man type as representative of a New World context and mentality which conceived itself as the ideal testing-ground of such enlightened principles: "Wedged between the Atlantic and the wilderness, Melville's contemporaries had little time for civilized salons. Instead, they wrestled with the 'blessings' of liberty. They welcomed monetary speculation, frontier expansion, foreign trade, and religious revival but feared economic collapse, Indian attack, European encroachments, and heterodoxy. Open to all cultures, they were not, however, cultural relativists. The cosmopolitan both appealed to and repulsed Americans, for his freedom in transcending national boundaries and religious affiliations suggested a capacity, if not willingness, to transcend friendship, custom, and law. In Europe the cosmopolitan was an intellectual beacon; on the frontier he was suspected of mendacity, opportunism, and misanthropy. As a citizen of the New World, he shared all creeds but in fact possessed none. His freedom eroded faith. Thus, the cosmopolitan came to represent both the hope and fear of liberty" (289).

Cosmopolitanism is, thus, represented as problematic in Melville's works. *The Confidence-Man* is one of Melville's most direct literary critiques of Kantianism, and this critique is similar to Judith Butler's claim that presenting Kantian cosmopolitanism as the only possible way to articulate universality is already a cultural imposition (1996: 52) defeating the very purpose of creating a truly plural universalism because it implies clinging to a parochial conception of the 'universal' and imposing such parochial conception as the only valid way to think universality. The meaning of universality, Butler claims, cannot be anticipated prior to its creation because universalism may only start being created through the questioning of its existing formulation (48): "A universality that is yet to be articulated […] one for which we have no ready concept, one whose articulations will only follow, if they do, from a contestation of universality at its already imagined borders" (49). Creating a parody which startles readers with the impossibility to find a character in the narrative which they can trust, what would be Melville's last novel published in his lifetime lays bare the discourses of cosmopolitanism and philanthropy, underscoring the hypocritical manipulation of such discourses, which are turned into tools at the service of the very treachery and mischief which they claim to be condemning. In the midst of petitions for universal human love, honesty is missing on board the *Fidèle*, where professional cheaters –the cosmopolitan being one– abuse people's confidence. The speeches of the cosmopolitan Frank Goodman take such inflated tone and wordings that they immediate provoke the readers' critical distance from the very philanthropy these speeches profess:

> Is the sight of humanity so very disagreeable to you then? Ah, I may be foolish but for my part, in all its aspects, I love it. Served up à la Pole, or à la Moor, à la Ladrone, or à la Yankee, that good dish, man, still delights me; or rather is man a wine I never weary of comparing and sipping; wherefore I am a pledged cosmopolitan […], a taster of races; in all his vintages, smacking my lips over this racy creature, man, continually. (1857: 982)

Melville's description of such 'cannibalistic' philanthropy in the previous passage is fitting to the novel as a whole, as Goodman 'devours' as a predator the confidence he manages his fellow travelers to deposit in him for his own interests. Melville analyzes in Goodman how the confidence-man blends within the cosmopolitan type. As John Bryant has argued, Melville studied how the cosmopolitan's rootless, traveling, and apparently charitable nature could also be the potential for trickery and cheat (1984: 289):

> Unprejudiced yet unprincipled, the cosmopolitan has no single calling or devotion, no dominant passion except himself. He has no family or nation, no identity beyond a superficial egotism. A man of many cultures, he has in fact no culture, and therefore does not share with us any of the predictable patterns of discrimination which make one culture distinct from another. Like Goodman, whose cosmopolitan "sort of talk … [and] dress" (p. 193) instantly puts the barber on guard, Nolte,[423] by dint of his cosmopolitan eclecticism, cannot be trusted. (Bryant 287)

Yet if Melville analyzes with skepticism the figure of the cosmopolitan, interlacing its apparently positive intentions and global personality with mischievousness and deceit, he is also critical of imposing Kantianism as the only possible way to conceive universality. Instead, the political project in Melville's literary production articulates a conception of universalism which exposes the interlacing between the local and the global, the particular and the universal. As has been argued, this universalism, the potentiality of which is intimately connected with the (im)possibilities of democracy and

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[423] Bryant argues that Vincent Nolte might have been a source after which Melville fashioned Frank Goodman in *The Confidence-Man*. See Bryant 1984. Also relevant is Bryant's 1987 article, which analyzes Goodman in relation to a millennial cosmopolite named Lorenzo Dow, which might have been another possible source influencing the characterization of Melville's Goodman. Bryant describes the religious cosmopolite thus: "For these cosmopolites, tolerance for religious diversity replaces the traditionalist's broader love of cultural diversity, and the anticipation of a New Jerusalem with its institution of divine government parallels the traditional cosmopolitan goal of world government. The shared end of universal brotherhood in the religious context derives, then, from revelation and Christ's providential return rather than from any secular or humanistic impulse. In short, the religious cosmopolite is a citizen of *this* world preparing for citizenship in a world to come" (1987: 23).

democratization, is a process created intersubjectively through the very dialogue of human beings who are different. In a way similar to Butler's line of thought, the universalism Melville creates in his works is conditioned by its own provisional nature, imperfection, permanent lack of wholeness, and even exposure to its own dismantlement in the very dynamic dialogic process by which it may be developed through the contact, negotiation, contestation and, above all, expression of different interpretations of the world: from Taji and his fellow travelers' multiple encounters throughout different isles in *Mardi*, or from the diversity in the national origin of the sailors aboard the *Pequod* in *Moby-Dick* and of the *Neversink* in *White-Jacket*, from the variety of passengers on board the *Fidèle* in *The Confidence-Man*, to the plurality of (even antagonistic) perspectives in Melville's Civil War poems in *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War*, or to the global microcosm of Jerusalem and the Holy Land in *Clarel*, and to the different stories of sailors in *John Marr and Other Sailors*, from the telling of the story of Bartleby in "Bartleby, the Scrivener", or of the slave revolt in "Benito Cereno, or of the Portuguese sailors in "The 'Gees", or of the pale maids at the paper mill in "Tartarus of Maids", among many other instances in Melville's oeuvres. Melville's works constitute universalist texts which expose, bring to dialogue, and contest worldviews and interpretations of reality as varied and diverse as each of the characters inhabiting them.[424] Aware of the fallacy of believing in a monolithic and stable 'Truth' or Universal 'Meaning', the texts develop plural thinking, testing, analyzing, evaluating, problematizing, sometimes contesting each of the interpretations they expose. Hence, the conclusion that there are no conclusions but questions leading to further question(ing)s in Melville's works. As Ahab meditates in *Moby-Dick*:

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[424] Some of these works are densely populated. According to Newton Arvin, *Clarel* has the largest number of characters in comparison to Melville's other works, including *Moby-Dick* (1950: 276).

> There is no steady unretracing progress in this life; we do not advance through fixed gradations, and at the last one pause:—through infancy's unconscious spell, boyhood's thoughtless faith, adolescence' doubt (the common doom), then scepticism, then disbelief, resting at last in manhood's pondering repose of If. But once gone through, we trace the round again; and are infants, boys, and men, and Ifs eternally. Where lies the final harbor, whence we unmoor no more? In what rapt ether sails the world, of which the weariest will never weary? Where is the foundling's father hidden? Our souls are like those orphans whose unwedded mothers die in bearing them: the secret of our paternity lies in their grave, and we must there to learn it. (*Moby-Dick* 1851: 430)

Melville noted not only that 'Truth' is fragmented into different interpretations of reality, but that perhaps there is no Truth at all: "And perhaps, after all, there is *no* secret", Melville would tell Hawthorne in correspondence ([16th?] April 1851, *Correspondence* 186). The fear of nothingness haunts Ishmael's meditations in *Moby-Dick* in the same way that it would haunt Melville's meditations in contemplation of the pyramids in his 1856-57 journal; the fear, Charles Olson has argued,[425] "that the great cosmic mystery may well be that there is no mystery, that there is no transcendent meaning of any sort, no Truth" (qtd. in Meltzer 2005: 147). It is in this awareness of the constant contestation and provisionality of meaning, and perhaps of its total vacancy, that the intersubjective universalism in Herman Melville's literary production is constituted as a political process which, I argue, establishes a dialogue with each textually available interpretation of the world and conception of reality. This dialogue is not incompatible with the undeniable fact that a person's access to different versions of reality will always remain incomplete, that Truth may not exist, and that any universalist dialogue will never be fully universalist because it will always be limited by the particular participants who construct it (and, paradoxically, also exposed to its destruction precisely due to its dependency on human nature, in which, as Melville reminds us, "Evil and good […] braided play" [*Clarel* 4.4.27-28]). Taken as a whole, Melville's

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[425] The original source is Charles Olson's *Call Me Ishmael* (London: Jonathan Cape Editions, 1947).

literary production is polyphonic in the diversity of voices and worldviews to which it gives expression: slave-owners, lawyers and representatives of the middle/upper classes in general (the lawyer in "Bartleby", the bachelors in "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids", Glaucon and the Banker in *Clarel*); representatives of law and order (Captain Vere in *Billy Budd, Sailor*, Captain Claret in *White-Jacket*, Captain Ahab in *Moby-Dick*, the Union government and army in *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War*, King Charles III in *Israel Potter*, the kings in the isles of Mardi in *Mardi*, etc.); philosophers, preachers, religious leaders and representatives, intellectual charlatans (Plotinus Plinlimmon and Revered Mr. Falsgrave in *Pierre*, the Rabbi in *Clarel*, the Chaplain in *White-Jacket*, Father Mapple in *Moby-Dick*, the cosmopolitan in *The Confidence-Man*, etc.); maniacs and 'mad'men (Ahab, Cyril, Habbibi, or Nathan); national icons and anonymous fighters (Benjamin Franklin, Paul Jones or Ethan Allen, and Israel in *Israel Potter*; Grant, McClellan, Mosby, Sherman or Stonewall Jackson and the anonymous Confederate and Union soldiers in *Battle-Pieces*, etc.); non-white characters (Abdon, Belex, or Djalea in *Clarel*, Annatoo or Samoa in *Mardi*, Queequeg, Pip, Fedallah, etc. in *Moby-Dick*, the Portuguese sailors in "The 'Gees", Hunilla in "The Chola Widow", Babo or Atufal in "Benito Cereno", Delly in *Pierre*, etc.); slaves (Babo, Atufal and the rest of the slaves in "Benito Cereno", Jane Jackson in *Battle-Pieces*); socially oppressed individuals, outcasts, exiles, loners, and above all, human endurers (Israel Potter, Bartleby, Hunilla, Marianna in "The Piazza", Agath, White-Jacket, anonymous crowds [e.g., the London crowds in *Israel Potter*] and maids ["The Tartarus of Maids"], John Marr in *John Marr and Other Sailors*, Billy in *Billy Budd, Sailor*, Celio, Agath, Ungar, Mortmain, Don Hannibal, Nehemiah, etc. in *Clarel*, Isabel, Lucy and Pierre Glendinning in *Pierre*, Ishmael, the *Pequod* sailors, and even Ahab in *Moby-Dick*; animal endurers [Hunilla's dogs, Nehemiah's donkey, Glaucon's horse, the tortoises in the island

described by Agath]), are perhaps the more representative.[426] This diversity of characters populating Melville's works –representative of the diversity of the 'human stock' that the writer 'collected' and resolved to fictionalize–, constitutes a fundamental basis to the creation of his universalist literary project, as the author juxtaposes and submits to evaluation the worldviews these characters represent and also underlines the manysidedness of humanity and, yet, interconnected fates and interdependence: oppressors and oppressed, agents of violence and victims, and, most of them, sufferers in one way or another.

Melville's works exhibit a universalist understanding of humanity that underlines the connectedness of human beings and transcends, even destabilizes, the separation between the local or particular and the global or universal. At the same time, Melville rescues from oblivion the "Dead letters" of humanity with his works (painfully aware that his own literary project will possibly become in itself a 'dead letter'):

> […] Bartleby had been a subordinate clerk in the Dead Letter Office at Washington […]. Dead letters! does it not sound like dead men? Conceive a man by nature and misfortune prone to a pallid hopelessness, can any business seem more fitted to heighten it than that of continually handling these dead letters, and assorting them for the flames? For by the cart-load they are annually burned. Sometimes from out the folded paper the pale clerk takes a ring:—the finger it was meant for, perhaps, moulders in the grave; a bank-note sent in swiftest charity:—he whom it would relieve, nor eats nor hungers any more; pardon for those who died despairing; hope for those who died unhoping; good tidings for those who died stifled by unrelieved calamities. On errands of life, these letters speed to death.
> Ah Bartleby! Ah humanity! ("Bartleby, the Scrivener" 1853: 98)

Showing an extraordinary concern for individuals who are victims of the sociopolitical, economic, and also national(ist) apparatuses which both generate and perpetuate social injustice, Melville's works reveal the uniqueness of each of these individuals as the

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[426] In some instances, I have placed the same character in more than one group (e.g., Israel Potter, Hunilla, Babo, etc.), since the 'categories' above overlap in many cases.

author fictionalizes them and places them at the heart of their narratives, writing literary 'monuments' which both remember and honor individualities violently neglected and obliterated by such oppressive forces.[427] At the same time that they engage in such process of individualization and remembrance, Melville's works connect these characters to a universal community of grievers.[428] As Michael Jonik notes in his discussion of *Clarel*, the population of pilgrims-travelers in the poem is not much different from that of Melville's other works:

> Much like the "mariners, renegades, and castaways" who are "federated along the keel" of the *Pequod* (NN *MD* 117), Clarel's cavalcade is another "wrangling crew" (NN *Clarel* 1.44.27), a reprise of the Anacharsis Clootz procession of universal humanity but with its attendant animals. In "Via Crucis," the collective form of the Whitsuntide procession allows for a blurring of the human and animal […]. (2011: 72-73)

Melville's works engage in the task of doing justice to a representative group of those oppressed and forgotten, "Or man or animal" (4.34.42). At the same time, the author's respect for, and understanding of the impossibility to know, his own characters is humble: respectful of his characters' privacy, the author acknowledges the impossibility of putting in words the complexities of the human heart, and he offers instead sketchy portrayals of the personalities of the characters inhabiting his works. A number of texts, written at different stages throughout Melville's career, illustrate this point. Portraying the narrative of an ex-revolutionary hero who dies forgotten and neglected by his country and compatriots, *Israel Potter: His Fifty Years of Exile* (1855), despite its nationalist plot, displays a global narrative consciousness that transcends the boundaries of time and space, and points to a conception of the world beyond the nation-state. In the same way as Billy in the novella *Billy Budd, Sailor* over thirty years later (which would

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[427] These texts, I believe, can be interpreted as dedicated to the characters that are drawn in the narratives and which, very often, the very titles to these pieces honor.

[428] See the analysis of the "Epilogue" to *Clarel* in section 4 of the present chapter for an example of how Melville connects such "varied forms of fate", both human and animal.

be left unfinished in the author's desk at his death and not published until 1924), Israel

is a subject shaped by, and entangled within, nationalist forces he cannot control or

escape. Despite presenting the life-story of a particular individual, in the same way as

"Bartleby, the Scrivener" (1853) or "The Chola Widow", to mention but a few, the

story fuses the particular with the universal, as the narrator emphasizes, at many

moments throughout the narrative, Israel's existence within a larger human context that

transcends nation-state boundaries, pointing to a universalist conception of humankind,

as contextualized and specific –the particular case of Israel (or Bartleby, or Hunilla, or

Ishmael, or Clarel…) in the present moment– as it is transnational and even

transhistorical: "Here, in this very darkness, centuries ago, hearts, human as his

[Israel's], had mildewed in despair; limbs, robust as his own, had stiffened in immovable

torpor", "And as that tide in the water swept all craft on, so a like tide seemed hurrying

all men, all horses, all vehicles on the land" (1855: 505; 604). These passages from *Israel

Potter* already anticipate the universal yearning and human cries Melville would give

expression to in *Clarel*. They also resemble, in my opinion, the human tide that Clarel

joins at the end of the poem-pilgrimage, and which connects the young student's

particular pain to a universal grief that evokes the human wail of souls "in endless

dearth" described earlier in the poem (*Clarel* 1.24.87).[429] Also in *Israel Potter*, Israel's

individual status as a marginalized, even invisible, outcast is connected to the fate of

"tormented humanity" (604), as well as to the biblical narrative of the Israelites'

wandering in the desert seeking the promised land after having escaped from bondage

in Egypt (the name of the protagonist evidently bears ironic echoes of the mythical

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[429] Some of Melville's works significantly end with images of grieving individuals joining a universal procession of sufferers: Clarel's joining of the "Cross-bearers" in the Via Crucis, at the end of the poem, mounted on Nehemiah's donkey; Hunilla's disappearance into Payra (Peru) riding a donkey; Israel's becoming a part of the London crowds, a "gulf-stream of humanity—which, for continuous centuries, has never ceased pouring, like an endless shoal of herring, over London Bridge" (*Israel Potter* 603).

'chosen people' and 'promised land' of the Bible). Like Clarel's, Israel's suffering is not exceptional: "Neither was our adventurer the least among the sufferers" but one among "this sudden influx of rivals, destitute, honest men like himself" (607). Like he does to Clarel, Melville elevates and individualizes Israel at the same time that he keeps him connected to his suffering fellow mortals, some of whom Melville, in turn, individualizes in other works. This prevents, thus, that characters such as Clarel, Bartleby, Hunilla, Billy Budd, Ishmael, Babo, Queequeg, John Marr, Marianne, etc. be forgotten within a "last whelming sea" (*Clarel* 4.35.33) of dead letters in irrecoverable losses to humanity.

Melville locates humanity in anonymous, rejected, forgotten, and unhomely rovers who suffer and are, alone, at a loss: "Humanity, thou strong thing, I worship thee, not in the laurelled victor, but in this vanquished one", exclaims the narrator of "The Chola Widow" (1854: 127), an affirmation which, I believe, captures the political project of individualization and remembrance of Herman Melville's literary production. In a similar way Melville had Ishmael assert in *Moby-Dick* that "The truest of all men was the Man of Sorrows, and the truest of all books is Solomon's, and Ecclesiastes is the fine hammered steel of woe. 'All is vanity.' ALL." (1851: 376). It is significant that Melville's suffering characters often recur to the ocean or the desert as spaces of meditation:

> […] a hammock on the ocean is the asylum for the generous distressed. The ocean brims with natural griefs and tragedies; and into that watery immensity of terror, man's private grief is lost like a drop. (*Israel Potter* 1855: 437)

> Man sprang from deserts: at the touch
> Of grief or trial overmuch,
> On deserts he falls back at need;
> Yes, 'tis the bare abandoned home
> Recalleth then. (Rolfe in *Clarel* 1876: 2.16.106-110)

Oceans, deserts, and also crowds pull every private grief within a universal earthly wail of the kind the narrator would describe in *Clarel* (see 1.24.86-88). Melville's project is to engage in the individualization of the uniqueness of each wail, without losing connection of each to a universal grief. The well-known lamentation of the narrator at the end of "Bartleby, the Scrivener" –"Ah Bartleby! Ah humanity!" (2001: 98)– captures the intermingling of both individual and universal grieving cries; while Hunilla's empathic capacity to incorporate the pain of other beings into her own, out of the love she feels for the fellow creatures, fuses these different experiences of pain into a universal continuum that is, at the same time, part of the individual: "To Hunilla, pain seemed so necessary, that pain in other beings, though by love and sympathy made her own, was unrepiningly to be borne. A heart of yearning in a frame of steel. A heart of earthly yearning, frozen by the frost which falleth from the sky" (1854: 133).

Yet, at the same time that Melville underlines the interconnection of the particular and the universal, he also reflects characters' impossibility to conceive such interconnection. Pointing to the democratizing potentiality of universalism to human relationships, Melville portrays the eventual withdrawal of most of his characters within their respective individual subjectivities, specific communities, and one-sided ways of thinking. These characters, thus, perpetuate a reality of disconnection, reinforce separation and divisions between different human beings and groups, and cling to monolithic worldviews. Although texts express the democratizing potentiality of intersubjectivity and the real universality of human beings, visions of interpersonal separation impose themselves recurrently and harshly in Melville's literary works in a way similar to how the crew of the *Fidèle*, in *The Confidence-Man* –Melville's parody of cosmopolitanism and questioning of national progress–, first an indistinguishable

whole, is 'dismembered' into groups, parts, pairs, and single individuals in a few lines: "[…] the crowd, as is usual, began in all parts to break up from a concourse into various clusters or squads, which in some cases disintegrated again into quartettes, trios, and couples, or even solitaires; involuntarily submitting to that natural law which ordains dissolution equally to the mass, in time to the member" (1857: 847). This dismemberment may be read positively, as a process by which the different 'parts' that are invisible within the crowd are given visibility, yet also as an image of human segregation (perhaps evoking as well the national divisions of the United States four years before the start of the Civil War, at the time *The Confidence-Man* was written and published). Similar to this image of intersubjective separation, yet in a reverse way, is the individual's efforts to seek the sociality of other individuals and join in the couples, trios, quartets and larger units of the crowd. This process is parodied in Israel Potter's attempts, in the homonymous novel, to join the different societies on board the English ship where he unexpectedly finds himself after equivocally jumping off the *Ariel*: "'Boys, is this the way you treat a watch-mate,' demanded Israel reproachfully, '[…] Come, let's be sociable. Spin us a yarn, one of ye. Meantime, rub my back for me, another,' and very confidently he leaned against his neighbor. 'Lean off me, will ye?' roared his friend, shoving him away" (*Israel Potter*: 579). Israel's socializing is intended to win him an identity within the different classes of the ship. The separation between Israel and the crowd to which he cannot belong is masterfully made evident by the narrator's description of the sailors circling the stranger in amazement: "[…] Others began to surround the two. Presently, quite a circle was formed. Sailors from distant parts of the ship drew near. One, and then another, and another, declared that they, in their quarters, too, had been molested by a vagabond claiming fraternity" (580). Rejected by all, Israel cannot tell who he is when he is asked: "'Who the deuce *are* you?'

[...]. 'Where did you come from? What's your business? Where are you stationed? What's your name? Who are you, any way? How did you get here? and where are you going?'" (581-582).[430] Even though Israel's efforts to 'fraternize' are portrayed in a comical way, the rejection of his interpersonal advances to join the different societies in the ship stages how the possibility to develop intersubjectivity (and, therefore, to develop universalism) is resisted by characters who withdraw to their own private societies and selves. This is a recurrent motif in Herman Melville's writings, of which *Clarel*, in its depiction of characters who fence up their egos and minds with hermetic walls that prevent any possibility of developing an intersubjective relationship with other characters, proves a good example.[431] It is these walls that prevent human beings from knowing one another, therefore perpetuating the separations between them. The potentiality of intersubjectivity, in such cases, remains undeveloped, and so does the possibility of democratic and democratizing relationships. Despite such containment, however, the potentiality is still there. Melville shows us the democratizing effects of the positive exploration of such potentiality in works such as *Moby-Dick*, where Ishmael and Queequeg's intersubjectivity abolishes the (racial, religious, cultural) barriers by which the characters feel initially separated, and enables a process by which Ishmael, first repulsed by the 'savage' Queequeg, is eventually capable of regarding that 'savage' as his equal, and Queequeg's worlviews as equivalent to his own. It is relevant that Melville only 'rescues' Ishmael and Queequeg's friendship from the self-destructive

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[430] Melville's emphasis in this passage is on identity, as shown by his decision to italicize the different forms of the verb 'be' that appear in Israel's conversation with the ship's Captain. Israel's final exclamation here also relates, in the general context of the novel, to the protagonist's having been neglected by, and to his struggle with, the uncontrollable forces of fate, which in pushing him, like a puppet, to different adventures, do not seem to bring him the peace he needs.

[431] For an analysis of how the possibilities of intersubjectivity are neutralized in *Clarel*, see Section 3.7.3 in this chapter.

crusade of the *Pequod*; Queequeg's coffin being the only thing Ishmael can hold on to by the end of the novel, and which preserves his life.[432]

Most of Melville's characters, however, die alone and rejected, the victims of the thick walls they encountered in their efforts to "fraternize" or which they erected against other characters' efforts to establish an intersubjective relationship with them. Pointing to the potentially democratizing effects of intersubjectivity, Melville places in interpersonal relationships the possibility of universalism while he shows how this potentiality is continuously aborted. Aware of both the possibilities and the difficulties, Melville provides no 'magical recipe' to the eliciting of democracy, yet envisions in intersubjective universalism a political project which may pave the way for plural thinking, as well as for more fluid and egalitarian human relationships, based on human connectedness, which may be transformative on a(n inter)personal level. Melville's works, the present section has argued, defend universalism for the creation of democratic human relationships and thinking. The way is open for us, readers, to join the dialogue and contribute in the project, which is where the source of the political is placed.

3.7.2. Weaving Universalism: Intersubjectivity and the Collaborative Construction of 'Meaning'

> "For all these reasons, then, any way you may look at it, you must needs conclude that the great Leviathan is that one creature in the world which must remain unpainted to the last. True, one portrait may hit the mark much nearer than another, but none can hit it with any very considerable degree of exactness. So there is no earthly

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[432] Even though Queequeg is dead by the end of *Moby-Dick*, it is relevant that 'he' should posthumously 'emerge from the sea' in the form of his coffin to save Ishmael as if fulfilling his 'wedding' promise to "gladly die for me [Ishmael], if need should be" (63). This will be an important difference with the final image of the swimmer rising from the deep in *Clarel*, as the young character will be alone with nobody to help him endure the hardships of existence. See the analysis of this episode in Section 4 of this chapter.

way of finding out precisely what the whale looks like. And the only mode in which you can derive even a tolerable idea of his living contour, is by going a whaling yourself; but by so doing, you run no small risk of being eternally stove and sunk by him. Wherefore, it seems to me you had best not be too fastidious in your curiosity touching this Leviathan."

(Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick* 1851: 240)

"Deep, deep, and still deep and deeper must we go, if we would find out the heart of a man; descending into which is as descending a spiral stair in a shaft, without any end, and where that endlessness is only concealed by the spiralness of the stair, and the blackness of the shaft."

(Herman Melville, *Pierre* 1852: 336)

"Between the idea / And the reality / […] / Falls the Shadow."
"Between the potency / And the existence / […] / […] / Falls the Shadow"

(T.S. Eliot, "The Hollow Men", 1925)

a) "To try to realize the unreal!": Dialogue

As has been argued in Chapter One,[433] intersubjectivity resides in the collaborative development of communication and of the exploration of 'meaning' which are central to the creation of universalism as a process with a democratizing potentiality that may break through the walls separating human beings. This intersubjective universalism, as I have named it in this dissertation, is created through a dynamic dialogue that de-centralizes and de-transcendentalizes 'Truth' and generates multiple interpretive possibilities. This dialogic process, which, I claim, constitutes a political process in itself, moves away from pseudo-communicative exchanges which in actuality silence other participants' perspectives in order to assert one interpretation of reality as a universal Truth. It is a process that aims to liberate the mind from 'somnambulizing' one-sidednesses and make it embrace plural, less monolithic and

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[433] See Section 8.1 in Chapter One.

more relational, types of thinking. It is in the intersubjective space created and continuously shaped through the communicative encounters between human beings, who are different and yet similar and interconnected, that the possibility of dialogue is invested and, consequently, the possibility of developing intersubjectivity and universalism.

Intersubjectivity, however, cannot be generated when any one potential participant withdraws into individualism. In these cases, the potentiality of intersubjectivity is cancelled before it starts: without dialogue individuals cannot cultivate –perhaps not even become aware of– the *inter* space or the space *between* (what philosopher Martin Buber terms the 'interhuman') connecting them to other human beings, and in which the intersubjective bonding may be potentially created that may be conducting to narrowing the gap between different human beings and their worldviews. As Hannah Arendt remarks, dialogue is the instrument that human beings have in order to make sense of the world together, and it paradoxically is the vehicle that both connects and separates individuals.[434] As I have argued in Chapter One, intersubjectivity makes the local and the global, the particular and the universal, converge in the individual: on the one hand, both I and my 'others' are different 'I's, all of us individuals infused by different particular (inescapable) social, economic, political, religious, ideological contexts, as well as permeated by particular personal characteristics and life-experiences which are constitutive of our existences as human beings; on the other hand, both I and my 'others' may represent not only individual 'others' to our different selves, but also 'global others' due to our different nationalities, cultural, racial or ethnic backgrounds, set of religious, political and ideological beliefs, etc. This (con)fusion of limits and boundaries –the impossibility to determine where the

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[434] See Arendt's "On Humanity in Dark Times: Thoughts about Lessing" (1955).

individual ends and the universal begins–, foregrounds the mutual constituency and actual inseparability of the particular and the universal, in a democratic exercise whereby, through the development of intersubjectivity, human beings may become aware of their interconnection and of their equivalence within a universalist system that transcends the boundaries of nationality. This process asserts the individuality of other individuals as well as my own, at the same time that it exposes our different individualities to the possibility of reciprocally and dynamically altering and being altered by one another. Through this process of intersubjective communication the distance separating human beings may be abridged in breaking through the different interpersonal walls that 'lock' human beings within themselves or a certain community, and render them blind to other human groups and their worldviews. This process may liberate individuals from one-sided views of humanity and monolithic conceptions of 'Meaning', in their embracing of a universal that, as I have claimed, is no totality but a "site of multiple significations" (Zerilli 1998: 8), developed through the continuous, dynamic interaction of different human beings and their worldviews beyond the 'walls' that separate them.

As has been argued, Melville's universalist poem *Clarel* gives expression to a number of characters representative of the diversity of humanity and of its multiplicity of worldviews, in a global and mythical context paradoxically characterized by the many 'walls' that segregate human beings into different identity-based groups that conceal their true interconnection. Critics such as Stan Goldman have defined *Clarel* as a "chorus of voices", not only because of the numberless conversations Melville generates in the poem but also because of its inclusion of chants, poems, inscriptions, drinking songs, funereal laments, theatrical representations, etc. (1993: 97). The poem aims to prove that dialogue (among characters in the text but also between the text and

the readers that may unfold the potentiality of Melville's universalist project) is the central textual mechanism upon which the democratizing potentiality of intersubjectivity rests. Consequently, dialogue is the instrument by which universalism is constructed in the text, as it brings together the multiplicity of worldviews and interpretations of 'meaning' that each of the characters is made to represent. Dialogue, therefore, is a crucial device to the poem-pilgrimage *Clarel* constructs. Melville's use of dialogue in *Clarel*, and his choice of an omniscient narrator that narrates the pilgrims' Holy Land excursions and both places in dialogue and submits to evaluation the worldviews and ideas these characters represent, resembles Plato's use of the Socratic dialogue,[435] a textual form (cf. essays or treatises) which deconstructs one-sided thinking by allowing the philosopher, characters and readers to debate issues of their common concern in an ongoing, dynamic, questioning, negotiation, and creation of 'meaning' which is the result of their collaboration.[436] This literary and philosophical form places several characters side by side and allows them to express their different points of view. As James P. Zappen claims, the Socratic dialogue

> […] is a polyphonic creating and testing of ideas in which the author participates along with the characters and the readers and in which novelistic devices such as parody and hybridization contribute to the creative development of the ideas. It is also a carnivalesque testing and contesting of ideas for the purpose of both opposing official languages and cultures and also, in the process, transforming and perhaps even redeeming them. (2004: 51)

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[435] In classical Greek, the term 'dialogue' is a result of the combination of 'logos' (speech, language, etc.) with the prefix 'dia-' (across, through). In its etymological sense, 'dialogue' thus means 'to speak across', indicating that language, through which 'meaning' is created, 'travels' across the participants involved in the dialogic encounter. The word dialogue therefore, refers to a fluid exchange, testing, and contesting of meaning, collaboratively, and based on the respectful incorporation of the other. As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak defines it, dialogue is thus an "embrace, an act of love" (Spivak, Landry, and MacLean 1996: 269-270).

[436] As a matter of fact, Vincent Kenny explicitly refers to "Platonic dialogue" as the form through which "Melville allows the characters to speak their own minds" (1973: 120).

Assuming the task of a *didaskalos* who, rather than imposing or preaching knowledge, awakens or stimulates thinking in those who want to learn from and with him, Plato never appears in his dialogues,[437] confronting readers directly with the varied, often antagonistic, interpretations that each of the characters in the text provides for a specific question; this technique invites readers to become independent thinkers by encouraging them to build their own opinions from the perspectives presented in the text. Christopher J. Rowe, among other scholars, has noted how, by making use of dialogue as a rhetorical mechanism fostering learning, Plato assumes the role of mediator with his readers, therefore avoiding to dictate his philosophical teachings and encouraging a democratic process of collaborative learning (2007: 31-32). William Braswell points out that Plato is the most frequently mentioned philosopher in Melville's works (1943: 14). As it is evident from a letter Melville wrote to his friend Evert Duyckinck in April 1849, Melville owned a copy of Plato's *Phaedon: or, A Dialogue on the Immortality of the Soul*, which he seems to have read during the summer of 1849.[438] However, Melville stretches the possibilities of Socratic dialogue by transcending the kind of points of view that limited Socratic dialogue in its classical format, that is, those of male and upper-class citizens in the Greek polis, therefore excluding women, 'barbarians',[439] slaves, etc. Melville incorporates into the polyphonic conversation he

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[437] Some scholars have assumed that Plato's own opinions are concealed behind Socrates's. See Kahn 1999: xiv.

[438] "I bought a set of [Peter] Bayle's Dictionary the other day, & on my return to New York intend to lay the great old folios side by side & go to sleep on them thro' the summer, with the Phaedon in one hand, & Tom Brown in the other" (*Correspondence* 128-129). According to Beverly R. Voloshin, Melville was also familiar with Plato's *The Symposium*, which he might have known through George Burges's translation, first through Taylor and Sydenham's edition of Plato's works in 1848, and a few years later, through Henry Bohn's scholarly edition (Voloshin 2011: 18).

[439] The etymology of the word 'barbarian' is located in the Greek word *bárbaros* (stranger, foreign). The Greek polis, in particular, and Greek democracy, in general, was based on a binary way of conceiving the world and politics which reinforced a segregating view of humanity based on 'Us' vs. 'Them' distinctions, 'citizenship' vs. 'foreign'/outsider, normative groups (men, upper classes) vs. subordinated citizens (women, lower classes, slaves, etc.).

creates in *Clarel*, as in many other of his works,[440] characters who are, for the most part and in many senses, outcasts and isolatoes of diverse nationalities, ethnicities, religious beliefs, and cultural backgrounds, since, as the narrator tenderly exclaims, pondering on Hunilla (the protagonist in Sketch Nine of *The Encantadas*, "The Chola Widow", by which the character of Agath in *Clarel* is most probably inspired[441]): "Humanity, thou strong thing, I worship thee, not in the laurelled victor, but in this vanquished one" (1854: 127). *Clarel* gives voice to those rejected by society in an effort to individualize each of these outcasts and engage in a respectful analysis of the mysteries of the human soul which, Melville knows, is a delusion to believe can be completely reached. At the same time, the writer-poet is aware of the impossibility to know even the characters he creates and, more generally, the complexities of the human heart: "But if in vain / One tries to comprehend a man, / How think to sound God's deeper heart!" (2.32.110-111), exclaims the narrator musing upon Clarel's challenge to integrate the different views and attitudes exposed by his fellow travelers Rolfe, Derwent, and Margoth in the preceding canto. Far from neutralizing his characters' subjectivity and agency behind a monolithic, dominant narrative that may oversimplify their personalities and silence their voices, the author treats them with utmost respect. He allows his characters to express their opinions and personalities, and often constructs literary monuments to his anonymous, eccentric, humble, working-class, obliterated individuals. Aware that he cannot fully know the heart of his characters, Melville will often point out, as Stan Goldman notes, that "human nature is above understanding" (1993: 108). As a matter of fact, William Potter has remarked that, like Vine or Rolfe, Clarel is without a biographical or personal past (2004: 52). As Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock argues in his analysis of Melville's "Bartleby, the Scrivener", to believe that one can tell the story of

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[440] See Section 3.7.1 in this chapter.
[441] See subsection "iii" in "b" of 3.7.3.

the other, that it is possible to reduce his or her 'essence' in a singular narrative, is a certain act of injustice because any pretensions to 'explain' the other will impose one view of him or her that will inevitably be incomplete, partial, and biased because it will be permeated by the very partiality and limitations of the looker/interpreter. "Bartleby", Weinstock claims, "structures a desire for meaning that never can be fulfilled"; yet, if it is impossible to reach on to (the) meaning (of the other), he wonders, how can one tell the story of the other, in this case, of the eccentric scrivener Bartleby? how can one do justice to an other that cannot be *known*, and what does it mean to do justice to the other? (2003: 23). Weinstock's reply to these interconnected questions is that doing justice to the other implies recognizing the impossibility of doing justice to the other and still assume such a responsibility, knowing that there will always be a 'strangeness' that cannot be domesticated because the other will never be 'known': "Ultimately, the terrible and terrifying responsibility lies in the *attempt* at the telling of the impossible story[,] and justice is approached through the recognition of this impossibility. Indeed, a certain *injustice* lies in believing that one has told the story of the other, captured the essence of the other in a singular narrative" (Weinstock 39). Weinstock bases his analysis of "Bartleby" on Derrida's claim that the impossibility of justice needs to be conceived as a call to action rather than as an impeding or paralyzing obstacle (40).[442] According to this view, Weinstock argues that the story of Bartleby succeeds in failing to tell the story of Bartleby and that this impossible yet imperative task of telling what cannot be told constitutes the moment of ethics. His conclusion is that Melville does justice to Bartleby by telling a story about Bartleby that does not try to neutralize Bartleby's strangeness or pretends to 'know' the scrivener, but which ultimately and respectfully leaves Bartleby to himself, recognizes his 'strangeness', and mourns him in

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[442] Weinstock quotes Derrida's essay "Force of Law" (1992), included in the Bibliography at the end of this dissertation.

an inscription-narrative that expands the epitaph-like title-naming of the eccentric character, and allows Bartleby, despite his silence, to suffuse the lines of the narrator's story (40). Weinstock's reading of "Bartleby", in my opinion, can be applied to Melville's construction of characters in *Clarel*, which not only imbues characters such as Mortmain, Ungar, Celio, Agath, Cyril, Habbibi or Nehemiah, among others, with heroic dignity, despite their different –in many cases self-annihilating and violence-generating– manias and many 'weirdnesses',[443] but also avoids falling into a one-sided portrayal of those characters. The poem is articulated on the basis of the complexities of the personalities and of the life-stories each character represents, and which are, in most cases, privately kept to characters themselves.[444] As the narrator claims in *The Confidence-Man*, in a passage sounding like an authorial interlude: "is it not a fact, that, in real life, a consistent character is a *rara avis*? […] That fiction, where every character can, by reason of its consistency, be comprehended at a glance, either exhibits but sections of character, making them appear for wholes, or else is very untrue to reality" (1857: 913).

It is through dialogue that all of these multiple personalities and worldviews are brought together in an exercise that assembles them as representatives of a common humanity yet emphasizes their individuality at the same time. The dialogue generated in *Clarel* is dynamic in that it travels across its different characters in a continuous way,

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[443] Even Nathan, I believe, is presented with pity (though certainly not uncritically) as a victim of his Zionist madness, result of his earlier despairing existential crisis.

[444] All characters are, in one way or another, examples of this privacy, since, even in the cases in which the poem provides a narrative on the personal story of any of them (as in the case of Nehemiah, Rolfe, Ungar, or Mortmain, Don Hannibal, etc.), the narrative itself underlines the very partiality and imperfection of such a narrative (Rolfe tells a story he heard about a sailor whom he imagines to be Nehemiah, many pangs in Ungar's heart remain unaccounted for even though the narrator provides some 'fragments' on the Anglo-Cherokee soldier's story, there are many untold gaps about Mortmain's life-story, etc.). In other cases, there is nothing but a few clues in the form of rumors or perceptions from characters about the past or personality of characters (e.g., Vine, Djalea). Even the apparently central protagonist, Clarel, remains unknown to the reader. The information we have about characters, therefore, comes in the form of sketches rather than biographies (significantly enough in this respect, the canto where Rolfe exposes the story of Nehemiah is entitled "A Sketch" [1.37]), which reinforces the inconclusive character of the poem. This 'sketchy' nature also responds, in my opinion, to the necessary reduction of the human into a literary character that only exists on the page.

only stopped when characters resist other characters' efforts to approach them and block thus the possibilities of intersubjective communication;[445] it is also de-centralized and polyphonic because it features 'centers' or points of view as varied and diverse as each of the characters the poem brings in. The plurality of perspectives the text encompasses invites readers, and also characters and author (we come back here again to the notion of the poem-pilgrimage and the different levels of pilgrimages and pilgrimaging that have been discussed in earlier sections[446]), to submit all the points of view to critical evaluation, to which end dialogue is placed. The dialogic process created in *Clarel* enables the development of the intersubjective universalism the poem defends on a textual level, in an exercise similar to what, in my opinion, may be compared to the different critical exercises in democratic thinking that contemporary theorists, as Chapter One analyzed, have proposed under different names yet which have many points of connection with one another: Hannah Arendt's notion of 'critical judgment', Ernesto Laclau's revision of the Marxist concept of 'hegemony', Zygmunt Bauman's plural universalism, not to mention studies re-thinking the notion of 'community', universalism, or cosmopolitanism by poststructuralist thinkers such as Judith Butler, Zygmunt Bauman, Giorgio Agamben, Roberto Esposito, Jacques Derrida, Jean-Luc Nancy, etc. *Clarel* exposes that meaning is nothing but the reciprocal interconnection of several different interpretations, worldviews and systems of knowledge, which the author juxtaposes and places under evaluation so that the reader can further assess. If "unlike things must meet and mate" ("Art" [ca. 1870], *Published Poems* 280), opposites and different elements may in the end 'mate' –and perhaps generate new meanings– in manysided imaginations:

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[445] I will analyze this generalized wall-reinforcing and egocentric tendency to abort the possibility of developing intersubjectivity in the next section, 3.7.3.

[446] See Section 3.2 in this chapter.

Content thee: in conclusion caught
Thou'lt find how thought's extremes agree—
The forethought clinched by afterthought,
The firstling by finality. (*Clarel* 2.18.140-143)

The dialogue created engages not only characters in the poem but also poet and readers in an intersubjective, global –due to the variety of nationalities and worldviews that the characters represent– conversation by which universalism is developed in the text throughout their common –and yet private– pilgrimage. At the level of characters, nevertheless, this intersubjective dialogue is continuously boycotted, as both communities and characters build up fences that prevent the development of any possibility of intersubjective communication even before this communication is actually established, consequently neutralizing the democratizing potentiality of intersubjectivity. This eventual reflection on how human beings continually boycott the possibilities of togetherness by choosing, instead, to remain locked in the fortresses of their egos, to which others are barred access, reveals the perpetuation of fear of the other and the imposition of one-sided thinking as universal 'Truth', which prevents the development of democratic thinking. At the same time as it textually constructs universalism, *Clarel* shows the multiple walls preventing intersubjectivity and therefore the very mechanisms by which universalism may be created. As the narrator sorely laments while commenting on Agar's dream of return to the mythical promised land of her imagination: "But ah, the dream to test by deed, / To seek to handle the ideal / And make a sentiment serve need: / To try to realize the unreal!" (1.27.67-70).

b) Messing up the elements: Rolfe

Rolfe, "a messmate of the elements" (1.31.21) always willing to discuss the different sides to any one issue, is crucial to the text's universalist project to encouraging plural thinking and to moving beyond inter-personal and inter-community walls. Rolfe is a weaver of dialogue in *Clarel*. Introduced as an independent thinker who is more of a man of experience than a scholar, Rolfe is a "genial heart" (1.31.14), constantly disposed toward others, who enjoys mingling with different minds, hearts, and peoples and analyze their worldviews. Importantly enough, the American embodies intellectual knowledge and experience, attributing to the latter the highest rank. As Joseph G. Knapp points out, Rolfe is an "intellectual pioneer" who "probes the frontiers of the mind to search out those truths which haunt all men" (1971: 85); the character is aware that ultimate Truths cannot be grasped, and thus explores, as Knapp notes, "the different kinds of certitude[s] possible to man" (86). Rolfe is significantly juxtaposed to the impenetrable Vine since Rolfe is first introduced in the poem-pilgrimage (in canto 1.31) at a moment when Clarel is musing about whether he will ever be able to trespass the walls with which Vine hermetically seals other people's access to him: whereas, upon first meeting Clarel and Nehemiah, Vine makes evident that the two strangers are irrupting his seclusion, and moves away in order to recover his space, Rolfe rises to salute the three travelers (Vine now incorporated into the pair formed by Clarel and Nehemiah) and interacts with them in a fluid conversation.[447] Frank, kind, social, extroverted, and "indiscreet in honesty" (1.31.25), Rolfe is "no

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[447] Despite Rolfe's easy-going and gregarious nature, throughout the pilgrimage Clarel feels more attracted toward Vine than toward Rolfe, whose earnestness and sincerity initially overwhelm the young student. Clarel, nevertheless, does perceive Rolfe's "genial heart" (1.31.14) since the beginning, and wonders what the result would be of the contact between two men of such exceptional natures as he thinks both Rolfe and Vine are. The fantasy of these two characters "meet[ing] and mat[ing]" ("Art" [ca. 1870], *Published Poems* 280) soon evaporates as Vine retreats "into his dumb castle" (1.31.59) and undermines the possibility of developing any intersubjectivity with Rolfe.

scholastic partisan / Or euphonist in Academe" (1.31.17-18). Most importantly, he is

the connector of the different points of views his companions represent, as well as of

the multiple systems of knowledge, belief, and tradition (religious, philosophical,

scientific, etc.) that are incorporated into the polyphonic conversation in the text. In my

opinion, Rolfe might best be compared to a Socrates-like figure in Plato's dialogues

who questions, ponders, evaluates, juxtaposes contraries, establishes connections, and

makes his fellow travelers speak. His communal disposition to others –his dwelling in

the 'with', to use Jean-Luc Nancy's terminology– turns him into the central engine

promoting the exploration of different conceptions of humanity, both 'horizontally'

–transnationally, transculturally, and interpersonally– and 'vertically' –transhistorically–,

through intersubjective dialogue. While many scholars have noted some parallelisms

between Rolfe and Melville himself,[448] Rolfe may be read, in my view, as a Prospero-

like analogy of the artist-creator, who gathers the scattered voices of different

characters, cultures, contexts, moods and feelings, and allows them to find one another

in the text. Rolfe connects them, evaluates their individual characteristics, and explores

the ways in which they 'collide'. It is this Prospero-like artist-creator who generates,

thus, the polyphonic dialogue and exercise in plural thinking that the poem constructs,

and which, the dissertation argues, constitutes a potentially democratizing project by

which universalism might be constructed.[449] Rolfe is even given divine connotations in

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[448] See, for example, Bezanson 1991 and Parker 2002. The poem remarks that Rolfe's knowledge comes from traveling and experience and not from scholarly education (as Ishmael would assert in *Moby-Dick* "[…] a whale-ship was my Yale College and my Harvard" [1851: 114]). Although such parallelisms seem evident, this is not to say that Rolfe is Melville.

[449] As has been previously noted, the poem "Art" describes such intermingling of opposites in the act of creation, which at the same time, I believe, relates these different and opposing emotions (love and hatred, pleasure and pain, etc.) not as separate and excluding, but as interconnected expressions of a same human feeling without which the other cannot exist. Paradoxical as this may initially appear, the intermingling of opposites is necessary to the very appreciation of the intermingled elements. As Ishmael remarks in *Moby-Dick*: "The more so, I say, because truly to enjoy bodily warmth, some small part of you must be cold, for there is no quality in this world that is not what it is merely by contrast. Nothing exists in itself" (1851: 65).

the poem by being compared to the Hindu God Rama. His humility, however, lies precisely in being unaware of such quasi-divine qualities.[450] Like Rama, Rolfe is a diver who sees deeper and beyond; also like Rama, he runs the risk that his insights be not given credit. As a matter of fact, the young Clarel does not initially like Rolfe's earnestness and finds both his honesty and tendency to unite different opposites overwhelming:

> Revulsion came: with lifted brows
> He gazed on Rolfe: Is this the man
> Whom Jordan heard in part espouse
> The appeal of that Dominican
> And Rome? and here, all sects, behold,
> All creeds involving in one fold
> Of doubt? Better a partisan!
> Earnest he seems: can union be
> 'Twixt earnestness and levity?
> Or need at last in Rolfe confess
> Thy hollow, Manysidedness! (3.16.253-263)

Clarel is first repelled by Rolfe's "manysided" nature, exclaiming that it is better to be a "partisan" than to live in a permanent –according to the student empty– in-betweenness: "Clarel calls Rolfe 'hollow,'[451] for he fails to understand 'Manysidedness'—not an inability to take a stand but a generous openness to many sides with a zealous commitment to none" (Goldman 1993: 79). Clarel's wishes are for simple answers and clarifying truths which soothe restlessness and provide peace of mind. Gradually, however, the young student will admire Rolfe's extraordinary nature and even learn to emulate it. The turning point in Clarel's appreciation of Rolfe is, I believe, the student's private interview with Derwent, the Anglican priest who, with

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[450] The poem narrates the story of the Hindu God Rama, who lived among humans unaware of his divine nature, in canto 1.32 "Of Rama", which follows canto 1.31 "Rolfe". For a more detailed account of the Hindu God Rama see Suresh Chandra's *Encyclopaedia of Hindu Gods and Goddesses* (1991).

[451] The 'hollow', however, might well be not something that is empty, but something that is full of a deeper meaning (though not necessarily a religious one) that is inexpressible.

Rolfe, is the other main generator of dialogue in the poem because of his social openness. These two characters, however, differ in their expectations of dialogic conversation for, whereas "Derwent expects a dialectical progression of truth, Rolfe does not" (Knapp 1971: 89). During his private encounter with Clarel, Derwent encourages the young student to express his doubts, yet at the same time he censors Clarel's doubting nature when he exclaims to Clarel that "Alas, too deep you dive" (3.21.307). The text underlines notorious differences between Derwent's and Rolfe's social natures: unlike Rolfe, who is able of empathizing and understanding the heroic nature of Mortmain, of seeing through Ungar's sad eyes, of conceiving the "beauty grave" of Agath (3.12.37), or of realizing the kind-hearted dignity in Nehemiah's simple nature ("And shall we say / That this is craze? Or but, in brief, / Simplicity of plain belief? [2.10.229-231]), Derwent predicates tolerance yet he actually dismisses those who escape his thinking parameters as 'queer'[452] and is, thus, incapable of the deep understanding of human nature that Rolfe is made a model of.[453] As Vincent Kenny notes (1973: 205), Rolfe differs from Derwent in that the former accepts that evil exists. Yet, not only does he accept the existence of evil but also its inseparability from goodness: "Evil and good they braided play / Into one chord" (4.4.27-28). Whereas Rolfe is characterized by his manysided thinking, the ability to examine the world and different systems of knowledge from diverse angles and points of view, Derwent is trapped by his one-sided thinking (i.e., his religious views and cheery optimism, since, to him, "All turns or alters for the best" [3.6.108]): although he tries to connect "things

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[452] As Vincent Kenny notes, 'queer' and 'mad' are words characteristic of Derwent's vocabulary: "Derwent's words are the clichés of the dilettante: 'queer,' for the inexplicable, or 'terrifying, my dear boy,' when Clarel poses unanswerable theological questions, or 'mad, mad enough,' as an easy explanation for Mortmain's monomania" (1973: 130).

[453] Stan Goldman presents a more positive view of Derwent as someone who finds the balance between diving and optimism, which Goldman calls the "middle way": "The Melvillean middle way is the interstitial space where belief, doubt, and unbelief continually contend with each other and within the individual for the human heart" (1993: 88). As his encounter with Clarel demonstrates, however, Derwent has little patience and tolerance for doubt.

all diverse" (3.16.173) –religion and science, for example–, Derwent regards his views as superior to others' (e.g., Salvaterra, Clarel…) and cannot comprehend doubt. As Joseph G. Knapp points out, Derwent's optimistic perfectibility constitutes a dogmatic view (1971: 46): "Derwent will not dive and – in Melville's values – will never arrive at greatness. His optimism, based on evolutionary progress, does not answer man's profoundest question about himself, about evil, about the universe, and God. He is not even interested in searching. Derwent is not a pilgrim; he is only a tourist" (52). The priest is not capable of seeing through the points of views exposed by others, as Rolfe is, but merely claims to tolerate plurality while dismissing the points of view and attitudes that escape his worldview and which he considers 'weird' and even "dulcet error[s]" (4.16.124), as he opines on the Franciscan monk Salvaterra. Rolfe's genial nature, on the contrary, lies not in believing himself in higher possession of Truth than his other fellow travelers, but in his capacity for evaluating different perspectives and for embracing others and their worldviews as part of the parameters through which he observes the world, infusing his own thinking with other interpretive possibilities. Rolfe is –perhaps together with Djalea–[454] the only character in the poem whose divings do not lead him to a violent or (self-)destructive type of monomania or egotism. According to Richard Chase, "Rolfe is Melville's ultimate humanist […] the figure, indeed, toward whom the strongest current of Melville's thought had always been flowing" (1849: 257). He is Melville's exemplification in *Clarel* of how to cope with the hardships of life and the absence of ultimate 'Meanings', without abandoning the exploration, and without turning into a maddened, nihilist, uncaring, bitter, or angry human being. Rolfe's genial

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[454] Djalea is a Druze, originally from Lebanon, portrayed as a wise and spiritual character at peace with himself, with his present status, and with others in the poem. As Timothy Marr has argued in his *The Cultural Roots of American Islamicism* (2006): "What is important about Djalea is that he is a mystic and his teachings cannot be imparted in words; unlike Clarel, he is full without the need for intellectual justification. Djalea is a nonideological being, who represents what Melville called the 'firm, creedless faith that embraces the spheres'" (252).

nature does not lie in believing himself in higher possession of Truth than the rest of his fellow travelers. It stems from his capacity for evaluating different perspectives, always with an inquiring mind, and from his willingness to embrace others and their worldviews as part of his own thinking parameters. Rolfe infuses his own thinking with other interpretive possibilities, aware that his opinion is one interpretation of 'Truth', and even welcoming the fact that there may be no ultimate Truth at all but truths as plural, partial, imperfect, limited, and incomplete as human beings.

By the end of the "Of Rama" canto, the narrator wonders if there are 'Ramas' in the world at present, answering in the affirmative that "Ay—in the verse, may be, he is" (1.32.56). The referent of the pronoun "he" is implicitly revealed in the succeeding canto (as well as by the anticipation of the earlier description of Rolfe in the canto immediately preceding "Of Rama), which opens with Rolfe meditating on the waste and stoniness of Jerusalem.[455] Rolfe's exceptionality lies in the fact that he does not stand separate from the world that unites him to his fellow mortals, but belongs with them and remains "Unspotted from the world" (1.32.13) despite his special nature. Rolfe is, as a matter of fact, a man limited by his own humanity: "though Rolfe has strong affinities with the high Promethean hero or Handsome Sailor, he is explicitly dissociated from this ideal figure. Rolfe is a man—human, modified, and limited. He is the human core of the high Promethean hero" (Chase 1949: 257). Rolfe is one of the most respectful, humane and globally conscious characters in the poem, an example of a character that cannot be 'explained' according to a single narrative; neither does he conceive other characters according to one single view or description. According to Joseph G. Knapp, "Unlike Derwent he [Rolfe] cannot be content with a liberal

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[455] One may also read, in my opinion, the narrator's affirmation that "in the verse, may be, he is" as an authorial reference to himself as one who can dive and reach the heart and complexities of the characters he creates maintaining for them an utter respect at the same time (Nehemiah, Mortmain, Ungar, Agath…).

position, which would simply balance contradictories and harmonize all extremes of thought. This futile endeavor he censures in Derwent, of whom he says: "Things all diverse he would unite: / His idol's an hermaphrodite" (III, xvi, 176)" (1971: 91). His relational nature and communal disposition, and his capacity to explore, interact with, incorporate, and juxtapose different systems of knowledge make of him an independent thinker capable of self-criticism and of critical plural thinking of the kind the young Clarel might yet become. William Potter compares Rolfe's capacity to evaluate different points of view at the same time to the whales' faculty to look in two different directions due to the position of their eyes, as Ishmael describes in *Moby-Dick* (2004: 15). As a matter of fact, despite feeling initially overwhelmed by Rolfe's interlacing abilities, Clarel will eventually find in Rolfe a role model. Walter E. Bezanson has claimed that Clarel increasingly imitates Rolfe's views and language (1954: 155). In a similar way, Robert Milder has argued that "Clarel's destiny, if he can raise to it, is to mature into Rolfe":

> Rolfe is distinguished by a thorough *un*consciousness of godlike merit, which it falls upon the narrator to commend. His godlikeness is not dependent on his finding, worshipping, or worshipfully defying a transcendent God; it resides in the elevation of the human personality that comes from living searchingly without illusion. Under the extraordinary demands of the agnostic life, not least of them the proscription that keeps the agnostic from ever suspecting his doubt is deifying. (2006: 216)

After having been first repelled by Rolfe's capacity to unite different worldviews, opinions, and beliefs, Clarel understands that such different perspectives can be placed together in a mature mind like Rolfe's (Miller 1962: 213) and still retain their balance. As Miller explains:

> Rolfe's great virtue lies in his balance. He, too, can doubt, and can ponder long his doubts, but without abandoning himself to despair and death. But if he is capable of

following, without monomania, the intricate paths of the intellect, he is also capable of making his way, without being duped, through the labyrinths of the heart. His is the ideal maskless nature—"a genial heart, a brain austere." He is "frankly kind"—a phrase which combines the fine features of both the mind and the heart: frankness is the mind's ultimate wisdom, and kindness the heart's final truth. Rolfe can acknowledge the rightness of the dark views of Mortmain and Ungar without assuming their despair. He can understand the value of Vine's solitude without joining him in retreat. And he can comprehend Derwent's commitment to optimism without condoning his hypocrisy. Between a shallow optimism and a deep-plunging pessimism, between foolish hope and dark despair, Rolfe does indeed remain "poised at self-centre and mature". (213-214)

The narrator remarks in *Pierre* that "the brains grow maggoty without a heart; but the heart's the preserving salt itself, and can keep sweet without the head" (1852: 372). As a matter of fact, Melville had claimed his preference for the heart (which Rolfe is made an embodiment of in *Clarel*) in a letter to Hawthorne: "I stand for the heart. To the dogs with the head! I had rather be a fool with a heart, than Jupiter Olympus with his head" (1 June 1851, *Correspondence* 192). It is, of course, relevant that the narrator should advice Clarel to "keep thy heart" (*Clarel* 4.35.27) at the end of the poem, even though this does not make such final words less enigmatic. As a matter of fact, Rolfe too needs to keep his heart by the end of *Clarel*, his Southern and mixed-raced compatriot Ungar having made him radically aware of the New World's lack of exceptionalism, and therefore shattering Rolfe's own hopes that America's "free vents" and "untried fields" might prevent the young nation from sharing in the universal degradation Ungar hopelessly denounces (4.21.88; 90). According to Knapp, after Ungar's relevant speeches, Rolfe is left with "no illusions to cling to"; if he was ever tempted by "thoughts of a natural paradise or of a technological utopia as ways of providing for man's happiness" and by hopes in the New World that America represented, "These are gone" (1971: 98). It is also relevant that Ungar, his Southerner and mixed-raced compatriot, is the only character that brings Rolfe to silence in the poem, a silence

which concludes with Rolfe's admission (to Derwent) that "He [Ungar]'s wise" (4.23.32).

I think it is not an exaggeration to claim that Rolfe is, together with Djalea, who does it through action rather than dialogue, the only character in *Clarel* who embraces intersubjective universalism as a way of relating, and a type of plural thinking which transcends the segregationism and communitarianism of Palestine and the individualism of his fellow travelers. The character thus seeks to reestablish the inter-human or space-between human beings –the *with* of 'being' in Nancy's philosophical thinking– who are either oblivious to their mutual interconnectedness or unwilling to accept it. The dynamic dialogic intersubjective 'weaving' that Rolfe is capable of carrying out liberates him from the one-sided thinking and conception of the world that traps the rest of his fellow travelers. This one-sided thinking makes other characters withdraw to their selves. In the words Hannah Arendt used in order to describe eighteenth-century writer Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Rolfe's thinking, like Melville's, is

> […] not the search for truth, since every truth that is the result of a thought process necessarily puts an end to the movement of thinking. The *fermenta cognitionis* […] were not intended to communicate conclusions, but to stimulate others into independent thought, and this for no other purpose than to bring about a discourse between thinkers. (1955: 10)

This thinking process, I argue, is already a political process which allows its participants to "humanize" the world by speaking of it and, in this very process, "learn to be human" by making sense of it together (Arendt 1955: 24-25). Rolfe's manysidedness underlines the real universalism of human beings, making readers aware of individuals' global interconnectedness and exposing the (self-)imprisoning walls and segregating conceptions of the world generated by individualism and communitarianism which characters in the poem are either unable or unwilling to trespass. According to Merlin

Bowen, Rolfe's resistance and constant questioning of definite beliefs demonstrates an "opposition to all attempts to freeze experience into rigid artificial forms" (1960: 260). Ishmael expresses a similar vision of the universalism of the human species in the *Moby-Dick* chapter 47, "The Mat-Maker", which describes a scene of intersubjective weaving which I interpret as underlining the vulnerability and intertwinement of human lives that permeates Melville's literary project as a whole:

> There lay the fixed threads of the warp subject to but one single, ever returning, unchanging vibration, and that vibration merely enough to admit of the crosswise interblending of other threads with its own. This warp seemed necessity; and here, thought I, with my own hand I ply my own shuttle and weave my own destiny into these unalterable threads. Meantime, Queequeg's impulsive, indifferent sword, sometimes hitting the woof slantingly, or crookedly, or strongly, or weakly, as the case might be; and by this difference in the concluding blow producing a corresponding contrast in the final aspect of the completed fabric; this savage's sword, thought I, which thus finally shapes and fashions both warp and woof; this easy, indifferent sword must be chance—aye, chance, free will, and necessity—no wise incompatible—all interweavingly working together. (1851: 200)

I read the image of Ishmael and Queequeg's interweaving of the sword-mat as the dynamic and collaborative exercise of intersubjective creation of universalism that, this dissertation has been arguing, is the project constitutive of Melville's oeuvre, and of which *Clarel* is a representative example. A plausible interpretation of the previous passage may be that Ishmael and Queequeg are playing gods forging human destiny. However, it is significant that Ishmael locates destiny in the hands of human beings themselves, whose agency shapes their own and the lives of others. The weaving of destiny is –not in an incompatible way, Ishmael remarks– entwined with chance (and necessity), as exposed by the fact that if Queequeg's sword (the sword of chance) hits the threads and warp that Ishmael and himself are creating, either too carelessly or too strongly, the fabric might be marred. It is interesting to note that the intersubjective

weaving described by Ishmael takes place in the midst of the stillness of a cloudy afternoon on board the *Pequod*, at a moment when, Ishmael says, "each silent sailor seemed resolved into his own invisible self" (200). Rolfe's connecting character, in the same way as Ishmael and Queequeg's intersubjective weaving, or Melville-the artist's "meet[ing] and mat[ing]" ("Art" [ca. 1870], *Published Poems* 280) of different, even opposed, elements in art has the potential to make human thinking more democratic by enabling it to break through the walls of individualism and communitarianism, and therefore of one-sidedness. The following section explores an episode in *Clarel* in which such plural thinking is constructed at the textual level.

c) "I look, you look, he looks; we look, ye look, they look":[456] Crows and Palms

Some of the most evident instances of how *Clarel* de-centralizes Meaning and constructs plural thinking are the cantos dedicated to the intriguing palm the pilgrims find inside the monastery of Mar Saba in Part 3. In these episodes the palm –which, the Lesbian informs Derwent, was planted by St. Saba a thousand years ago and is considered sacred by the monks in the monastery (see 3.25.59-64)– becomes an immutable symbol encouraging different responses and emotions in each of the characters who regards it. This series of cantos is similar to the "The Doubloon" chapter in *Moby-Dick* (1851), in which the narrator exposes the different interpretations that the *Pequod* men give to the doubloon Ahab has nailed to the mainmast as an enticement to his crew's implication in the hunt of the white whale he leads. In the same way as onto the doubloon, different visions are projected onto the palm; the hovering tree revealing thus part of the interiority of each of its lookers to be displayed exclusively to the readers. As Basem Ra'ad claims, the palm

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[456] The title in this section corresponds to Pip's repetitive remark in the *Moby-Dick* chapter 99, "The Doubloon" (1851: 384). Pip also uses the word 'crow' to refer to the lookers.

> […] becomes another occasion for observations, with characters positioned relative to it on the stone stairs indicating rank on a consciousness scale. Vine is "Reclined aloof upon a stone / High up," Mortmain "dropped upon the under stone," definitely "under Vine"; Rolfe is "lowermost" of the three. The Celibate, Derwent, and Clarel are all lower, though Clarel, "Midpoised," is distinguished as recognizing Vine is highest (3.26.7-8; 3.28.68, 95; 3.29.24-5; 3.30.23, 134-40). (2006: 142)

Although Derwent and the Lesbian also pass by the palm (the Lesbian having made clear his opinion that the tree is not sacred), Vine, Mortmain, Rolfe, and Clarel are the characters who engage in respective solitary 'interviews' with the palm. Thanks to the palm, readers have access to the private selves of these characters, selves which otherwise remain walled.

Vine, on the one hand, regards the palm as a beautiful emblem of the past which has stood witness to a thousand years, lonely yet proudly in the place it was planted and redeeming the waste of the land. Curious about the fact that the palm stands suspended over the Brook of Kedron, Vine sees the palm as a symbol of exultant durability in the midst of present waste, conceiving time as the only one that may "disarm / The grace, the glory of the Palm?" (3.26.49), and wondering what will occupy the place of this proud lord the day it falls. Brian Yothers reads Vine's musings on the palm as reflecting this character's "fear of the future, disillusionment with the present, and veneration of the past", adding that Vine also regards the solitary tree "as a comforting object because of its persistence throughout time even as he contemplates the fact that even the palm will eventually die" (2007: 129). Vine's encounter with the palm is spied on by both Derwent and the Lesbian, the latter of whom regards Vine as crazy after having seen him in the church of the monastery contemplating the bones of the buried martyrs and reading eagerly the books of an abandoned library. Whereas the Lesbian concludes that much learning has turned Vine into a mad man (3.27.73), and

Derwent defends Vine claiming that he is just "queer" but considered wise by some (3.27. 83), which the Lesbian refutes, readers are privilegdly given direct access to Vine in this scene and allowed to form their own opinion on the "queer"/wise character.

The second private encounter with the palm is Mortmain's, who conceives the tree as bravely standing alone, not even afraid or intimidated by the precipice. The palm gives strength and peace to the lonely Swede and eventually becomes the only company that the "brotherless" (3.28.21) Mortmain can find in the poem, which prepares him to welcome death as a release from the despair and pain of life: "Despair? nay, death; and what's death's cheer? / Death means—the sea-beat gains the shore; / He's home; his watch is called no more" (3.28.37-39).[457] Leaning as if it was inclined deliberately toward him, the palm soothes Mortmain's pain, and induces him into a dream where he feels at peace, eventually accompanying him in his death.

More enigmatic is the narration of Rolfe's encounter with the palm, in an episode which describes with more detail the process of reaching the site of the palm than the character's encounter with the tree itself. After a long climb up the rocky hills, Rolfe reaches the location of the tree, which he greets as if the palm saluted him. With an eagle-eye or from a cinematographic-like zooming perspective, the narrator first describes Rolfe as an integrated part of the landscape, emphasizing his smallness in the midst of the immensity of the desert: "Far down see Rolfe there, hidden low / By ledges slant. Small does he show / (If eagles eye), small and far off" (3.29.8-10). Rolfe's individuality at this point appears insignificant in the midst of such overpowering hugeness, only to emerge again as he ascends the natural stairs that will bring him to the

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[457] This idea of home calls to mind the final chapter of *White-Jacket* which ends with the poetry line: "Life is a voyage that's homeward-bound!" (1970: 400). While the novel does not explicate what, who, or where is 'home', allowing thus the reader the possibility to 'fill up' the meaning of this word as s/he pleases, the homeless and orphaned Mortmain can only find 'home' in death at the end of his life-pilgrimage in *Clarel*, yet Melville provides the heroic ex-idealist with a companion, the palm, which redeems his suffering and makes him feel 'at home' (i.e., in peace) in his last moments.

palm. Marking the difficulty of the climb and how never before any human being had ventured it (ironically, Derwent and the Lesbian, Mortmain and Vine had been there too in previous cantos, and Clarel will in the following one), Rolfe wonders who will come again after him (3.30.41-58) or if man will, instead, abandon the quest. According to Vincent Kenny, the palm infuses Rolfe with idyllic memories of a past Eden: "Instead of memories warming him, the tree symbol informs him that all joy is in the past and that a return is impossible" (1973: 88). Thus, while the hanging tree brings Rolfe back to his days in the Pacific, the American's paradisiacal memories are shadowed by thoughts of a lost Eden:

> Rolfe sees in the palm a reminder of his own travels in the South Pacific, and the scene from those travels that he specifically recalls is the commonly described apotheosis of the European/Euro-American in the eyes of the natives. Rolfe imagines the islands first as 'Eden' (3.29.46) and later as 'Puck's substantiated scene' (3.29.63), progressing from an image that describes a paradise on the verge of an inevitable fall to one that emphasizes the illusoriness of the envisioned paradise. The traveler whom Rolfe describes finally renounces his idyllic surroundings and returns to sea. Rolfe's response to the palm is in the end to construct a narrative much like his own, in which a man who has tasted the joys of the South Pacific is driven by an internal compulsion to leave for other lands. In this model, Rolfe's own journey to the Holy Land becomes, ironically, a fall from paradise. (Yothers 2007: 130)

In a way similar to what it does for Mortmain, the palm provides peace to Rolfe, the perfect state of quietness in which neither cold nor heat is felt (3.29.69). At this moment, Rolfe marks how some human beings reject such state of happiness for "the briny world away" (3.29.75), perhaps a reference to the need for diving itself which pushes some individuals to leave the firmness of the land for the deep waters of the ocean.

Clarel is the last in the group to visit the palm, pursuing the climb his companions had already undertaken and reaching the solitary tree next to which stands

a Celibate monk summoning doves "from shore to shore / Of Kedron's overwhelming walls" (3.30.25-26).[458] In the same way as it does to both Rolfe and Mortmain separatedly, the palm gives peace and warmth to Clarel. However, the student turns from the solitary symbol to engage in conversation with the Celibate, who nourishes the student's reflections on love: both his love for Ruth, whom he confesses the monk to miss, and "That *other* love" (3.31.53) or homosexual love he expresses and represses at several points throughout the pilgrimage. According to Knapp, the Celibate exerts a deep effect upon Clarel, who conceives the monk as "a living embodiment of the Palm, since his life of renunciation recalls the 'martyr's scepter,' the palm of martyrdom" (1971: 33). The Celibate evaporates after invoking to Clarel a biblical fragment about leading a chaste and austere life, and Clarel realizes immediately afterwards how his fellow travelers (Mortmain, Vine, and Rolfe) are all three standing by the palm although completely unaware of one another. Clarel's eyes are laid upon Vine, whose private interview with him by the Jordan River Clarel vividly remembers. These recollections make the young student wonder if there "Can be a bond" that "Pass[es] the love of woman fond?" (3.30.149, 152). The reference to Jonathan and David[459] in the description of such "bond" in the passage is certainly not accidental. As I shall argue in future sections of this chapter, Clarel struggles with the "heavy load" (3.31.53) of the tension he experiences between his heterosexual desire for Ruth, on the one hand, and his homosexual desire for some of his fellow travelers, on the other. While the episodes

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[458] The image of the "overwhelming walls" is relevant here. However, the doves bred in the monastery, unlike the monks living there, can fly in and out as they please.

[459] The relationship between David and Jonathan is narrated in the Old Testament, and has historically transcended as an example of homosexual love. Belonging to two different social classes (Jonathan is the son of the king of Israel, Saul, while David is the son of a shepherd), David and Jonathan commit to one another in love and loyalty. In the nineteenth century, the relationship between David and Jonathan was already acknowledged by writers such as Walt Whitman or Bayard Taylor, contemporaneous to Melville, as a story about homosexual love, even inspiring some of these writers' own literary production (e.g., Taylor's *Twin-Love* [1871]). For a more detailed study of the story of David and Jonathan and its impact among homosexual writers in the nineteenth century, see Andrés 2007: 99-103. The representation of homosexual love in *Clarel* is analyzed in "a", Section 3.7.3 in this chapter.

on the palm constitute one example of how Melville constructs manysided or plural thinking in *Clarel*, characteristic of the universalist project that, this dissertation contends, the poem articulates, they also reflect the deep individuality and impossibility to transcend one's self that prevents the development of such universalism at the level of characters. The episodes analyzed portray the most private individual encounters of each character with the solitary palm, and each interpreters' impressions on the palm remain secreted to others with the exception of narrator and readers (narrator and readers, in their turn, not having complete access to the complex private heart of each character). While the text at the same time creates a respectful space for characters to directly expose their individuality, with the palm episodes, as with so many other moments throughout the poem, *Clarel* demonstrates the ultimate aloneness at the core of every single one of its characters who are unable to transcend their individualities and conceive their universal connection with others.

d) Illusory Togetherness: Conviviality and Hedonism

Clarel portrays moments of togetherness and pleasure, in contrast to the aridity of the land and the bleakness of existence, which invite the pilgrims to (briefly) forget the hardships of their lives. Such togetherness and pleasure, however, is merely transitory and contributes little to providing any lasting sense of connectedness among these fellow travelers. The monastery of Mar Saba –walled-in, secluded, difficult to reach, and, therefore, enclosed in its own 'self' as many of the characters in the poem– is witness to one of these moments. Despite its location in the barrenness of the desert, Vincent Kenny claims that, to a certain extent, the monastery appears as "an oasis in the desert, including sleeping quarters, food and wine, and ample grounds for visitors to

roam in pleasure" (1973: 84).[460] Upon arrival, the pilgrims are greeted with a convivial

dinner in the company of the Lesbian and his friend the Arnaut who happen to be also

lodging with the monks at Mar Saba.[461] The man of Lesbos, of a happy-go-lucky and

jovial nature, welcomes the newcomers into an atmosphere of conviviality and pleasure

which eventually brings them to sing and drink together St. Saba's wine: Rolfe relaxes

and places his arm close to Og "in vinous fellowship", which the armed man, after

regarding Rolfe's gesture "in mood of questionable brotherhood" feels comfortable

with (3.11.204); Derwent also feels at ease and interacts with the Arnaut and the Spahi,

"his two knees / Push[ing] deeper, so as e'en to get / Closer in comradeship at ease"

(3.11.159-163). However, this apparent togetherness is not 'universalist', as those less

social natures within the group such as Vine, Djalea, Mortmain, Agath, and even Clarel

stand aside from the conviviality.[462] The episode, then, becomes a dream-like illusion of

togetherness and happiness, a "paradise of bachelors" (to evoke Melville's 1855 diptych

short-story) disrupted by certain 'obscuring' moments: e.g., the timoneer Agath narrates

his tragic story in an entire separate canto (3.12, "The Timoneer's Story), Mortmain

stands a shadowy presence separate from the cheerfulness of the scene, and so does

Vine, who contributes a sad song when he is pushed to sing by Derwent and the

Lesbian.

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[460] Although I agree with Kenny's observation that Mar Saba is a relief from the burdens and pains of the desert (Agath, for instance, is recovering in the monastery from his misfortunes), the 'pleasure' some of the pilgrims obtain there is merely a temporary feeling (an episode of cheery drinking, eating, singing and dancing) which does not soothe their sorrow and serves them little as an existential balm.

[461] According to Kenny, Melville may be implicitly pointing toward a homosexual consideration of the Lesbian: described as a "'Mytilene, a juicy man' (III, xi, p. 320)", the Lesbian "arrives with the Arnaut—a handsome giant among men—urges conviviality among men, and, in a short time, is holding hands with Derwent (III, xi, p. 319). The connection of Lesbos with female homosexuals was sufficient for Melville to invert the meaning by calling this man 'The Lesbian'" (1973: 127-128).

[462] To Clarel, as Vincent Kenny notes, "the Lesbian's actions are a contemptible mockery of the holy Mar Saba. Frolicking songs of wine and women profane the sacred air" (178).

The gregarious Rolfe participates in the conviviality generated by the Lesbian even though he regards critically the latter's hedonism: "Ought I protest? (thought Rolfe) the man / Nor malice has, nor faith: why ban / This heart though of religion scant", "Then let him laugh, enjoy his dinner, / He's an excusable poor sinner" (3.13.21-23, 44-45).[463] It is interesting that Rolfe shall find himself an "improvised twin brother[…]" (3.13. 57) with the Lesbian, who embraces him in a dance. In the same way as Rolfe, and feeling at ease (and drunk) Derwent succumbs completely to the man of Lesbos's merriment. Impregnated by the jollity of the Lesbian, Derwent even asks Agath and Vine, who stand aside, to sing along, an invitation which, at Derwent's insistence, they respond to with a sort of prayer for reconciliation (Agath) and a sad poem on beauty (Vine). After the recitation, Derwent remarks to the Arnaut and Belex that they have been drinking and smoking even though Islam forbids to do so in times of the Ramadan, to which observation they respond carelessly yet blessing Allah in front of Clarel, who laments the death of faith and the hypocrisy of those who claim themselves devout. The scene concludes with the same jovial tone it had started with as "The five cups made touched brink to brink / In fair bouquet of fellowship" (3.14.122-123). After the party, the pilgrims succumb to a general slumber in the canto that follows, excepting Rolfe, who, suffering from "disquiet […] / In sequel to redundant joy" (3.15.7-8), remains awake and joins equally sleepless Clarel in a night walk during which they meet Djalea[464] who, asked by Rolfe to explain his faith (Djalea is a Druze),

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[463] Even though he does not agree with the Lesbian's hedonistic philosophy of life, Rolfe does not judge too hardly in this scene the gayness of that character, whom he describes as "A caterer to revelries, / He's caught the tints of many a scene, / And so become a harlequin / Gay patchwork of all levities" (3.13.36-39).

[464] Djalea is one of the most interesting characters in the poem. Yet another wandering figure, "Exiled, cut off, in friendless state" (2.7.21), though also a suspected Lebanese Druze of noble origin, and certainly an example of human dignity and strong yet calm nature, he contrasts with the different personalities and manias of other pilgrims-travelers, Djalea guides the pilgrims in their excursions in the wilderness. As Ada Lonni has remarked, it is significant that Melville chose to place Djalea as the leader of "the caravan of displaced pilgrims" (2011: 47), more so if we consider that one of the meanings of the

exclaims his belief that "No God there is but God", wishing both Rolfe and Clarel that "Allah preserve ye, Allah great!" (3.16.115,123), with a spirituality which contrasts with the carelessness with which the Arnaut and Belex[465] have failed to comply with Muslim precepts, and with the Lesbian's hedonism in the previous scene. Reading this episode, one is reminded of Melville's "The Paradise of Bachelors" (1855), which portrays with great irony the conviviality of a group of men in a hedonistic night-lingering gathering where the bachelors enjoy themselves in a plentiful dinner accompanied with abundant drinking, smoking, and talk. Nevertheless, unlike the pilgrims in *Clarel*, the bachelors in the short story know no pain or trouble: their comfortable economic situation and their lack of personal ties having allowed them to lead an independent, non-(re)productive (they are members of the "Brethren of the Order of Celibacy" [1855: 150]), and pleasure-seeking existence. Ironically served by the "old field-marshal"[466] Socrates (152), who does not smile at any moment despite the lightheartedness of the scene, the bachelors do not engage in profound conversation or 'Socratic dialogue', but merely tell

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term 'djalea' in Arabic is 'community'. Lonni has analyzed the character of Djalea according to the role he occupies in the poem as a dragoman, noting the permanent 'in-betweenness' between languages and cultures that such profession required: "A dragoman (*Turjuman* in Arabic) interprets, translates, and transposes words and ideas from one language to another, from one culture to another. Translation builds bridges, creates transparencies and reciprocal comprehension between persons and cultures. But to create links between different realities and thought systems, we must enter those other realities and systems: the translator cannot understand and, at the same time, remain extraneous and immune from the culture to be translated; it is not possible, in other words, to avoid one another's influence" (2011: 42-43). This role of the translating and mediating 'dragoman', in my opinion, is relevant to the analysis of intersubjective universalism in *Clarel* presented in this dissertation, since, to a certain extent, we might consider Melville, the poet-creator, on a supra-textual level, and Rolfe, on an textual level, as 'dragomen' who unite, mediate, move between, and give voice to "things all diverse" (*Clarel* 3.16.173). More interesting is to note that, in its adjectival form, 'djalea' means 'clarity', 'light', 'clear-sightedness' in Arabic, which places Djalea in direct connection with the idea of 'clarity' that the enigmatic title '*Clarel*' has been claimed to evoke (see footnote 273 on page 279). Lonni's affirmation on the dragoman that "He was always in the middle, not here, not there" (2011: 43) may, in this respect, be attributed to both Melville as creator of the poem and Rolfe as 'connector' of the different perspectives or characters within it. I am grateful to Timothy Marr for directing my attention to the possible resonances of the name Djalea and its possible connection to the title *Clarel*, and to Mohamed Karim Dhouib, for providing careful translations of the term 'djalea' from Arabic into English.

[465] I agree with William Potter's observation that Belex and the Arnaut "demonstrate that Islam, like Christianity, is not without its hypocritical followers" (2004: 164).

[466] The narrator confesses in an aside between brackets that he "can not school myself to call him by the inglorious name of waiter" (2001: 152).

light stories and anecdotes while their degree of drunkenness increases. Socrates is certainly not an accidental name, and he constitutes a character whom the narrator (one who participates in the bachelors' party, yet an outsider to the "Brethren of the Order of Celibacy" [150]) invests with great dignity. The convivial episode in Mar Saba highlights a hedonism (embodied by the Lesbian) similar to the one in "Bachelors", in which some pilgrims (especially Derwent, but also Rolfe, Vine, and Agath) participate, even if it is merely for a brief lapse of time. Unlike the bachelors in the 1855 story, however, some of the pilgrims in *Clarel* cannot forsake their gravity (Mortmain, Vine, Agath) despite the hilarity of the feast taking place around them. This conviviality of the dinner places the rest of his companions (Rolfe, Derwent, the Lesbian, etc.) in a light atmosphere which infuses the majority of them with a temporary sense of connectedness or brotherhood which makes them leave aside the gravity of their quests during the time this provisional togetherness lasts. As the narrator describes in "The Paradise of Bachelors": "It was the very perfection of quiet absorption of good living, good drinking, good feeling, and good talk. We were a band of brothers" (153). The pleasure, togetherness, and merriment generated in these convivial gatherings are but temporary ones; hedonism just a way to mask yet not eliminate the pain in the hearts of these pilgrims: even though inter-subjective walls are indeed transcended during the encounter, the togetherness generated vanishes as soon as the effects of alcohol and the feast die away, after which inter-personal walls are, once again, reestablished.

The following morning, the pilgrims attend the celebrations of Saba's festival, the first of them being a polyphonic canticle of four voices which blend together in multiple singing combinations expressing the decay of Zion and claiming for its

restoration.[467] The chant is followed by a play on a wandering Jew named Cartaphilus who, rejected, cannot join the fellowship of man and wanders alone in awe in a way that reminds the reader of the wanderings of the Italian Celio.[468] This play bears strong resonances in the context of the poem. As Hershel Parker claims: "The actual scene of the masque, the Kedron gorge, here stands for the Valley of Jehoshaphat […] beneath the Jerusalem wall. The whole alienation theme of the poem—continuously echoes of being 'cut off'—hence reaches climax" (1991: 809). Emphasizing his "guilty tie" (3.19.22) with the city of Jerusalem, "that bond of doom / Between us" (3.19.35-36), the wandering Jew eventually withdraws from human society: "More lonely than an only god; / For, human still, I yearn, I yearn" (3.19.76-78). This episode, I argue, mirrors the characters' generalized incapacity for intersubjectivity in what William Potter has termed "the inability to transcend one's own self and experiences, to achieve, as it were, an 'intersympathy' of any kind" (2004: 189). Mortmain sees the performance from the distance, probably relating to the character of Cartaphilus onstage. The performance ends with some epigraphic inscriptions that praise an "Era Golden" (*Clarel* 3.20.3), leaving Clarel wondering if there is really a difference between right and wrong "in frames of thought / And feeling" (3.20.33-34), and if there is any thread that he may use, like Theseus, to get out of the labyrinth of his own doubts. Both the performance in the St. Saba's festival and the dinner welcoming the pilgrims bear resonances of the poem's all pervasive topic of loneliness. Even though the convivial gathering of the pilgrims provides its participants with a temporary sense of togetherness and inter-personal connection, this togetherness vanishes as soon as the

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[467] Hershel Parker argues that this chant is based on Jeremiah 32-39, which narrates Jeremiah's prophecies on the fall of Jerusalem and God's promise of return (1991: 809).

[468] Parker explains the medieval origins of the legend of the Wandering Jew and the different ways in which it has been retold: "One form uses the name Cartaphilus […] for a servant of Pilate, reputed to have given Jesus a blow as he was led out to execution; for this he received the sentence, 'Thou shalt wander on the earth till I return'" (1991: 809).

context in which it is generated, in this case the dinner, is over. After this transient connectedness, characters retreat back to their own lonely selves (some of them, in fact, never left them). This retreat and the following tragedy, Mortmain's death, conclude the pilgrims' visit to Mar Saba in a very different note to the jollity the travelers had first encountered in the merry dinner celebrating their arrival.

3.7.3. Potentiality Aborted: Egocentrism and Interpersonal Walls

> "And it is I
> (He muses), I that leave the others,
> Or do they leave me?"
>
> "We loiterers whom life can please
> (Thought he) could we but find our mates
> Ever! but no; before the gates
> Of joy, lie some who carp and tease:
> Collisions of men's destinies!—"
> (Herman Melville, *Clarel* 1876: 3.26.8-10; 3.27.175-181)
>
> "Oh, men are jailers all; jailers of themselves."
> (Herman Melville, *Pierre* 1852: 110)

As analyzed in the previous section, wine and pleasure distract the pilgrims' attention from "the Siddim madness" (*Clarel* 3.27.169), in an episode of jollity and togetherness which evaporate as soon as the dinner is over and pilgrims return to their individual selves. After visiting the dead monk Habbibi's cave, Derwent meditates on how human beings boycott their own possibilities of happiness and togetherness, before he quickly rushes to recuperate his jolly character and represses these grave thoughts from his mind. This question, the (democratizing) potentiality versus the continuous abortion of such potentiality –the blocking of possibilities to develop interpersonal relationships and intersubjective communication, and consequently togetherness and universalism through more democratic ways of relating both beyond and without the walls of both

the individual and the community– is, I have argued, one of the central subjects in

Clarel as well as in Melville's entire literary production (perhaps also the tragedy of

Melville's literary career during his lifetime, given that the 'potentiality' of his works had

to wait for decades in order to start being unfolded). In the final chapter of *White-Jacket*

(1850), for example, a narrator that blends the voice of the young White-Jacket with an

authorial voice notes how

> Oppressed by illiberal laws, and partly oppressed by themselves, many of our people
> are wicked, unhappy, inefficient. […] We have a *brig* for trespassers; a bar by our main-
> mast, at which they are arraigned; a cat-o'-nine-tails and a gangway, to degrade them in
> their own eyes and in ours. These are not always employed to convert Sin to Virtue,
> but to divide them, and protect Virtue and legalized Sin from unlegalized Vice.
>   We have a Sick-bay for the smitten and helpless, whither we hurry them out of
> sight, and, however they may groan beneath hatches, we hear little of their tribulations
> on deck; we still sport our gay streamer aloft. […] When a shipmate dies, straightaway
> we sew him up, and overboard he goes. (399)

The passage underlines how men protect themselves from strangers and from the

unknown, and even choose to ignore the cries of those in need of help, a sad

characteristic of humanity that *Clarel* laments as well. Characters in the poem remain,

for the most part, within their own selves throughout their journeys, often posing

obstacles to other characters' advances toward them and, consequently, blocking the

possibilities that an intersubjective connection might develop. Despite the rich

conversations in what might, in my opinion, be named a dialogic poem, and the

constant strategies to juxtapose, evaluate, and generate interactions between different

participants and their worldviews, most characters in the poem are unable to trespass

their own selves. One *Clarel* image that most clearly shows how efforts to develop

intersubjectivity and togetherness clash with the wall of egocentrism (both of

individuals and communities) and one-sidedness is Agar's appalling sensing of the lack

of amorous feelings in Nathan's heart when she presses her chest against his with the

hope that she might thus resurrect the love that Nathan's religious craze has extinguished.[469] Nathan's impenetrable walls will be replicated by other instances of inter-subjective walls throughout the poem, instances featuring characters that will be unable to unlock the gates of their own selves. These characters fence themselves against trespassers in the same way as the massive wall sets the Jewish community apart in the poem. Centering my analysis on Clarel's personal pilgrimage, the present section studies textual instances in which the young quester, Clarel, witnesses how the possibility of intersubjectivity is thwarted by characters who abandon the interhuman space which exposes them to others, and withdraw into their own individual subjectivities (Clarel himself being one of these characters as well). Melville shows how, borrowing Vincent Kenny's words in analyzing Clarel and Celio's abortion of the possibility of intersubjectivity, "[…] the 'boundless sea' of existence resists successful gams, in Melville's assessment of life, and Celio goes to his death completely alone" (1973: 188). The present section is divided into two main parts. The first one analyzes the tension between heterosexual and homosexual love in *Clarel*, examining the young student's quest for love in the light of the characters' generalized failure to create intersubjective bonds. The second part studies *Clarel*'s depiction of different types of monolithic thinking (religious dogma, blind faith in scientific progress, naïve optimism, radical pessimism), that destroy the possibility of plural thinking and perpetuate egocentrism and one-sidedness.

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[469] This scene is described in canto 1.27, "Matron and Maid". Not even in Clarel's vision of the companions who have died since he first arrived in Jerusalem (4.32.96) are Agar and Nathan together but walk apart and looking lonely.

a) (Im)possible Intersubjectivity: Frustrating Heterosexual and Homosexual Love

Clarel's poem-pilgrimage is not only a journey through spiritual doubt but also through desire, love, and the possibility to establishing interpersonal bonds. Samuel Otter has claimed that *Clarel* is not only a work of love, as the reviewer of the Chicago *Tribune* asserted on 1 July 1876, but also a poem about love: "the love (and fear of and longing) for God, the love of learning and artistic craft, the love of man for woman and man for man" (2006: 467). In this respect, in my opinion, it is possible to interpret the poem as an exploration of the possibility of human togetherness and desire, both heterosexual and homosexual, considering Clarel's quest as a search for human attachment, which, as Otter has claimed, interlaces and places in tension the student's desire for his beloved Ruth, on the one hand, and, on the other, for some of the male characters Clarel also meets in Palestine, namely Celio, Vine, and the sensual Lyonese (475). Critics of *Clarel* have traditionally spoken timidly about homosexual love in the poem, some –such as Stan Goldman– even referring to it in order to deny it:

> Clarel is certainly guilty of asking from others more than they can or even know how to give, but his "longing for solacement of mate" (1.2.12) is more of a spiritual need than any latent homosexuality. Critics who persist in seeing Clarel's attempt to make a human connection as a sign of the failure of heterosexual love and the hope for homosexual love ignore the poem's theme of spiritual sympathy. (1993: 37)

Goldman's conservatism toward homosexual love in *Clarel* makes it seem even more astonishing that, already in 1971, the early *Clarel* scholar Joseph G. Knapp would claim that, as Clarel travels through his pilgrimage, "his own overtures to Vine and his attraction to other male pilgrims cause him to wonder whether his own love is really heterosexual" (7). In a similar line of thought, in 1974, Nina Baym centered her analysis of heterosexual and homosexual love in *Clarel* on the young protagonist's conflicting conception of physical or erotic desire, on the one hand, and spiritual or religious, on

the other. Noting that Clarel identifies love for women with physical gratification and takes his heterosexual desire for Ruth as incompatible with spiritual development and pure love for God (117), Baym claims that

> […] the homoerotic relationship is presented as a kind of saving alternative to the dangers of heterosexual love. For Clarel naively imagines at first that relationships between men must necessarily be non-physical; he is drawn toward homosexuality as toward a "pure" earthly love. Later in the poem he learns to acknowledge a physical dimension to homosexual love, but since the traditional view makes freshly evil reside in the woman (the sphered breasts), he is tempted to believe that physical love between men would somehow escape the curse God has put on the flesh. (318)

While it is plausible that, as Baym claims, Clarel's flight from heterosexual partnership may be related to his fear of the sexual dimension of heterosexual love, it is also appropriate to note at this point that the poem describes Clarel's feelings for Ruth in a spiritual and idealized way, thus neutralizing any physical dimension to their partnership. Among those who have acknowledged and engaged in the analysis of Clarel's homosexual longings in the poem (Bezanson, Knapp, Parker, etc.), the character of Vine has been a central focus of attention. These critics have agreed on an analogy between Vine and the writer Nathaniel Hawthorne, analyzing Clarel and Vine's relationship in the light of Melville's friendship with Hawthorne. In this respect, it is important to underline the work of Walter Bezanson, the first *Clarel* scholar to analyze Clarel's homosexual attraction to his fellow traveler Vine, initiating the Vine/Hawthorne identification which has persisted to the present day. Although one may well find parallelisms between the fictional Vine and the author of *The Scarlet Letter*,[470] this identification has dominated the study of homosexuality in the poem, overshadowing Clarel's homosexual desire for other characters besides Vine, as well as the evolution of the young student's conception of his own homosexual attraction

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[470] For an analysis of such parallelisms see Bezanson 1991.

toward other fellow travelers. Clarel's evolving attitude toward his own homosexual longings –in my opinion, from fear, to a will to explore, and to a final repression of the homosexual in him–, I believe, provides hints that may allow us to examine not only the representation of love between men and fluid forms of desire escaping heteronormativity that Melville had already developed in the 1840s-1850s (White-Jacket's fascination with Jack Chase in *White-Jacket* [1850], Ishmael and Queequeg's bosom friendship in *Moby-Dick* [1851], Pierre Glendinning's attraction to his cousin Glen [1852], etc.). These hints also allow us to perceive how these previous representations would be radically transformed in Melville's analysis of some of his male characters' efforts to rule out and eventually annihilate "the feminine in man" (*Billy Budd, Sailor* [ca. 1891:] 503) in his last piece, the posthumous novella *Billy Budd, Sailor* (1924).[471] In the student, both heterosexual and homosexual love are made to converge and collide, leading character and readers to an exploration of love in the light of the poem's intersubjective (under)development, where love comes face to face with the (im)possibilities of trespassing the inter-personal walls which might propitiate such intersubjective bond but eventually does not.[472] Rodrigo Andrés has studied the political dimension of love between men in Melville's literary production and, particularly, in *Billy Budd*, arguing that, in a way similar to Walt Whitman's, Melville portrays love between men as a form of relating with a radical democratizing potentiality because it turns lovers into equals –therefore neutralizing the existing hierarchies among them–, eliminates prejudices in the subjects who love, demolishes

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[471] Rodrigo Andrés has interpreted *Billy Budd, Sailor* as an analysis of homophobia, both on an individual and on a national level. In his book *Herman Melville: poder y amor entre hombres* [*Herman Melville: Power and Love between Men*] (2007), Andrés analyzes how Melville's novella reflects the internalized homophobia of those male characters who destroy the possibilities of loving other men by clinging to hierarchical and oppressive conceptions of the world and of themselves.

[472] Love in *Clarel*, and more generally the possibility to establish an interpersonal bond with the other, remains, in most cases, unreciprocated (excepting Clarel and Ruth's relationship). In all interpersonal relationships the poem depicts (even in Clarel and Ruth's), love and other forms of interpersonal bonds remain eventually unfulfilled.

inter-personal separation, and makes lovers potential democratizing agents. One of the ways in which Clarel comes into contact with the inter-personal walls the poem portrays, both physically and symbolically, is through his relationship with Ruth. As I have analyzed earlier,[473] the young American provides an illusion of freedom to both Agar and Ruth, and their evolving intersubjectivity with Clarel tumbles down not only the identity markers of religion and gender that separate them from the student, but also the misogynist hierarchies characterizing the Jewish community to which they belong, a transgression which will be eventually stopped when the two women are literally locked in within the walls imposed by the Jewish community and returned to their places in it, a confinement which finally precipitates their actual death. Thus, although in the case of Ruth and Agar's relationship with Clarel intersubjectivity abridges the gap between 'I' and 'you', 'insiders' and 'strangers', as friendship evolves among the three, the walls they have trespassed are eventually reestablished once the community imposes its power before the free will of the individual. At his arrival in Jerusalem after his excursion to the environs of the city, Clarel finds out that Ruth and her mother died while he was away, and, in anger, the student blames the death of the two women on his separation from them imposed by the Jewish community: "And ye—your tribe—'Twas *ye* denied / Me access to this virgin's side / In bitter trial: take my curse!— /[…] / And here's the furl / Of Nathan's faith: then perish faith—" (4.30.90-103). Similar to how the Rabbi had done in Part 1, some anonymous Jews in Ruth and Agar's tombs remark to Clarel that he does not belong in the Jewish community and, therefore, does not have a right to be there, menacing him to "Give way, quit thou *our* dead!", "Art *thou* of *us*? Turn thee about!" (4.30.111, 113; my italics). Even in death, community walls continue separating Clarel from Ruth and her mother.

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[473] See Section 3.6 in this chapter.

Although the student is right in his accusations of the tragic consequences of one-sided mentality and communitarian segregationism, Clarel himself also poses an obstacle to his own relationship with Ruth by choosing to leave her alone in her grieving retreat and joining instead the all-male society of his fellow travelers to journey the Holy Land. Walter Bezanson has indicated that *Clarel* ultimately reflects Melville's failure to literary deal with heterosexual love except in allegorical terms (1991: 632). Similarly, Vincent Kenny has noted that Clarel and Ruth's courtship, eventually ending in her death, follows a pattern of unhappy marriages already present in Melville's other works (1973: 183): Clarel's commitment to Ruth, Kenny argues, emerges from his desperate wish to believe that heterosexual love leads to happiness and prevents loneliness (182).[474] Nevertheless, Clarel's desire for Ruth is frequently eclipsed by the student's attraction for some of the men he meets, and which interestingly seems to strike him more intensely than his love for the Jewish young woman. In fact, Ruth appears more as the embodiment of Clarel's vision of perfection –an angelical emblem of beauty, purity, innocence, and virginity– than as a real woman. Clarel's desire for Ruth, it might be argued, is spiritual, not corporeal or physical; Petrarchan, not sexual: Ruth is silent, (readers never hear either her or her mother speak, which, I believe, is intended to mirror their submissive nature within their patriarchal Jewish community), unattainable, and little less than an angel whom Clarel idealizes as if she belonged to a realm beyond the very human world where the male characters by whom he feels attracted are placed. Kenny argues that sex and carnal love threaten the purity of Clarel and Ruth's relationship: "Ruth cannot fill Clarel's need for a mate because her carnal

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[474] Among such unhappy marriages, Kenny underlines Pierre and Isabel's in *Pierre*, the narrator and his wife's in "I and My Chimney" and "Cock-A-Doodle-Do", or Taji and Yillah's in *Mardi*, among others.

gift in marriage will destroy his Platonic conception of love" (1973: 185).[475] Most

importantly, Clarel cannot feel the same magnetism and wish for communion toward

her that he experiences toward the male characters he is attracted to. It is actually these

other different male characters more than Ruth who contribute to Clarel's learning and

unlearning; as Robert Milder argues, the quest for knowledge in *Clarel* follows the

pattern of Melville's other writings, since it is a character of the same sex and not of the

opposite that provides the central quester with the possibility to advance toward his

own completion (2006: 47).[476]

Clarel's incipient love relationship with Ruth in Part 1 is juxtaposed to, and, I

believe, in tension with, Clarel's magnetic connection to the young Italian doubter

Celio, since, significantly, "[…] every thought / Of Ruth was strangely underrun / By

Celio's image" (1.18.51-53). As has been argued, Clarel and Celio are immediately

drawn to one another in a heart-to-heart connection that even transcends language and

that is described with more intensity than Clarel's love for Ruth. In spite of this

connection, even Clarel and Celio's almost instinctive magnetism is also an example of

how intersubjectivity is cut off by individuals who boycott their own possibility of

togetherness with other human beings. Clarel's intersubjectivity with Celio intermingles

with questions of love and sexuality; their relationship may be considered an instance of

"That *other* love" (3.31.53) explored by the young American throughout his journey.[477]

In his pilgrimage, Clarel evolves from an open disposition to express his homosexual

desire to a self-censoring repression of the feelings that distract his thoughts from Ruth

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[475] Kenny's observation, I think, also applies to Pierre's relationship with Lucy in Melville's 1852 *Pierre*.

[476] To this, it is important to add the fact that Melville's sea novels portray all-male contexts because whaling was a male industry and a male job, therefore, there were no women on whaling ships. For obvious reasons, therefore, women cannot be the sources out of which the growth of Melville's male characters takes place.

[477] Although I do not agree with his argument, Stan Goldman reads the "*other* love" Clarel seeks as a spiritual love or the love for God, therefore denying any homo/sexual yearning on Clarel's part (1993: 156).

by his final resolution to marry the young woman. Clarel and Celio's bond, however, constitutes one of the most evident examples of how intersubjective communication may radically trespass inter-personal and inter-community walls ("The spiritual sympathy / Transcends the social" [1.19.3-4]). Yet if, as the dissertation has been arguing, it is through ongoing dialogue that intersubjectivity may be developed, it is interesting to analyze how Clarel and Celio's magnetic attraction to one another points to a bond that transcends language. Celio feels drawn toward Clarel since their first –silent– encounter, conceiving in the American "a brother that he well might own / In tie of spirit" (1.11.43-44). Their non-verbal communication is described as a powerful one: "Mutely for moment, face met face: / But more perchance between the two / Was interchanged than e'en may pass / In many a worded interview" (1.11.54-56). Clarel, nonetheless, will frustrate the Italian's longings for communion with him. However intense Clarel feels the force of their magnetism is, the American actually remains incapable of responding to Celio's call despite the obvious attraction he also feels for the Italian. Shy, and perhaps overwhelmed by the intensity of this connection and of his own feelings, Clarel's tongue is paralyzed by the "Unknown" ("the Unknown / Compressed his lips" [1.11.51-52]),[478] which may be read as the homosexual love Clarel experiences in these episodes for the first time in the poem, which he cannot name, and which even obscures his love for Ruth. Thus, even though the two young characters are attracted to one another, Clarel aborts all possible attempts of verbal interaction and further communication, and his unresponsiveness shatters the brotherless Celio's yearnings to socialize with a fellow human, eventually precipitating his death alone and deprived of any feeling of human fellowship. Clarel and Celio's relationship, or, rather,

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[478] In a different way to this episode described in canto 1.11 "Lower Gihon", where Clarel's first meeting of Celio is narrated, Clarel will be able to speak his feelings to Vine, and it will be Vine that, then, will 'reject' Clarel's call for togetherness. See the analysis of this episode on pages 451-456 in this section.

their lack of a relationship that might have been, is one of the most evident moments in the poem of a possibility to transcend interpersonal walls that is aborted. As Vincent Kenny claims: "Clarel sensed in Celio an alter ego, but his inability to speak prevented the friendship they might have had" (1973: 73). In other words, Celio longs to talk to Clarel (the potentiality of intersubjectivity emerges), but Clarel does not respond to his yearning (the potentiality is aborted). The climax of Clarel's unresponsiveness is canto 1.15 "Under the Minaret", when, after having spent the night by St. Stephen's gate for not having arrived in Jerusalem before the doors closed at sundown, Celio watches Clarel and Nehemiah coming out through the gate as it opens in the morning, and rises to greet them, only to feel hurt by Clarel's non-responsiveness:

> Again, as down in Gihon late,
> He [Celio] hovered with his overture—
> An overture that scorned debate.
> But inexperienced, shy, unsure—
> Challenged abrupt, or yea or nay,
> Again did Clarel hesitate;
> When quick the proud one with a look
> Which might recoil of heart betray,
> And which the other scarce might brook
> In recollection, turned away.
>   Ah, student, ill thy sort have sped:
> The instant proffer—it is fled! (1.15. 69-80)

It is interesting to note that Melville supplements the description of Clarel and Celio's gazes during their second meeting with a brief interlude portraying the call of the muezzin which Jews ignore ("Is Zion deaf?", the narrator wonders [1.15.32]), on the one hand, and the "sightless eyes" (1.15.40) of Muslims who look at the sky in prayer, on the other. This inter-passage of deafness among neighboring communities and the reference to the "sightless eyes" constitute, in my opinion, a suggestive indication of Clarel's blindness to realize the yearning that Celio's eyes and bodily disposition (he

rises to greet them) are trying to convey. Companions in doubt and spiritual crisis, it is not revealed why Clarel is in all their encounters unable to talk to Celio, which causes Celio to feel offended by this lack of reciprocity.[479] Ashamed and repentant, Clarel afterwards seeks to repair his latter incapacity to approach the Italian and looks for him, but, as the narrator augurs in the preceding passage ("Ah, student, ill thy sort have sped: / The instant proffer—it is fled!" [1.15.79-80]), the possibility to meet Celio which Clarel cowardly renounced has now completely evaporated, and Clarel will never be able to see Celio again. In the following Canto, Clarel meets Ruth and falls in love with her, yet Celio continues haunting his thoughts: "Celio sought / Vainly in body—now appeared / As in the spiritual art, / Haunting the air, and in the heart" (1.18.53-56). Having seen his last efforts to socialize with a fellow human rejected by one toward whom he had felt such a special connection, Celio can only die in a Bartleby-like manner:

> Yes, some retreat to win
> Even more secluded than the court
> The Terra Santa locks within:
> Celio had found withdrawn resort
> And lodging in the deeper town.
> There, by grasping ill distressed—
> Such as attacks the hump-bowed one—
> After three days the malady pressed:
> He knew it, knew his course was run,
> And turning toward the wall, found rest. (1.19.7-16)

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[479] Language may be considered a barrier here as well, since, even though the poem is of course written in English, some of its characters do not share the same linguistic code, as may be the case between Celio, an Italian, and Clarel, an American. In any case, however, Clarel's incapacity to respond to Celio's call, I believe, is not to be blamed on linguistic difference but on the student's paralyzing fear to open himself to the other and, by so doing, discover more about himself.

Aware that he is going to die, he significantly chooses to do so facing the wall.[480] It is only after Celio dies that Clarel takes a step to approach the stranger by reading his journals. This insight into Celio through the written words in the Italian's journals (which may be taken as an example of the intersubjective relationships which texts establish with their readers) enables Clarel to realize, at this point, that Celio was in fact not only his alter ego but a stronger pursuer than himself who not only dared to question the Truths that the world imposed upon him, but also to live in the painful awareness that there are no answers. It is, thus, at this point, when it is too late to communicate with him, that the stranger is made less strange to Clarel. It is relevant that Melville should make Celio's death transgress inter-community (religious, cultural, ethnic) boundaries: the Italian dies among the Turks, in presence of a group of Syrians, is wailed by Syrian women, and waked according to Muslim funereal rites, before his body is claimed by the Latins and buried as a Catholic.[481] As Rolfe blatantly exclaims in contemplation of Celio's tomb, whom he confesses to have known long ago and in another faraway land: "we die, we make no sign, / We acquiesce in any cheer / No rite we seek, no rite decline" (1.40.54-56).

The second male character that attracts Clarel's interest after Celio's death is Vine, who remains a 'walled' subjectivity throughout the pilgrimage. Even though he could not talk to Celio, Clarel will in this case be capable of speaking to Vine, but it is

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[480] See my reference to Celio's death facing the wall on page 392 in this chapter. Celio's death is narrated in canto 1.19 "The Fulfilment", the title of which refers to the materialization of Clarel's premonitions that Celio is suffering and going to die. Celio's death might also be read in the light of Clarel's heterosexual relationship with Ruth, since, in order for Clarel to pursue Ruth he must first kill the homosexual in him, symbolized by Celio.

[481] After having rejected him in life, the Latins bury Celio as a Christian: "[…] the monks decided that Celio had made peace with God and had died in the Church and therefore they gave him Christian burial in consecrated ground" (Knapp 1971: 89). Rolfe notices the irony in Celio's imposed 'conversion' when, upon reading Job's text at Celio's tombstone "I KNOW THAT MY REDEEMER LIVETH", he exclaims "Poor Ethelward! Though didst but grope; / I knew thee, and thou hadst small hope" (4.40.48; 49-50). It is also important to juxtapose Celio's burial to Mortmain's, whose body is interred in the desert, outside the consecrated ground of the monastery.

relevant that Vine, in turn, should refute Clarel's yearning for intersubjectivity at this point, in the same way as Clarel had rejected Celio's. At the same time as he is thinking of Ruth, Clarel meets Vine at the Sepulcher of Kings when the latter is deeply engaged in meditation as he contemplates the tombs.[482] Noting the irruption of the student and his companion Nehemiah in his secluded retreat, Vine politely salutes yet makes evident to them that he wants to be left alone: "[…] shy passed forth in obvious state / Of one who would keep separate" (1.28.50-51). Vine's personal space is 'invaded' again when Nehemiah goes to wash his eyes in the fountain. While Vine's reaction to this is to go away from Nehemiah, he establishes an instant connection with Clarel, even though they do not exchange a word. Clarel is almost bewitched by the stranger's beauty despite his silence, yet Vine's constant self-control and reserved nature (1.29.34) make him as difficult to approach as he is appealing.[483] The following canto is significantly entitled "The Site of the Passion", which, in my opinion, may be read as evoking not only Vine's inner struggle with whatever thoughts or painful memories he may try to repress, but also Clarel's 'passion' for Vine, a turning point to how Clarel approaches his homosexual feelings. Older than the student,[484] Vine's secluded character fascinates Clarel but initially renders him inarticulate in front of him. Despite Clarel's interest in his fellow traveler, interpersonal walls surrounding Vine prevent the development of any kind of intersubjectivity or togetherness. As the episode advances, Clarel perceives how Vine withdraws more and more into his self, and wonders if he will ever be able to approach Vine without being rejected:

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[482] As I will analyze, Clarel's desire for Vine is an extension of the homosexual longings he had felt for Celio, yet had repressed. It is, thus, not accidental that Clarel should meet Vine after the Italian's death, again as the student is thinking of his beloved Ruth.

[483] As a matter of fact, the poem names Vine "The Recluse" in the very title to canto 1.29.

[484] Looking at a possible Hawthorne/Vine connection, scholars have noted that Hawthorne was fifteen years Melville's senior.

> For Vine, aloof he loitered—shrunk
> In privity and shunned the monk.
> Clarel awaited him. He came—
> The shadow of his previous air
> Merged in a settled neutral frame—
> Assumed, may be. Would Vine disclaim
> All sympathy the youth might share? (1.30.82-88)

Vine does reject Clarel's advances toward him, and will in fact disrupt any possibility of togetherness with Clarel or other characters due to his tendency to build walls around his own self, a locked fortress unreachable to others.[485] Vine's gestures often reflect both his personal isolationist tendency and the segregation that, the poem shows, characterizes the Holy Land. One example of this is, in my opinion, the apparently minor episode describing how Vine separates one by one the seeds of a weed he picks from the ground: "For Vine, he twitched from ground a weed, / Apart then picked it, seed by seed" (1.34.68-69).[486] A similar scene is repeated in the closing stanza to canto 3.5 "The High Desert", where the narrator describes how Vine takes a stone in his hands and breaks it up into pieces ("For Vine, from that unchristened earth / Bits he picked up of porous stone, / And crushed in fist: or one by one / Through the dull void of desert air, / He tossed them into valley down" [3.5.183-187]). Vine remains apart from the group of pilgrims, engaging in some spontaneous remark only occasionally. Significantly enough, Vine's position in the cavalcade is at the end of the rest of his fellow pilgrims, almost removed from the group and frequently looking backwards, in a constant reminiscence of the past that prevents him from enjoying the present and looking toward the future. Vine is trapped in the past; to him, I believe,

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[485] The first time Rolfe is introduced Clarel wonders about the possibility that such two fascinating personalities such as Vine's and Rolfe's might "meet and mate" ("Art" [ca. 1870], *Published Poems* 280), and that something great might emerge from their contact. Vine, however, withdraws to his own self after meeting Rolfe, avoiding thus any possibility of interaction with Rolfe. See footnote 447 on page 418 in this chapter.

[486] It is, I believe, interesting to note that, in the *Battle-Pieces* poem "A Dirge for McPherson", Melville uses the weed as a metaphor of the vulnerability and fragility of human beings: "Man is noble, man is brave, / But man's—a weed" (1866: 125).

applies White-Jacket's affirmation that "Those who are solely governed by the Past stand like Lot's wife, crystallized in the act of looking backward, and forever incapable of looking before" (*White-Jacket* 1850: 150). Even though he occasionally participates in the dialogue that is generated with other characters in the poem, Vine's heart remains to the end of the pilgrimage "a fountain sealed" (*Clarel* 1.17.22) preventing the development of any possible intersubjectivity, as he more and more withdraws inside his inner self. [487] Clarel's efforts to approach Vine reach their climax in canto 2.27, when the student lets go "some inklings" (2.27.111) as he yearns for communion with Vine. Yet Vine does not seem to notice Clarel's insinuations. During the whole episode, Vine remains immersed in his own thoughts, his speech resembling more a monologue than a dialogue because he neither leaves space for Clarel's observations nor addresses the student at any moment. Clarel's perception of the 'conversation' is different, believing Vine's "fluent turn" (2.27.35) an unusual opening on the part of this character which intensifies even more he student's actual yearning, and encourages him to express his feelings to Vine:

> Prior advances unreturned
> Not here he recked of, while he yearned—
> O, now but for communion true
> And close; let go each alien theme;
> Give me thyself! (2.27.66-70)

>   Divided mind knew Clarel here;
> The heart's desire did interfere.
> Thought he, How pleasant in another
> Such sallies, or in thee, if said
> After confidings that should wed
> Our souls in one:—Ah, call me *brother*!—
> So feminine his passionate mood
> Which, long as hungering unfed,

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[487] Pushed to sing by Derwent, Vine significantly sings in canto 3.14. "The Revel Closed". See the analysis of this passage on Section "d" in 3.7.2 in this chapter.

All else rejected or withstood. (2.27.102-110)

As I interpret the episode, Vine remains ignorant of Clarel's desire, which indicates the different perceptions that the two characters have on an 'incident' that may well be non-existent to one of the parties involved, as Vine is locked within his own subjectivity and absorbed by his thoughts. Clarel's desire for Vine, though ardent, also remains actually unspoken: whatever his "inklings" (2.27.111), Clarel struggles with his feelings alone, and it is only the narrator and readers that have access to his passionate yearnings.[488] If it is true that Vine appears altered after Clarel subtly insinuates his longing for communion, such change is most probably caused by the stream of thoughts he has been assembling rather than by Clarel's hints. As a matter of fact, in my opinion, Vine is so immersed in himself that he does not realize the student's feelings. Clarel, however, interprets Vine's sudden gravity and inquiring look as a rejection of the feelings the student thinks he has expressed: calling Vine an "Enslaver" (2.27.137), by the end of the 'conversation' Clarel is ashamed to possess such "sick" (2.27.139) feelings inside of himself, which, he says, distract his attention for Ruth. This description of Vine as an "Enslaver" who does not dare to "Let flow thy nature but for bar" (2.27.138) may be related to the narrator's description of Captain Vere in *Billy Budd, Sailor* as a man who "could even have loved Billy but for fate and ban" ([ca. 1891:] 485). In the same way, it is also worth observing that, from this moment on, Clarel will become his own enslaver by repressing his homosexuality. Clarel's private 'conversation' with Vine is a turning point in the way the student conceives homosexual desire.[489] It is important to note that, despite his solitary status and impenetrable

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[488] The lack of attribution in inverted commas ("") in Clarel's words indicates that these are thoughts and not his direct speech.

[489] Clarel and Vine, nevertheless, will be capable, by the end of the poem, of departing from each other in friendly terms ("Friendly they tarried—blameless went" [4.32.13]). The private encounter

subjectivity, Vine is regarded highly by other travelers in the cavalcade, who consider the silent Vine some kind of lord or person of noble blood. The only character in the poem who dismisses Vine as mad is the Lesbian, who compares him to the mad monk Habbibi living in the cave outside Mar Saba.[490] Melville gives voice to Vine through an inner monologue of the character, providing readers access to the walled subjectivity that characters such as Clarel can only struggle to grasp:

> "And is it I
> (He muses), I that leave the others,
> Or do they leave me? One could sigh
> For Achmed with his hundred brothers:
> How share the gushing amity
> With all? Divine philanthropy!
> For my part, I but love the past—
> The further back the better; yes,
> In the past is the true blessedness,
> The future's over overcast—
> The present aye plebeian. (3.26.8-18)

Vine ponders these thoughts while he lies in contemplation of the palm by the monastery of Mar Saba, sorely wondering if it is he who has separated from the world or if it is the world that has separated from him. The intriguing question posed by Vine (i.e., "How share the gushing amity / With all?") is of central importance to the intersubjective universalism that, this dissertation claims, *Clarel* articulates.

Contrary to arguments such as Baym's, analyzed at the beginning of this section, Samuel Otter has noted how Clarel tries to imagine a more fluid conception of love that transcends conventional parameters of gender and sexuality: "Clarel attempts to think

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between Clarel and Vine in canto 4.15 "Symphonies" also demonstrates that both characters are able to stand together again "in friendly neighborhood" (4.15.2) after the episode analyzed here.

[490] While Vine is 'weird' to Derwent too, the latter informs the Lesbian that some consider Vine wise. Melville remarks the fuzzy boundaries between sanity and madness in *Billy Budd, Sailor* "Who in the rainbow can draw the line where the violet tint ends and the orange tint begins? Distinctly we see the difference of the colors, but where exactly does the one first blendingly enter into the other? So with sanity and insanity" ([ca. 1891]: 496).

beyond 'Eve,' outside of the male/female dichotomy and the constraints of standard rhyme, and to imagine a love without gender: 'That *other* love!' (3.31.53). Ultimately, he responds according to convention, returning to Ruth and then assuming the role of her mourner" (2006: 475). The third character to whom Clarel feels attracted is the Lyonese, a young easygoing Jew whom the student meets in canto 4.26 "The Prodigal", and who becomes Clarel's roommate in Bethlehem.[491] This attraction, however, is described in a more contained way due to the fact that Clarel represses his feelings for other men after he thinks that Vine has rejected his advances. As a matter of fact, the American's resolution at this point is to return to Ruth and enter marriage, henceforth repressing his desire for men. Clarel keeps his attraction for the Lyonese silenced, to the extent that not even the narrator is able to disclose Clarel's feelings this time. There are some textual "inklings" (2.27.111), however, by which the reader is made aware of Clarel's fascination with the Lyonese's sensuality and "coquetry" (4.26.235), which the student conceives as both exotic and feminine:

> What wind was this? And yet it swayed
> Even Clarel's cypress. He delayed
> All comment, gazing at him there.
> Then first he marked the clustering hair
> Which on the bright and shapely brow
> At middle part grew slantly low:
> Rich, tumbled, chestnut hood of curls,
> Like to a Polynesian girl's, (4.26.242-249)

Whether the 'swaying of Clarel's cypress' may be taken as a sexual reference or not, Clarel feels stimulated by this character. As Walter Bezanson notes, the Lyonese "is introduced by the narrator with a 'satyr's chord' (4.25.59) and stirs Derwent to a

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[491] Even though Clarel's meeting of the Lyonese takes place in canto 4.26, (the voice of) this character is already introduced in canto 4.24 "Twilight", through a love song the lyrics of which enrapture the young Clarel. The fact that he is introduced by his voice and through a love song already signals the happy-go-lucky nature of the Lyonese.

rhapsody (4.27) on 'the sweet shape' (line 24) of this beguiling young Bacchus" (1991: 625). Bezanson argues that, being unconcerned with religion or transcendental meanings (the Lyonese is a Jew by birth, but is actually a prodigal),[492] the Lyonese represents a "temptation to Clarel to deny his own spiritual conflicts" (1991: 625). As William Potter has similarly noted, the Lyonese invites Clarel to live according to his sensual nature (2004: 137), and it is precisely the sensuality that this "young Bacchus" emanates that both attracts and intimidates the student. The Southern-European origin of the Lyonese is used to reinforce this character's sensuality: "No Northern origin declare, / But Southern—where the nations bright, / The costumed nations, circled be / In garland round a tideless sea / Eternal in its *fresh delight*" (4.26.26; my italics). Rooming together in Bethlehem, the Lyonese shares with Clarel a personal story about his relationship with a certain "*amigo*" (4.26.99) named Don Rovenna, who died some time ago after spending many happy times together.[493] The personal relationship that the Lyonese maintained with Don Rovenna is kept ambiguous, as the Jew does not give any further details but, instead, finishes his story singing a particular passage from the "Song of Solomon" that underlines the most erotic dimension of the biblical text, and perhaps too of his friendship with Don Rovenna. It is relevant that Clarel should feel disgusted by the song at this point, and tries to repress the erotic dimension of the lyrics that the Lyonese emphasizes, by claiming that the song is merely allegoric. The

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[492] Although he generally agrees with Bezanson's opinion that the Lyonese has no interest in metaphysical truths, Potter also claims that "as much as he seeks the sensual, the Lyonese is also unconsciously in flight from something equally powerful" (2004: 198). The character, Potter notes, demonstrates a good knowledge of the Old Testament (even deeper than Clarel's) and is able to skillfully frustrate Clarel's questions (199). Potter concludes that the Lyonese's ambiguity toward his own Jewishness is related to prejudice, quoting the words of the Russian pilgrim who is seeking the Lyonese and whom Clarel meets in canto 4.28: "Society / Is not quite catholic, you know, / Retains some prejudices yet— / Likes not the singular; and so / He'd melt in (4.28.139-143).

[493] At the same time as he underlines the homoerotic sensuality of the Lyonese and his relationship to his "amigo" Don Rovenna, Vincent Kenny has also noted that it is Clarel who constructs such homosexual possibility in the Lyonese, as the Prodigal Jew confesses his attraction to beautiful, sensuous women and encourages Clarel to pay attention to the bodily dimension of his "Bella Donna" (4.26.202) (Kenny 1973: 178-179).

response of the Lyonese is also significant, as he advises Clarel to "look at straight things more in line" (4.26.200), without complicating them with "foggy symbols" (4.26.198). It is interesting to notice that, in his attempt to silence the overt sensuality of the Lyonese, Clarel becomes a censoring agent similar to the one he felt victim of in Vine's 'rejection' of his own feelings. It is only by repressing his own homosexual desire that Clarel considers himself ready to return to Jerusalem and propose to Ruth. Vincent Kenny has pointed out how Clarel's marriage to Ruth, had it happened, might have stopped Clarel from continuing in his search for truth: "Married to Ruth, he might have become another Rip Van Winkle or John Marr, settled in the habit of relationship" (1973: 186). Regarding *Clarel* as a poem-pilgrimage about love, such marriage would have also covered Clarel's homosexual love by settling him down into a heteronormative relationship.

As this section has analyzed, *Clarel* constitutes an exploration of heterosexual and, most specially, homosexual love. In relation to intersubjectivity and universalism, the poem explores love as a possible path through which intersubjectivity and the togetherness which most characters in the poem seek yet fail to fulfill may be developed, yet is not. It is not only the separation between different cultural, religious, or national communities that generates obstacles to the possibility of intersubjectivity (the Jewish community in Ruth's relationship with Clarel), but, most importantly, individuals themselves, who boycott the possibilities of approaching and being approached by other characters, and choose instead to remain 'walled' within their own subjectivities –from which they fence off strangers–, continuing to be trapped in their one-sided views of the world, and experiencing the painful and sometimes self-destructive consequences of their aloneness.

b)   <u>Walled   Subjectivities,   Impenetrable   Minds: Manias—Madnesses—One-</u>

<u>sidednesses— Egocentrisms</u>

> "[…] while wistful here
> Clarel in silence challenged Vine;
> But not responsive was Vine's cheer,
> Discharged of every meaning sign."
>
> "Go mad I can not: I maintain
> The perilous outpost of the sane."
>   (Herman Melville, *Clarel* 1876: 2.33.36-39; 3.19.97-98)
>
> "In   our   man-of-war,   this   semi-savage   [Wooloo],
> wandering   about   the   gun-deck   in   his   barbaric   robe,
> seemed a being from some other sphere. His tastes were
> our abomination: ours his. Our creed he rejected: his we.
> We thought him a loon: he fancied us fools. Had the
> case been reversed; had we been Polynesians and he an
> American, our mutual opinion of each other would still
> have remained the same."
>   (Herman Melville, *White-Jacket* 1850: 117-118)
>
> "Heaven have mercy on us all—Presbyterians and
> Pagans alike—for we are all somehow dreadfully cracked
> about the head, and sadly need mending."
>   (Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick* 1851: 2007)

As the previous section has analyzed, love fails to lead to the development of

intersubjectivity and togetherness in the poem, neither is there any room for friendship

in a number of characters who constitute a juxtaposition of separate egos rather than

human beings who are-*with* one another. The impenetrable subjectivities of most

characters in the poem stand as evident obstacles to the potential development of

intersubjectivity, their characteristic one-sided conceptions of the world bearing an

intimate connection to egocentrism and monolithic –often monomaniac– adherences to

Meaning which prevent the creation of dialogue. In *Clarel*, characters travel in a land of

segregation where 'walls' (interpersonal, inter-religious, inter-cultural, etc.) prevent the

development of intersubjectivity, even though it is early in the poem that characters

leave behind the walled Jerusalem to journey the Holy Land.[494] From walled egotistic natures such as Vine's; to religious maniacs such as Nathan or Nehemiah; science worshippers and materialists such as Margoth; cheerful optimists such as Derwent, the Lesbian, Don Hannibal, Glaucon and the Elder; and bleak pessimists such as Mortmain, Agath,[495] Ungar, Habbibi, or Cyril, *Clarel* analyzes how, even though they are incorporated into the universalist dialogue Melville creates in his poem-pilgrimage, characters are unable to abandon their own individual selves and to engage in plural thinking (Rolfe excepted). It is undeniable that the character of Clarel longs to connect and discover other fellow travelers who accompany him in his journey. Bruce L. Grenberg, however, has considered the young character as different from "Melville's early questers" (i.e., Tomo, Taji, Ishmael, White-Jacket, Redburn, etc.) who, he claims, "sought out new, better, other worlds to conquer and assimilate":

> In stark contrast, Clarel's search is an inverted, or regressive quest. Clarel's starting point is that of impasse, the patent failure of the human spirit to rise above the dust, and his "quest" in the poem is a journey backward through spiritual time in an effort to discover the dubious origins of hope and expectation. […] Clearly he finds no answer in Bethlehem, but neither are there answers in the endless dialogues among the poem's major characters […]. The poem's manifold "readings" of life, death, faith, and disbelief take us back to the doubloon chapter of *Moby-Dick*, but more emphatically they are of a piece with the conditional world of "If—". (Grenberg 1989: 191)

As the present section will analyze, even though they are part of the exercise in plural thinking and universalism that the poem creates, most characters cannot come to terms with the "if" or conditionality (or perhaps total lack) of 'Meaning'. These characters

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[494] Even though Clarel abandons the walled city of Jerusalem in order to go on the cavalcade with the rest of the pilgrims, walls are not left behind. As Joseph G. Knapp claims: "the wilderness replaces the oppressiveness of the walled town, but man is still locked in with a cosmic oppressiveness" (1971: 31). Also importantly, characters eventually return to the walled city of Jerusalem after their journey.

[495] I am following here Walter Bezanson's analysis of Agath as "the third figure in the monomaniac sequence (Celio-Mortmain-Agath-Ungar)" (1991: 614). More recently, however, Wyn Kelley has read Agath not as part of the monomaniac group of characters but as a "more flexible, social, and generative figure than Melville's other monomaniacs" (Kelley 2011: 61).

remain locked-in within their own egos and one-sided minds, and out of the world, thus cutting off the inter-human space or relational disposition that may potentially unite them to their fellow travelers. These impenetrable subjectivities and the one-sided thinking they represent, as *Clarel* shows, eliminate the possibility of intersubjectivity and, consequently, of universalism.

i) <u>Monolithic Knowledge, Immutable Meaning: Religious and Scientific One-sidedness</u>

> "Zeal, furious zeal, and frenzying faith."
>
> "Convert to science, for but see
> The hammer: yes, geology."
>
> "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."
> (*Clarel* 1876: 3.16.65; 2.19.54-55; 1.31.193-196)

In his first days alone in Jerusalem Clarel wishes strongly for a traveling companion with whom he may share his doubts. His yearnings are ironically answered with the appearance of old Nehemiah, an Evangelical Millenarian who believes in the Second Coming and Jewish restoration, and who provides Clarel access to the Jewish community where he meets Ruth and learns about Nathan. As Nathan,[496] Nehemiah is an example of one-sided thinking and religious mania. Characterized by the Bible he always carries with him, it is certainly ironic that Melville should introduce the Millenarian as Clarel's guide (however ironic a guide Nehemiah seems to be, he actually 'guides' Clarel toward Ruth and, as a consequence, toward the possibility of love and potential –domestic– happiness). As a matter of fact, the Bible will not become a valid travel or spiritual guide to Clarel, to the extent that the volume will be significantly

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[496] See the analysis of Nathan in Section 3.5 in this chapter.

buried with Nehemiah at his death.[497] As Walter Bezanson notes, Nehemiah will become Clarel's friend yet not precisely his mentor or guide (1991: 629). In spite of his obsessive religiosity, Nehemiah is a character who arises sympathy in readers and whom the narrator portrays with both respect and dignity, even though he is also criticized for the religious craze which, like Nathan's, actually leads him to death as he sleepwalks pursuing a vision of the New Jerusalem and drowns in the Dead Sea. The young Clarel interrelates the one-sided thinking of "somnambulists" (1.21.47) such as Nathan and Nehemiah who cannot see beyond their respective monomanias yet dismiss such one-sided thinking in others as a sign of madness. This is evident in the episode narrating Nehemiah and Clarel's visit to the Jewish community in Jerusalem, during which Nehemiah expresses compassion for "Poor Nathan" (1.22.77): "Heaven help him; dreams, but dreams—dreams, dreams!" (1.22.84). Clarel's reply to Nehemiah brings to attention that the craze of the old man is not much different from Nathan's: "But thou, thou too, with faith sincere / Surely believ'st in Jew restored" (1.22.85-86); to which he gets nothing but the reply: "Poor man, he's weak; […] / he's amiss" (1.22.88-89). Clarel's conclusion is that Nathan must think likewise of Nehemiah, which reminds us of the *Neversink* crew's and the Polynesian Wooloo's conceptions of one another in *White-Jacket*, or of Ishmael's affirmation in the "The Ramadan" chapter (number 17) in *Moby-Dick* that "[…] we are all somehow dreadfully cracked about the head, and sadly need mending" (1851: 89). Unlike the attitude he expresses toward Nathan's destructive madness, however, the narrator invests Nehemiah with an almost child-like tenderness and personal dignity even though he portrays the old man as a "fool for Christ" (Potter 2004: 54). Similarly, when Nehemiah stops in the middle of the road to remove the stones in order to prepare the way for Christ's coming, the narrator questions, through

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[497] Martyn Smith noted that the role of Nehemiah's Bible/guide-book is "to connect the stories found in the Bible to the spots where these events took place" (2011: 35).

Rolfe, Glaucon's affirmation that the old man is crazy: "And shall we say / That this is craze? Or but, in brief, / Simplicity of plain belief?" (*Clarel* 1876: 2.10.229-231).

Melville critically establishes an analogy between religious mania and scientific mania, in that both constitute systems of thought limited by one-sided views of reality, which –often violently– exclude other interpretations of the world and are, therefore, intolerant of the characteristic plurality of humanity as they universalize themselves respectively as the only possible 'Truth'. These constitute dogmatic views which neutralize the possibility of dialogue and doubt, for, in the words of Stan Goldman, "to dogmatize […] gives peace of mind and answers" (1993: 87) but also eliminates any possibility for questions and doubts. William Braswell has noted how Melville's works include references to Galileo, Newton, Buffon, LaPlace, Lyell, Darwin, or Agassiz, among other less notorious scientists (1943: 17). References to science and geology are already included in works such as *Mardi* (1848), which juxtapose scientific knowledge to religious belief and problematize the capacity of science to provide explanations to mysteries about which no explanations can be provided: "You have given us the history of the rock; can your sapience tell the origin of all the isles? how Mardi came to be?" (1072). Similarly, in *Moby-Dick*, Ishmael explores numberless scientific categorizations and ways of classifying the sperm whale, yet *what* the whale is remains a mystery: "Dissect him how I may, I but go skin deep; I know him not, and never will" (*Moby-Dick* 1851: 338).[498] As William Potter analyzes, at the time Melville was writing *Clarel* (i.e., 1860s and 1870s), "science was increasingly turning its attention from the stars and planets, which had been its main concern in the centuries before, to the more immediate spheres of geology, biology, and anthropology; and new theories of a common humanity amongst different peoples began to displace scriptural etiologies"

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[498] For an analysis of science in Melville's works see Smith 1993.

(2004: xiv). In *Clarel*, science is embodied in the character of Margoth, a German geologist characterized by the hammer he permanently carries in his hands in order to study samples of Palestinian land. Melville uses this character to underline science's rationalist objectification of reality and human feelings (Knapp 1970: 106): as William Potter claims: "Margoth, the scientist, epitomizes a rigidly orthodox, unilateral viewpoint of the kind repeatedly attacked throughout the poem; there is only one way for him to see things: there is only the physical world to consider, refracted through an exceptionally single-minded and arrogant prism of dogma with no tolerance for any other position or viewpoint" (2004: 198). Joseph G. Knapp has similarly pointed out how Margoth replaces the dogmas of religion with the dogmas of science (1971: 52-53). Raised in Judaism,[499] Margoth has renounced his former faith choosing instead to be "Hegelized" (*Clarel* 2.19.53). To Margoth, "All's mere geology" (2.33.47); he believes that everything that is can be apprehended through the senses, and he regards the soil of the Holy Land as sand and stones deployed of any sacred or metaphysical attributes. Melville's choice to introduce Margoth in *Clarel* needs to be contextualized in a decade when debates on evolutionism were acquiring centrality in the United States.[500] During

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[499] The narrator warns readers that his negative characterization of Margoth is not due to anti-Semitism: "Perverse, if stigma then survive, / Elsewhere let such in satire thrive— / Not here" (2.20.16-18). A textual evidence supporting this affirmation against anti-Semitism is that the Lyonese, also a Jew, is portrayed in a positive light, unlike Margoth, and so are Agar and Ruth, the latter of whom Clarel considers marrying.

[500] Charles Darwin published *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life* in 1859, and debates on evolutionism were widespread in the United States over the decades that both preceded and followed the publication of Darwin's masterpiece. As he would demonstrate in novels such as *Mardi* or *Moby-Dick*, among others, Melville was aware of new scientific discoveries and debates on geology and evolution. This is also true of his poetry, as *Clarel* and poems such as "The New Ancient of Days, or The Man of the Cave of Engihoul" (unknown date of composition), among others, exemplify. This latter poem echoes the 'discoveries' of 'new' human specimens in the chain of evolution which made evident a greater antiquity of man than previously imagined ("The man of bone confirms his throne / In cave where fossils be; / Outdating every mummy known" [*Tales, Poems, and Other Writings* 321]). It also makes direct reference to Sir Charles Lyell's *The Geological Evidence of the Antiquity of Man* (1863), which Melville may have read. Although the exact time of composition of "The New Ancient of Days" is not known, it is interesting to note a possible intertextual connection with *Clarel*, since the exact phrase that gives title to the poem (i.e., "The Ancient of Days") is used by Rolfe when he is in conversation with Derwent and Mortmain:

those years, the divide between faith and scientific knowledge was dramatically exposed, as new scientific and geological discoveries were bringing to reexamination documents long accepted as true (Braswell 1943: 17). Rolfe's musings "Science and Faith, can these unite?" and poignant remark that faith "Snores […] toward her mortal close" (3.5.64; 73) foregrounds the poem's revealing of the gap between scientific knowledge and religion. This relates to Richard Dean Smith's affirmation that, in the second half of the nineteenth century, science was producing a demythologized and miracle-free religion (1993: 310). Stanley Brodwin reads Margoth as the embodiment of such demythologization, or "the death of Supernaturalism as symbolized by the hammer he carries about with him in order to study the history-laden ground of Palestine as mere rock" (1971: 381).[501] His claim "I, Science, I whose gain's thy loss" (*Clarel* 2.31.99) already expresses the demythologization pointed out by Brodwin. Margoth is incorporated into *Clarel* in canto 1.24 "The Gibe" yet does not start to be developed as a character until Part 2. His description is not precisely sympathetic: "iron gray", "short", "rugged", "round shouldered", and "of knotty bone" (1.24.36-37), his eyes never reflect any state of "pious dream / Or sad humility" (1.26.43-44) but are continuously bent toward the earth, a position which mirrors Margoth's incapacity to consider any questions beyond the physical world he can grasp. In the time he spends with the group, the geologist does not attract the sympathy of the rest of the characters, whose reaction is either to avoid him or to dismiss him and not to take him seriously (Clarel and Vine avoid him and Rolfe calls him a "kangaroo of science" [2.21.10]).

"Ah, that!" cried Rolfe; "for we, misled,
We peer from brinks of all we know;
Our eyes are blurred against the haze:
Canst help us track in snow on snow
The footprint of the Ancient of Days?" (3.6.21-25)

[501] Potter similarly argues that Margoth seeks to "destroy the mystical and supernatural, and he pursues it without the slightest misgiving" (2004: 198).

Walter Bezanson notes how Margoth is an "announced antagonist not only to the 'theological myth' but to the whole realm of values that concern the major pilgrims" (Bezanson 1991: 625):

> Seen first by the Dung Gate in Jerusalem, he reappears descending from the Mount of Temptation with limestone specimens. He spits out the Jordan water which Nehemiah finds sweet, refuses to carry a palm leaf but picks a Sodom apple, delights in refuting biblical prophecy, scrawls notice on a rock that Science has slanted the Slanted Cross, [and] sees the Dead Sea as merely a geological fact. (Bezanson 1991: 625)

Margoth embodies materialism and progress, as shown by the fact that he recommends "Rails, wires, from Olivet to the sea, / With station in Gethsemane" (2.20.93-94), thus demythologizing the mythical land of Palestine. In the same way as he does with religion, Melville problematizes, through Margoth, scientific knowledge as a form of one-sided thinking that imposes itself as 'Truth' and dismisses all other perspectives escaping the parameters of science, and which consequently generates a form of 'totalitarian' knowledge permeating all areas of life. According to Richard Dean Smith, "scientism" during the nineteenth century spread the belief that all dimensions of human life could be understood through science and that science was able to provide all the necessary human values (1993: 239). Contrarily to this belief, *Clarel* underlines the incapacity of science to answer humans' most spiritual and vital needs, since –using Brodwin's words evoking the inscription[502] that the pilgrims find on the "*Slanting Cross*" (2.31.44)– science may give "'light' but not 'warmth'" (1971: 382). Even though science imposes itself as a unique Truth, numberless dimensions of human existence will always resist scientific explanation, and this fact exposes the incapacity of science to give response to the longings of the human heart. This is precisely where Melville's critique

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[502] "Emblazoned bleak in austral skies / A heaven remote, whose starry swarm / Like Science lights but cannot warm— / […]" (2.31.50-52).

of science and scientific knowledge, embodied by Margoth, lies in *Clarel*. As Bruce A. Harvey has pointed out:

> The poem's satire of Margoth's tools and blasé positivism – which grant him knowledge of the scoriations of the earth but not of the psyche – reflects Melville's contempt for a smug empiricism blind to the depths of human grandeur and angst. […] The problem with Margoth is not that he is a geologist, but that he is indifferent to what a truly aged earth means to human-oriented time scales. (2006: 75)

It seems pertinent that Margoth should disappear when the pilgrims reach Mar Saba, since his scientific one-sidedness does not allow him to enter the spiritual world that the monastery represents. This way, while the other characters will be introduced to the history of Mar Saba and its dwellers, get in contact with Cyril's ghostly presence, join in an episode of conviviality, visit the neighboring caves and read Habbibi's incomprehensible handwriting, or find peace and communion in contemplation of the solitary palm hovering over the precipice inside of the monastery, Margoth will continue in the desert studying his "Dead unctuous stones" (2.37.73). He disappears early after that and will not reappear in the poem.

Ungar is one of the characters who most overtly exposes the crisis of faith and decline in spirituality, denouncing how human beings have abandoned their connection with God: "Of Thy ways / No knowledge we desire; *new* ways / We have found out, and better. Go—" (4.21.31-33; my italics).[503] The consequences of these "new ways" –which, I believe, may be read not only as a reference to scientific knowledge but also

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[503] In his tale "The Two Temples", written in the 1850s but not published in the author's lifetime, Melville had already criticized the fact that religion was allying with money and materialism in antebellum U.S., satirizing that Mammon was replacing God even inside of the church, since this institution accepted money for membership. In a similar way, writing about New York's Grace Church for the *Eagle* in 1846, Walt Whitman ferociously criticized that: "We don't see how it is possible to *worship God* there at all […]. The haughty bearing of our American aristocrats (that most contemptible phase of aristocracy in the whole world!), the rustling silks and gaudy colors in which wealthy bad taste loves to publish its innate coarseness—the pompous tread, and the endeavor to 'look grand'—how disgustingly frequent are all these at Grace Church! Ah, there is no *religion* there" (Whitman, qtd. in Reynolds 1996: 237).

to material progress, of God's having been replaced by Mammon– are corruption and chaos, both economic (ethical corruption in money-making) and moral (in Ungar's views, moral corruption of agnosticism): "Where He is not, corruption dwells, / And man and chaos are without restraint" (4.21.43-44). Ungar critiques the fact that human beings have been "disennobled—brutalized / By popular science" (4.21.131-132), perhaps due to evolutionists' discoveries of humans' parentage with primates, as well as "Atheized / Into a smatterer" (4.21.132-133), perhaps because, blinded by science, humans have turned away from their spiritual side into the simplistic belief that science can provide answers to everything.[504] Rolfe, too, is an explicit skeptic of the omnipotence of science to provide for the needs of the human spirit and the longings of the heart. Earnestly exclaiming that although the non-existence of God were to be proved, men would continue seeking a divinity, Rolfe claims that science does not silence but deepens the human need for faith: "Yea, long as children feel affright / In darkness, men shall fear a God", "This ignorant state / Science doth but elucidate— / Deepen, enlarge" (1.31.187-188; 191-193). In this line of thought, the American criticizes that science seeks to take control over faith in an age when, as Richard Dean Smith points out, "Each claim for the superiority of human intelligence was a defeat for the faith of the heart" (1993: 263). Although he generally likes the English priest Derwent, of whom he becomes a close conversation partner, Rolfe is annoyed by Derwent's tendency to mix science and religion, and he claims that the priest's idol can only be "an hermaphrodite" (3.16.174). Most important to the argument of the present section is Rolfe's emphasis on the impossibility of scientific knowledge to either rationalize or answer the longings of the human heart:

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[504] Ungar also laments that Voltaire has stolen Jesus's followers: "More minds with shrewd Voltaire have part / Than now own Jesus in the heart" (4.18.144-145). However, minds that embrace Voltaire are, I believe, trained in critical and independent thinking of the kind Melville's works advocate.

Tell Romeo that Juliet's eyes
Are chemical; e'en analyse
The iris; show 'tis albumen—
Gluten—fish-jelly mere. What then?
To Romeo it is still love's sky:
He loves: enough!" (4.18.102-107)

Even the "Epilogue" to the poem continues to express the tension between science and

religion, seemingly supporting Rolfe's vindication that science is incapable of answering

humans' spiritual needs or of providing comfort to the human heart. It also exposes

how the fact that we know more also implies that we necessarily pose deeper questions:

"Degrees we know, unknown in days before; / The light is greater, hence the shadow

more" (4.35.18-19). The narrator doubts at this stage that the advance of science should

imply the annihilation of faith ("If Luther's day expand to Darwin's year, / Shall that

exclude the hope—foreclose the fear?" [4.35.1-2]): even though it oozes blood "from

her wounded trust", faith is still able to raise "the spirit above the dust" (4.35.9, 11). Far

from reflecting the triumph of one over the other, the confrontation between science

and religion –between the "ape" of evolutionism and the religious "angel" (4.35.12)–,

Clarel claims in its closing lines, is doomed to remain forever unresolved –as unresolved

will remain the yearnings of the human heart.[505] If science cannot warm, faith, in the

end, may also be unable to provide light to the heart.

ii) <u>One-sided Cheer: Optimistic Monomaniacs</u>

"'The ascending path was ever long.'
'Ah yes; well, cheer it with a song"

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[505] What seems clear, according to the poem, is that the worries in "Man's heart" are not that different across space and time. As the narrator explains in *The Confidence-Man*: "The grand points of human nature are the same to-day they were a thousand years ago. The only variability in them is in expression, not in feature" (1857: 915).

> "Leave thy carmine! From thorns the streak
> Ruddies enough that tortured cheek.
> 'Twas Saftesbury first assumed your tone,
> Trying to cheerfulize Christ's moan."
>
>   "The icicle,
> The dagger-icicle draws blood;
> But give it sun!"
>
>   (*Clarel* 1876: 3.25.83-84; 3.6.136-140; 4.22.7-9)

"Brass, / A sounding brass and tinkling cymbal! / Who he that with a tongue so nimble / Affects light heart in such a pass?" (*Clarel* 1876: 2.3.97-100): the bleak pessimist Mortmain ironically remarks on the cheerful Derwent. An English Anglican priest, mature in age yet retaining a young spirit, Derwent is a jovial traveler of amiable disposition and capable of profound comments. His optimistic nature determines his positive view of man and of society and his belief in progress, which clash with the dearth of the Holy Land, and with most of his fellow pilgrim's loss of faith in the world around them. Derwent denies despair and breakness. On Mortmain, the priest observes to Rolfe that:

> There's none so far astray,
> Detached, abandoned, as might seem,
> As to exclude the hope, the dream
> Of fair redemption. One fine day
> I saw at sea, by bit of deck—
> Weedy—adrift from far away—
> The dolphin in his gambol light
> Through showery spray, arch into sight:
> He flung a rainbow o'er that wreck. (2.4.147-155)

Thinking that rainbows can be made to soar over every wreck, Derwent's optimism constitutes an instance of one-sided thinking in the same way as the gloomy monomanias of characters such as Mortmain or Ungar do, as I shall analyze in the next section, since the priest does not admit worldviews that might alter the optimistic

nature of his thinking, which is why he both dismisses the pessimism and desperation of some characters as madness, and becomes the target of these characters' critiques. As Walter Bezanson claims: "Derwent is partial to the pleasant" (1991: 620), an embodiment of a myopic meliorist optimism.[506] James E. Miller further calls Derwent "the petty deceiver, the poem's confidence man, whose transactions are not in coin but in an 'easy' religious faith" (1962: 199), to the extent that Mortmain, Miller notes, reproaches Derwent for "Trying to cheerfulize Christ's moan" after the priest names Jesus the "Pontiff of optimists supreme!" (3.6.140; 135). Derwent's unalterable optimism also leads him to reject doubt, as becomes evident in canto 3.21 "In Confidence", where, after having first encouraged Clarel to open himself to him without fearing to be censored ("We broader clergy think it good / No more to use censorious tone: License to all" [3.21.94-95]), he eventually dismisses the student's doubting nature: "Alas, too deep you dive" (3.21.307); "My fellow-creature, do you know / That what most satisfies the head / Least solaces the heart?" (3.21.241-243).[507] Even though he is described as a 'good pilgrim' due to his sociable nature, at the same time, Derwent is criticized for being unable to contemplate worldviews that escape his optimistic thinking parameters, which renders him a one-sided character that admits no possible critique of his positive view of humanity, society and progress, rather than someone as capable of manysided thinking as Rolfe. Derwent is a priest, yet he is not a

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[506] As I noted earlier (see footnote 453 on page 421) *Clarel* scholar Stan Goldman differs from Bezanson's critique of Derwent, valuing the character's capacity to find a "middle way" (1993: 87) between 'diving' and being optimistic. I believe with Bezanson, however, that Melville portrays Derwent in a negative light, as the character does not explore 'darkness' but denies it in order to maintain his myopic optimism.

[507] In his conversation with Clarel at Mar Saba, Derwent is either unwilling or unable to deal with Clarel's religious doubts –despite the fact that he is a priest–, an attitude which is met with Clarel's disgust and with the reader's dislike of the English priest at this point. As Walter Bezanson observes, "Derwent's acknowledgement to Clarel—'Alas, too deep you dive' (line 307)—puts him low in the hierarchy of the poem, recalling, as it does, Melville's memorable comment in a letter to Evert Duyckinck (March 3, 1849): 'I love all men who dive'" (Bezanson 621). A clash of perceptions may be at play here, since one can dive intellectually but not in dogma (i.e., dogma is about belief, not about questioning). Clarel may therefore understand himself as a traveler, but Derwent may understand him as a no good pilgrim. I am grateful to Dr. Rodrigo Andrés for his careful observations on this matter.

religious maniac, like Nathan or Nehemiah, but a harmonious integrator of both religious and secular traits who is open to the scientific advances of the modern age. Derwent's religion, however, "embraces all peoples and theories, except those of gloom and damnation" (Kenny 1973: 170). The priest proclaims tolerance of other beliefs and opinions, yet, paradoxically, there are moments in which his religious views are censorious of others' views: the Anglican is upset by the presence of Catholic Arabs in Bethlehem and claims that "Some words don't chime together" (*Clarel* 4.17.7), as well as by the Franciscan monk Salvaterra's remarks to the pilgrims before they depart from Bethlehem "[God] *Me save from sin, and all from error!*" (4.16.77), to which a few stanzas later Derwent replies "Ah, Salvaterra, / So winning in thy dulcet error— / How fervid thou!" (4.16.123-125). Derwent's philosophy, as he himself claims quoting St. Paul when the despairing Mortmain mockingly asks him for consolation according to his role as priest, may be summed up thus: "Rejoice ye evermore" (3.6.48). As I analyzed earlier,[508] Derwent is connected to the Lesbian, another middle-aged optimist whom the pilgrims meet at Mar Saba, and whose philosophy of life concentrates on the here and now, and reinforces the belief that even though "Life has its trials, sorrows […] / blessedness / Makes up" (3.11.96-98). The easy-going nature and cheerfulness of the Lesbian, reflected in his songs (which 'alleviate' the tetrameter of the poem with iambic verses), generates episodes of togetherness and conviviality which allow the creation of a sort of temporary bond among characters as different as Rolfe, Derwent, Vine, Djalea, Mortmain, Clarel, the Arnaut, or the Spahi.[509] Besides the Lesbian, Derwent is also connected to the other optimist monomaniac, his old friend Don Hannibal Rohon Del Aquaviva (the only character in the poem who is presented to the reader by his full

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[508] See subsection "d" in 3.7.2 in this chapter.

[509] In these cantos, analyzed in Section "d" of 3.7.2, in this chapter, the narrator describes moments of touching and embracing yet, interestingly, does not specify who the actors of such fraternal gestures are.

name), a crippled Mexican who fought for Mexico's independence losing an arm and a leg in battle, whom the pilgrims encounter in Bethlehem (Part 4).

Don Hannibal is an interesting transition between the optimistic and pessimistic monomaniacs in the poem, a character who, together with Mortmain or Ungar, shows how "History proves false the humanitarian dreams of Derwent and all other romancers" (Kenny 1973: 190).[510] Even though he is predominantly good-humored, his experiences in war and life have convinced him that "man is a rascal whose only salvation lies in penalties" (Bezanson 1991: 623). Don Hannibal's complaints against the natural goodness of human beings oppose Derwent's defense of it. As a matter of fact, Walter Bezanson compares Don Hannibal's to the ex-revolutionary Mortmain's political disillusionment, and defines the former as "an interesting experiment by Melville in attempting a jolly monomaniac" (623). A discoverer of the evil side of man and the world, and a refugee from the New World seeking asylum in the Old, Don Hannibal is also connected with Ungar; nonetheless, the personality and views expressed by both characters clash: even though Don Hannibal is offended by Ungar's harsh critique of democracy –a political system that the American considers is "eternal hacking" (*Clarel* 4.19.118)–, the Mexican confesses to be escaping from the very 'progress' Ungar is denouncing. Lamenting the loss of Mexican lands to the United States by the peace Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848) at the close of the war with Mexico, Don Hannibal left the American continent for England, where he met Derwent, but found "too much agitation" (4.19.36) which the Mexican relates to the rise of the working classes and the fact that Britain became "Too proletarian" (4.19.37). Ever since he left England, the Mexican started wandering from one place to the next:

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[510] An analysis of pessimistic monomaniacs in *Clarel* will be developed in the following section.

I've stumped about since; no redress;
Norway's too cold; Egypt's all glare;
And everywhere that I removed
This cursed *Progress* still would greet.
Ah where (thought I) in Old World view
Some blest asylum from the New!
At last I steamed for Joppa's seat,
Resolved on Asia for retreat.
Asia for me, Asia will do.
But just where to pitch tent—invest—
Ah, that's the point; I'm still in quest (4.19.38-48)[511]

Neither the Americas nor Europe would suit Don Hannibal which is why he set for Africa and Asia; but these did not fulfill his expectations either (he is "still in quest"). Despite sharing similar views on "cursed Progress", Don Hannibal and Ungar clash in their conception of democracy to the extent that the Mexican is offended by Ungar's analogy of democracy to a prostitute (a "great Diana of ill fame!" [4.19.138]) who perverts her own followers. Even though he believes that democracy should be restricted, and even though it was actually democracy that made him a crippled man, Don Hannibal defends democracy, perhaps because dismissing the ideal in which he had once believed would make his participation in the war senseless. In the same way as other loners, Don Hannibal is a character that travels alone and remains too absorbed by his own reality to be aware of the realities of others. During the brief time he spends with the pilgrims, the Mexican becomes one piece in the universalist dialogue Melville creates in *Clarel*, yet at the level of character Don Hannibal is inflexible about his views; he will develop no intersubjectivity with any of his fellow travelers and will depart from the group and continue his quest alone.

Between the set of optimistic characters in this section, on the one hand, and the pessimistic maniacs to be analyzed in the following one, on the other, the Smyrniote

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[511] This passage has been quoted earlier in relation to *Clarel*'s critique of progress. See page 307 in this dissertation.

Glaucon represents an interesting transition, as well as a warning against the painful consequences that roaming in the shadowy depths of the human soul may precipitate. Glaucon is a secondary character that refuses to dive, and is, therefore, unwilling to participate in the exercise pursued by characters such as Rolfe or Clarel. As a matter of fact, Glaucon departs from the rest of the pilgrims early in the pilgrimage, returning to Jerusalem with his father-in-law and wife-to-be, as he voluntarily chooses to avoid the gloom that he assumes the other travelers will encounter in their excursion of the Holy Land. Before departing, however, the Smyrniote regales his fellow travelers with a song that warns about the dangers of always seeking the shadowy side of existence:

> "Tarry never there
>   Where the air
> Lends a lone Hadean spell—
>   Where the ruin and the wreck
>   Vine and ivy never deck,
> And wizard wan and Sybil dwell:
>   There, oh, beware!
>
> "Rather seek the grove—
>   Thither rove,
> Where the leaf that falls to ground
>   In a violet uprisings,
>   And the oracle that sings
> Is the bird above the mound:
>   There, tarry there!" (2.13.122-135)

Coherent with his decision not to continue the pilgrimage and confront the personal questions such journey may pose him, Glaucon's advice to the other pilgrims-travelers is to avoid the (destructive) dark and seek the orchard (a "grove" which, on the other hand, also acknowledges the mulch and the grave). As Nina Baym claims, Melville portrays Glaucon as a wise character, even though the wisdom he embodies is of a particular kind: "Glaucon is made representative not of triviality but of a different order

of wisdom. And he strongly suggests that man's view of life is dependent on his actions. If he seeks desolation, he will find it" (1974: 320). Of a different opinion is Walter Bezanson, who calls the Smyrniote a symbol of "IRRESPONSIBLE and HAPPY YOUTH, atheistic in attitude if not in belief" (1991: 624). Glaucon represents an easy life and pleasure-seeking existence supported by the security of belonging to an upper class, and therefore whose life-experiences are incomparable to the much harsher existences of a Mortmain, Don Hannibal, Ungar, Agath, and even Nehemiah, and of other major characters who "Tarry" in "the ruin and the wreck" (*Clarel* 2.13.122, 125). On the other hand, Glaucon's song shows a wisdom that may have saved some Melvillean characters such as Mortmain, Pierre, Ahab, or Taji from annihilation. Like these characters, however, and unlike Glaucon, Melville could neither prevent himself from diving nor remain always in the pleasant.

iii) One-sided Gloom: Bleak Monomaniacs

> "Wiser am I?—Curse on this store
> Of knowledge! Nay, 'twas cursed of yore.
> Knowledge is power: tell that to knaves;
> 'Tis knavish knowledge: the true lore
> Is impotent for earth."
>
> (*Clarel* 1876: 3.28.5-9)

> "Look not too long in the face of the fire, O man! […] Give not thyself up, then, to fire, lest it invert thee, deaden thee; […]. There is a wisdom that is woe; but there is a woe that is madness."
>
> (*Moby-Dick* 1851: 376)

After listening attentively to Mortmain's life-story, the optimist Derwent (whom Mortmain and other bleak monomaniacs in the poem consider naïve) exclaims that there can be nobody so removed and rejected to have completely lost hope in

redemption (2.4.147-150). The pessimistic monomaniacs in *Clarel* demonstrate the contrary. As Walter Bezanson first noted, Melville introduces in *Clarel* a sequence of 'dark' characters haunted by harsh life-experiences who embody the uttermost pessimism and, like the optimistic, religious or scientific monomaniacs in the poem, are incapable of seeing beyond the specific parameters determining their one-sided conception of reality. Starting with Celio in Part 1, the pessimistic monomaniacs' series shifts from him to Mortmain (Parts 2 and 3), Agath, Cyril, and Habbibi (Part 3), and Ungar (Part 4), giving voice to five characters whose disillusioned perceptions of life and humanity make them severe evaluators of their present age. This series of 'pessimistic monomaniacs' proves an important counterpart to the cheerful monomaniacs (Derwent, Don Hannibal, the Lesbian, Glaucon) I analyzed in the previous section. As has already been noted, Celio dies a victim of 'walls' (as his physical position, facing the wall of Jerusalem, at the moment of his death mirrors), shunned by his community (the Franciscans), consumed by both doubt and the awareness of the impossibility of Truth, and grieved by Clarel's unresponsiveness to the possibility to establish an intersubjective relationship with him, Clarel being the last human being in whom Celio shall deposit his vital yearning for human fellowship.[512] The second of these pessimistic monomaniacs is the Swede Mortmain, whom the narrator introduces in Part 2. Walls are also relevant to Mortmain in the literal sense, since they reflect his outcast status as a disillusioned exile whose former idealism has died away and who has gradually withdrawn from human society: Mortmain is first introduced to readers when the pilgrims are already outside Jerusalem, in the Wilderness. He will, however, remain a 'walled' subjectivity dominated by his self-consuming monomania, and will eventually be buried outside the walled monastery of

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[512] See the analysis of heterosexual/homosexual love in "a" of Section 3.7.3, in the present chapter.

Mar Saba having died with his eyes transfixed in the mysterious palm hovering over the precipice inside of this religious site. A living embodiment of shattered dreams and disillusionment, and an eccentric among the travelers in the cavalcade,[513] Mortmain had been an idealist revolutionary in the French Revolution of 1848 who witnessed how the fight for justice derived into a dictatorial regime, and escaped Paris –"the cut-throat town" (2.15.77).[514] Such experiences of human cruelty conditioned Mortmain's conception of humanity and the world as evil, which is directly opposed to jollier monomaniacs such as Derwent's view of human nature as innately good, or to Don Hannibal's solid belief in democracy.[515] Far from being mythical, glorious, or sacred, to Mortmain the Holy Land constitutes a *"Terra Damnata"* (2.3.108), the epitome of universal human cruelty, of the betrayal of the possibility of salvation, and of collective ("unanimous") responsibility for the killing of the 'Second Adam':

> O abyss!
> Here, upon what was erst the sod,
> A man betrayed the yearning god;
> A man, yet with a woman's kiss.
> 'Twas *human*, that unanimous cry,
> "We're fixed to hate him—crucify!" (2.3.141-146)

There is no way for jolly monomaniacs such as Derwent to bring Mortmain out of his lack of hope in humanity and of the belief that "Man's vicious: snaffle him with kings" (2.3.180). No character in the poem establishes an intersubjective connection with Mortmain, as with not one of his fellow travelers does he wish to establish an

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[513] Mortmain is first characterized by his strange name –which, as Walter E. Bezanson has argued (1991: 626), may evoke the French for 'dead hand', reflecting the eventual impossibility of materializing the ideals that had inspired the French Revolution of 1848, where Mortmain participated– and by the skullcap he wears.

[514] See footnote 308 on page 310 in this chapter.

[515] The characters of Mortmain and Don Hannibal never meet. However, textually, Mortmain will continue 'present' after his death through both Agath and Ungar, the other monomaniacs who conclude the sequence and who, like the Swede, will become severe judges of Western civilization, democracy, and progress.

intersubjective communication; his only companion will be the palm in Mar Saba, which soothes and accompanies him to his death. As Rolfe explains, Mortmain was a victim of neglect and rejection since his earliest childhood: the illegitimate child of a mother who did not love him and of an absent father who provided money but no love, this "son of earth" (2.4.28) moved to Paris seeking the companionship of man and breeding longings for peace, equality, and human togetherness. His idealism won him some followers to whom he became a prophet in defense of "That uncreated Good / […] whose absence is the cause / Of creeds and Atheists, mobs and laws" (2.4.49-51). His belief in humanity, justice, good, and peace made him a participant in the 1848 revolution, through which his ideals met face to face with the harshness of reality and experience. Mortmain's revolutionary struggle serves the narrator to point at the lack of boundaries between 'Right' and 'Wrong', justice and injustice, and to condemn the use of violence to amend "questionable wrongs" by a "yet more questionable war" (2.4.74, 75). The narrator emphasizes the paradoxes of revolutionary action and the fact that a "Prophet of peace" such as Mortmain should engage in violent fight for the defense of 'good'. After the revolution, Mortmain abandoned France to "Rove[…] the gray places of the earth" (2.4.130), his idealism shattered into a view of the world where "The good have but a patch at best, / The wise their corner; [and] for the rest— / Malice divides with ignorance" (2.4.90-92). It is, thus, not surprising that Mortmain renounced any possibility of togetherness with other characters and remained a loner pained by his own suffering. In this respect, the desert as waste-land or place of dearth becomes a symbol that is connected to Mortmain's inner desolation.[516] Rolfe remarks how the desert constitutes a refuge to those who, like Mortmain, have lost all faith in civilization and God:

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[516] As a matter of fact, in canto 2.15, "The Fountain", the Swede expresses the need to

Man sprang from deserts: at the touch
Of grief or trial overmuch,
On deserts he falls back at need;
Yes, 'tis the bare abandoned home
Recalleth then. See how the Swede
Like any rustic crazy Tom,
Bursting through every code and ward
Of civilization, masque and fraud,
Takes the wild plunge. Who so secure,
Except his clay be sodden loam,
As never to dream the day may come
When *he* may take it, foul or pure?
What in these turns of mortal tides—
What any fellow-creatures bides,
May hap to any. (2.16.106-120)

Rolfe portrays deserts as the sites of common human origins or as universal 'homes', at the same time that he underlines human beings' susceptibility to, as happened to the Swede, feel the need to withdraw from the world and look for shelter in them. Mortmain joins the group again by the Dead Sea. This reunion between Mortmain and the rest of his fellow travelers makes evident the wall with which Mortmain surrounds himself and which blocks off the development of any possible intersubjective bond with other voyagers. Even though they are happy and relieved to have him back, the pilgrims repress the wish to demonstrate their gladness: "Relieved from anxious fears, the group / In friendliness would have advanced / To greet, but shrank or fell adroop" (2.34.7-9). Mortmain returns from his retreat in the desert gloomier and with a wilder look, even more absorbed in his own self, blinded by his bleak monomania ("Condensed in self, or like a seer / Unconscious of each object near" [2.34.16-17]), and asking for universal repentance before he has a sip of the waters of the Dead Sea. Gradually, the rest of the pilgrims abandon the Swede in his dark meditations: "He

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temporarily separate from the rest of the group and spend time alone in the Quarantania desert.

glanced around: / They all had left him, one by one. / Was it because he open threw / The inmost to the outward view?" (2.36.107-110). Intersubjective communication is at this point aborted (though perhaps not between Mortmain and readers) both because characters desert Mortmain and because Mortmain remains blind to any of them because he is trapped in his monomania. In a similar way as Celio was, now the Swede is left "Sad in inefficacious love" (2.36.116), considered mad by most of his companions except by Rolfe, who notes that it is Mortmain's outrage at evil that lays at the root of the latter's darkness, perhaps accentuated by the vapors of the Dead Sea, which Mortmain tasted,[517] and which also led Nehemiah to sleepwalk to his death.[518] It is in Mar Saba that the Swede will find relief to his inner pain; a shelter from the dangers of the desert, as Rolfe claims (3.7.70-74), the monastery also becomes a refuge to the heart: "But Saba! Of retreats where heart / Longing for more than downy rest, / Fit place would find from world apart, / Saba abides the loneliest" (3.9.33-36). Mortmain's "downy rest" will only come in the form of death. As the dead camel worn out by exhaustion that the pilgrims find on their way to the monastery,[519] Mortmain 'gives up' life as he lies in peaceful contemplation of the solidary palm hovering over the precipice inside the monastery. A victim of painful knowledge sharpened by tragic experience, Melville gives Mortmain a peaceful death in which the palm becomes the comforting companion the Swede has not been able to find in any fellow human. As Clarel feels while observing the palm: "Here, sure, is peace" (3.30.81). Mortmain's body is discovered "So undisturbed, supine, inert— / The filmed orbs fixed upon the Tree"

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[517] Melville also tasted the waters of the Dead Sea during his visit to Palestine in January 1857. See the entry the author wrote in his journal, cited on page 219 of this chapter.

[518] It is interesting to remark that, when Nehemiah's body is discovered, Mortmain steps aside, only noticed by Vine, who wonders whether he is suffering.

[519] This is described in canto 3.8.13-15.

(3.32.28-29), and with an eagle's feather on his lips,[520] but the inter-personal barrier with his fellow travelers is not yet gone, since nobody dares touch him and check if there is any life in him. Mortmain's outcast status is perpetuated even in death, as the monks bury his body without the walls of the monastery –"(Nor in a consecrated bed) / Where vulture unto vulture calls / And only ill things find a friend" (3.32.70-72)–, condemning him thus to permanent rejection and eternal aloneness in the desert.

Mortmain is replaced by two characters that complement the poem's exploration of different degrees of pessimism and hopeless monomania: Agath, who is already introduced in Part 3, and Ungar, who joins the pilgrims in Part 4.[521] Even though they embody a pessimistic conception of human nature due to particular life-experiences which have turned them into disillusioned interpreters of the world, like Celio or Mortmain, Agath's passive resignation and Ungar's active endurance and struggle are different from Mortmain's and Celio's self-consuming pessimism and loneliness. An aged man, Agath is a Greek timoneer who is recovering in Mar Saba after having been attacked by Ammonite robbers. His life-story is one of many misfortunes: the survivor of a shipwreck,[522] attacked by a bird, chased by a shark, and victim of human violence, Walter Bezanson describes Agath as "a man of disasters" (191: 614) who bears his unhappiness with passive resignation, and meets the sympathy not only of the narrator but also of his fellow travelers and the readers. Agath's life of

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[520] Merlin Bowen interprets the eagle feather on Mortmain's lips as a "token of a higher wisdom than earth's" (1960: 271): "Mortmain, his pride of knowledge put aside, has passed, as Rolfe has not, through the gateway of despair and come out into a freedom where, though all is lost, nothing is regretted, and where, having wholly given over this world, his hands are free to reach out, at least toward another" (1960: 274). Similarly, Joseph G. Knapp interprets the feather as a "symbol of a wisdom that this world cannot give" (1971: 74).

[521] Even though Agath is introduced in Part 3 when the pilgrims are inside the monastery, his full development takes place in Part 4.

[522] It is relevant to note that the sinking of Agath's ship is an indirect consequence of religious fanaticism: "In an effort to help a fanatical Islamic believer […] escape the plague in Egypt, the timoneer smuggled him aboard his ship. When a storm arises, the boat is helpless because a stash of swords the believer had secretly brought aboard disturbs the ship's compass, causing the ship, significantly enough named *The Peace of God* (now disturbed by orthodox fundamentalism), to eventually wreck. Like Nathan's fanaticism, the Moor's extreme orthodoxy leads to catastrophe for many" (Potter 2004: 165).

suffering connects him to humanity and, according to Bezanson, "the cross and crucifixion that is tattooed on Agath's arm is a fitting 'ensign' ('Ensign' canto) for all mankind, an ensign that is not tattooed on the arm but is carried within. And all men repeat Agath's story about the isolated tortoise, since ach man has also his inner 'Golgotha' ('The Island' canto)" (1971: 34). To a certain extent, Agath may be considered as reminiscent of Hunilla, the suffering Chola widow in Sketch Eighth of *The Encantadas* (1854), who lost her husband and brother to the sea and endured for years as the only human inhabitant of Norfolk Isle being the victim of some events which the narrator considers too terrible and dehumanizing to describe. Some elements from Hunilla's story actually re-appear in Agath's, the main one being the island Agath once visited as a young man and which bears resonances of the island where Hunilla is found by the narrator in *The Encantadas*. Like that archipelago, Agath's island's desolation is comparable to the desolation that Agath, the narrator, and so many other characters –as well as the reader– also perceive in Palestine. There are some other parallelisms between the two characters: the fact that Hunilla, like Agath, is a "lone shipwrecked soul" ("The Chola Widow" 1854: 127), the tortoises in the island that both characters visit/inhabit, the fact that Agath rides Nehemiah's donkey and Hunilla is last seen "riding upon a small gray ass" ("The Chola Widow" 133), the crucifix the widow places in the grave where she with her own hands buries her husband when the sea returns his body to her and the tattooed crucifix Agath wears in his arm, etc. Agath might have been a re-creation of Hunilla about twenty years after the story was published, which, in turn, was probably a recreation of "Agatha", the widow designed as a main protagonist in the story Melville, in a series of letters, offered Nathaniel Hawthorne to write. That correspondence, referred to by scholars such as Harrison Hayford (1946) as the "Agatha letters", Wyn Kelley remarks, "shows Melville thinking

out loud about the creative process" and provide "a superb view of the writer at work" (2008: 12).[523] The transformation from Agatha/Hunilla to Agath is also interesting, and there is no evidence that may indicate the reasons for the change in the sex of the character. What is clear, however, is that only an Agath and not an Agatha could have trespassed the thick walls of Mar Saba, because the monastery –even today– does not allow women in.[524] Even though he is another walled subjectivity, Agath arises great respect and pity among his fellow travelers, and even makes Clarel aware that the young student has become more like Rolfe in this later stage of the pilgrimage and now shares in Rolfe's views. As Walter Bezanson notes:

> Agath wins from the narrator the deepest compassion; though he is inarticulate and broken, and past hope of comprehending life, he somehow withstands it with an animal-like patience (4.3.105). His story of the island leads Clarel to decide that man will never *solve* the world; in saying this Clarel realizes suddenly that he is taking Rolfe's point of view (4.3.122-23). Vine watches Agath closely, likes him, finds him "authentic," and respects his "dumb reverence / And resignation" (4.2.192, 198-99). (Bezanson 1991: 615)

Agath's departure from the pilgrims is charged with passivity and painful resignation to the forces of fate, like Hunilla's quiet vanishing in the streets of Peru, which may be

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[523] To a thorough discussion of the Agatha letters and story see Kelley 2008: 12-24.

[524] As the pilgrims enter the gates of the walled Mar Saba the narrator informs us that "everybody is welcome ("Admission shall that arch afford / To any" [3.10.41-42]), only to discover a few cantos later that women are not accepted 'guests', a rule that continues to be operative nowadays (in a visit to Mar Saba in June 2007 during the Seventh International Melville Conference, all women in the group, me included, were forbidden to enter the monastery; an anecdote in this respect is that a woman in the group tried to pass as a man but was invited out as soon as the observant monks discovered her disguise). For a report on that visit, see Rodrigo Andrés's "What is the Purpose of your Trip to Jerusalem?" (2010). Clarel underlines the loneliness to which men inside the monastery submit themselves to as they are isolated from the company of women and condemned to unreproduction:

Father, if Good, 'tis unenhanced:
No life domestic do ye own
Within these walls: woman I miss.
Like cranes, what years from time's abyss
Their flight have taken, one by one,
Since Saba founded this retreat:
In cells here many a stifled moan
Of lonely generations gone;
And more shall pine as more shall fleet. (3.30.86-94)

said, in turn, to resemble Clarel's own 'vanishing' in the Via Dolorosa at the end of

Clarel:

> In farewell Agath they detain,
> Transferred here to a timelier train
> Than theirs. A work-day, passive face
> He turns to Derwent's *Luck to thee*!
> No slight he means—'tis far from that;
> But schooled by the inhuman sea,[525]
> He feels 'tis vain to wave the hat (*Clarel* 4.13.2-8)

Agath's attitude in this scene is one of passive resignation to (he is "transferred"), and acceptance of, whatever future awaits him. Having learned from his previous life-experiences that the future will probably be no better than the past and that his life will never be a cheerful one, the old man looks at Derwent with a "passive face" (4.13.4) when the priest amicably wishes him good luck, as these good wishes do not provide any hopes to his heart. Agath, however, and in the same way as Ungar, does not 'give up' life (at least in front of us, readers) but continues living; yet his challenge will be not to undergo the same fate as Mortmain's or Celio's, and not to be both paralyzed and consumed by his despairing resignation.

Ungar, as Knapp points out, "completes the revolt against optimism begun by Mortmain" (1971: 6). Also a walled subjectivity, Ungar is the last monomaniac in the sequence, a half-Anglo and half-Cherokee Southerner who fought in the Confederate army during the U.S. Civil War, and who is now a refugee and a soldier in the Ottoman army in Palestine. Melville incorporates into *Clarel* the American Civil War through Ungar, who also becomes a central piece in the poem's evaluation of 1870s United

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525 This "inhuman sea" is also invoked in the closing piece of "Pebbles" in *John Marr and Other Sailors* (1888), as the narrator utters the enigmatic claim: "Healed of my hurt, I laud the inhuman Sea—" (103).

States and brings in issues of colonialism and imperialist violence.[526] Ungar is a "bitter

judge of man and society" (Bezanson 1991: 563), surely one of the harshest in the poem

together with Mortmain. In the same way as it denounces the universal degradation of

democracy, *Clarel* also expresses, though Ungar, the disappointment at postbellum

America that Melville may have accumulated over the ten years separating the

publication of *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War* –where, as I have analyzed in Section

3.4, the author could still express some hopes for postbellum U.S. democracy– and that

of *Clarel*.[527] According to Knapp: "For Ungar, both the Civil War and the rising

industrialism prove – even in the New Eden of America – man's inhumanity to man.

He gives an American context to the intense sense of alienation so vividly illustrated in

Mortmain" (1971: 6). Ungar is introduced in Part 4, immediately after Mortmain dies,

and he accompanies the group of pilgrims from Mar Saba to Bethlehem. Described

from the beginning as a quiet follower rather than a leader of the caravan –a "plain-clad

soldier, heeding none", who knows how to control himself and "in neutral tone /

Maintained his place" (*Clarel* 4.1.76-78)–, Ungar, nevertheless, is no secondary

character, but gradually becomes a central figure who, through his powerful speeches,

gains the respect of the rest of the characters and becomes an important piece for

debate and thought, even exerting a profound influence in fellow-travelers such as

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[526] It is significant that Melville chose to make Ungar a Southerner, a descendant of Native Americans, and a Catholic from Maryland, thus giving, through him, direct capacity for intervention to two different population groups who were being politically silenced (and actually killed, in the case of Native Americans) at the time. Ungar introduces the Civil War and Reconstruction in the poem, but it is important to note that Ungar is neither a white Southerner nor an emancipated slave, which may be perhaps indicative of Melville's willingness to offer an assessment of Reconstruction that escapes any white Southerners' perspective (i.e., the one Andrew Johnson had been favoring) or that of slaves (i.e., the one Radical Republicans had claimed to be favoring). As a matter of fact, Ungar's mixed-race identity, both Anglo and Cherokee, together with his experiences in the Civil War, make him sensitive to the interconnectedness of different forms of subjugation (slavery, imperialism and racial supremacy, etc.). It is not his "Anglo brain" but his "Indian heart" (4.5.140), and perhaps his own or his ancestors' experience of colonialism/discrimination, which give him the capacity to assert that "holding slaves was aye a grief" and the whole system of slavery "an iniquity / In those who plant it" (4.5.148; 149-150).

[527] As a matter of fact, Ungar's very name may bear phonetic resonances of such 'anger'.

Rolfe[528] or Clarel. Yet, even though he participates in the dialogue the poem generates, Ungar will remain unable to move beyond his own monomania even though he realizes other characters' attempts to "draw my monomania out / For monomania, past doubt, / Some of ye deem it" (4.21.101-103); he will also be incapable of developing an intersubjective bond with any of his fellow travelers, not even with his American compatriots or with Rolfe, the character who most exerts to understand his suffering and anger. A strong man of Indian blood and a "wandering Ishmael from the west" (4.10.186),[529] Ungar has been exposed to evil and to the wickedness of man in the past, through experiences which have determined his harsh judgments on human beings, society, and democracy, similar to Celio's, Mortmain's, or Agath's. Ever since he is introduced in the poem, Ungar is in constant remembrance of the painful events he has witnessed.[530] This upsets the young Clarel, who does not know how to interpret him: "at loss / I am: at loss, for he's most strange; / Wild, too, adventurous in range; / And suffers" (3.17.48-51). Ungar's nationality is particularly emphasized, yet he is an American who is both racially and politically different. Although he is a U.S. citizen and, therefore, a compatriot to Rolfe, Clarel, and Vine, there is a feeling of strangeness rather than of togetherness between the four characters since their first encounter: "A countryman—but how estranged!" (4.1.102). The fundamental difference between Ungar and his fellow Americans is that Ungar is not only a Southerner and an ex-Confederate soldier –the 'national enemy' during the U.S. Civil War and the vanquished

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[528] According to Knapp, Rolfe is "tempted by thoughts of America as the New Eden", which alter with Ungar's multiple critiques of the New World and the myth of American exceptionalism (1971: 6).

[529] Ungar's personal life-story is narrated in canto 4.5.113-152 ("Of the Stranger"). His father is Anglo and his mother Cherokee, a mix-raced identity which also accounts for his exotic name and features.

[530] Ungar's inner "bleeding", a suffering which he struggles to repress, is often revealed by the external bleeding of his actual bodily scars; the "saber-scar" on his neck and the "temple pitted with strange blue / Of powder-burn" make the narrator conclude that he is a veteran whose brown eyes, constantly in a state of reverie, are "Sad woods […] where wild things sleep" (4.1.95).

side which was being punished for rebellion during Reconstruction–, but also "A native of the fair South-West" (4.1.99) –the wild 'Indian' whom Angloprotestant America had tried to conquer, 'civilize', and even eradicate from the expanding United States through systematic genocide, and who keeps "A bias, bitterness—a strain / Much like an Indian's hopeless feud / Under the white's aggressive reign" (4.5.106-108). In the words of Timothy Marr:

> Ungar internalizes in his own bitter experience the successive historical campaigns of American persecution. He serves as an embittered mercenary exiled in the Holy Land, "a wandering Ishmael from the West" (4.11.189) whose duty it is to "drill the tawny infantry" of Ottoman armies. A man with an "Anglo-brain, but Indian heart" (4.6.141), Ungar exemplifies in his unrelenting warfare Melville's angry attack on the perverse providence of human estrangement—the "abiding malevolence / In man toward man" (4.13.228-30). Ungar's unquenched feud extinguishes any hope for a redemptive project for America. "The world cannot save the world," Ungar despairs, "And Christ renounces it" (4.20.35-36), He predicts instead that materialism and proliferating social division will cause the destruction of the New World nation—that the post-Civil War society has devolved into a "civic barbarism" that will "yield to one and all / New confirmations of the fall / Of Adam" (4.21.131-33). (2005: 160)

Ungar's mixed-race identity is emphasized. As a matter of fact, in the 1870s, the Grant administration was supporting imperialist practices to colonize the West and de-legitimize Native American tribes' claims upon any North American lands.[531] This

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[531] As a matter of fact, with the expansion of the United States over the nineteenth century and the discovery of rich resources in the 'West', the U.S. continued pushing westwards more impetuously, engaging in wars against Native Americans and destroying the cultures and the social organizations of the peoples whose lands it appropriated and who were expected to assimilate to mainstream (Angloprotestant) American culture. As Eric Foner explains: "To the west lay millions of acres of fertile and mineral-rich land roamed by immense buffalo herds that provided food, clothing, and shelter for a population of perhaps a quarter of a million Indians" (1988: 462). However, it was "more than an agrarian empire. Around the Great Lakes and in the Ohio Valley arose new mining and industrial complexes geared to processing the farmer's expanding output and meeting the railroad's enormous demand for machinery, coal, and iron products" (Foner 464). All these resources were soon exploited by capitalist corporations with the support of the government, which also had a share in the benefits of these private companies. At the beginning of the century, large numbers of Native Americans had been gradually removed from the states of Tennessee, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Florida, in the South, and forced to emigrate west of the Mississippi River by the time of the U.S. Civil War. The period after the Civil War was marked by the gradual suppression of rights upon the land and the use of military force in the negotiations between the Grant government and Native American peoples. In 1871, Congress passed the "Indian Appropriations Act", by which Native Americans would no longer be

reminds us of the poem's description of the colonization of America and removal of Native Americans by Nathan's puritan ancestors, which is compared to Nathan's Zionist project in Palestine. Thus, whereas Rolfe, Clarel, and Vine are travelers, Ungar is a refugee escaping the United States –an expatriation that is most tragic if we evoke the ideals of freedom and equality that America is proudly made to represent. Ungar's status as an exile may be interpreted as indicative of the mismanagement of the South during the Reconstruction period, and therefore of how the governments that came after Lincoln (Johnson's and the two Grant administrations) failed to promote national healing and reconciliation. Rolfe, the speaker and connector *par excellence* in the poem, but who is left without words in front of Ungar's powerful speeches, can do nothing to abridge the intersubjective separation between them and Ungar, a man "So distant, though a countryman / By birth" (4.5.26). Rolfe makes a thorough effort to understand Ungar; wondering about the reasons that impelled the "wandering Ishmael" (4.1.186) to leave the United States ("Is't misrule after strife? And dust / From victor heels? Is it disgust / For times when honor's out of date / And serveth but to alienate?" (4.5.48-51), Rolfe soon understands that "The rankling thing in Ungar's grief" (4.5.73) is the Civil War:

> Reluctant touching on the wound
> Unhealed yet in our mother's side;
> […]
> > That evil day,

treated as sovereign nations with whom the U.S. government should negotiate. Therefore, claiming that "[…] no Indian nation or tribe within the territory of the United States shall be acknowledged or recognized as an independent nation, tribe, or power with whom the United States may contract by treaty" (in O'Brien 1993: 71), the U.S. could continue expanding without acknowledging the legitimate rights of Native Americans on the lands it was conquering. The Grant administration was also interested in territories outside the U.S., particularly in the Caribbean, envisioning in 1869 the annexation of Santo Domingo, which finally failed to be ratified by the Senate. There was also interest in Asia, as Grant sent a naval force to Korean waters which ended up battling Korean soldiers near Seoul (Meernik 2004: 104). Moreover, after the Emancipation Proclamation was passed, the U.S. government (under Lincoln) initiated a program to send freed slaves to Liberia and other regions under the auspices of the American Colonization Society, also with colonialist ends. See footnote 388 on page 362 in this chapter.

Black in the New World's calendar—
The dolorous winter ere the war;
True Bridge of Sighs—so yet 'twill be
Esteemed in riper history—
Sad arch between contrasted eras;
The span of fate; that evil day
When the cadets from rival zones,
Tradition's generous adherers,
Their country's pick and flower of sons,
Abrupt were called upon to act—
For life or death, nor brook delay— (*Clarel* 4.5.70-85)

Ungar will confirm in due time Rolfe's hypothesis, becoming one of the fiercest critics of how the U.S. that consolidated after the Civil War –"the wound /Unhealed yet in our mother's side"– did not materialize the hopes for democracy and equality that Melville had expressed in *Battle-Pieces*; Ungar evaluates social and political transformations in postbellum American society, American imperialism, colonialism, and progress, the crisis of faith and the rise of scientific discourses over the nineteenth century, and the economic depression of the 1870s and subsequent social agitation.[532] In more general terms, as has been analyzed earlier,[533] the critique of postbellum U.S. democracy in *Clarel* is connected to a more global critique of Western civilization and democracy which replaced ideals of honesty, spirituality, and humane progress by a materialist and imperialist type of progress. Ungar undermines the myth of American exceptionalism: in face of Rolfe's question about whether America might still be able to escape such social unrest due to its vast green lands, Ungar's reply is that the United States, in the same way as England, France, the Holy Land, etc., has become a country of dearth and hopelessness. Thus, the mixed-raced American underscores the

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[532] The economic depression of 1873 finds its echo in Ungar's reflections on the collapse of the insatiable materialist progress in postbellum America, which foresee a future class war as the result of such collapse. As a matter of fact, Ungar's critiques may be taken as evoking the episodes of social (frequently overlapping with 'racial' or ethnic) confrontation, unrest, strikes, and riots, which would eventually lead to the great strike of 1877.

[533] See Section 3.4 in this chapter.

connection between different societies in their forming part of what he contemplates as a universal waste.

Like Mortmain's or Agath's, Ungar's monomania prevents him from developing any possible intersubjective relationship with fellow travelers in the poem, since his constant grieving makes him withdraw more and more within his own self and be inflexible about his pessimistic views on humanity and the world. Rolfe's respectful attempts to develop an interpersonal bonding with the soldier and try to shed light to the darkness that permeates his views on the United States and humanity are, thus, aborted by Ungar's immutable one-sided thinking. Rolfe's sympathetic disposition to understand his "strange", "wild", and suffering compatriot (4.17.49-51), despite the anger the latter expresses in his speeches, may be read as an articulation of the figure of the humane and responsible Northern reconciler that Melville had called for in *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War*, and advocated as key to national reconciliation in the aftermath of the Civil War. Rolfe's comparison of Ungar with the Roman god Mars –not only the Roman god of war (Ungar is a soldier) but also the second most distinguished god after Jupiter, in Roman mythology (Daly and Rengel 1992: 89)– demonstrates the admiration he holds for the heroic Southerner, which resembles, in my opinion, the regard for the South to which Melville had given articulation in *Battle-Pieces*. Rolfe's high esteem for Ungar is noticed by Derwent (one of the most frequent targets of Ungar's anger in the poem), who marks Rolfe's partiality to Ungar, at the same time that he admires, perhaps a bit jealously, Rolfe's fraternal empathy for the stranger and his capacity to stand up for his fellow American. Derwent names this quality "magnanimity" (4.23.71); in this term readers may find an evocation of the value that Melville had urged in the final poems and "Supplement" to *Battle-Pieces*:

> […] whatsoe'er reserves be yours
> Touching your native clime and clan,
> And whatsoe'er his thought abjures;
> Still, when he's criticised by one
> Not of tribe, not of the zone—
> Chivalric still, though doggedly,
> You stand up for a countryman:
> I like your magnanimity;"
> And silent pressed the enfolded arm
> As he would so transmit a charm
> Along the nerve, which might insure,
> However cynic challenge ran,
> Faith genial in at least one man
> Fraternal in love's overture. (4.23.64-77)

Rolfe's fraternal and reconciling disposition, however, is in conflict with the fact that, after the Civil War, the victorious North failed to heal national divisions, precipitating Ungar's exile. But Ungar's monomania will remain stronger than Rolfe's sympathy, and eventually inflexible. Ungar is torn between his longings for reconciliation and his impossibility to reconcile, a profound inner division which he cannot ease, since, as Bryan C. Short argues: "Rather than finding a way of uniting himself, he controls his disintegrated personality through relentless mental discipline" (1979: 564). The episode of the shepherds in canto 4.9 "The Shepherds' Dale", which I analyzed in Section 3.5, illustrates the inner divisions preventing Ungar from joining the 'Northern society' of his fellow Americans in the poem. Ungar's presence in *Clarel* exposes the fracture between North and South, as well as the national disunion still predominant in the United States of the 1870s, notwithstanding the deceitful image of national unity publicized by the U.S. government in the Centennial Exhibition. Despite his incapacity to 'integrate' in their society, Ungar's departure from his fellow travelers in the poem will be somehow painful to him:

> [...] Brief the word;

No hand he grasped; yet was he stirred,
Despite his will, in heart at core:
'Twas countrymen he here forsook:
He felt it; and his aspect wore
In the last parting, that strange look
Of one enlisted for sad fight
Upon some desperate dark shore,
Who bids adieu to the civilian,
Returning to his club-house bright,
In city cheerful with the million. (4.28.6-16)

Ungar's departure from his countrymen is not romanticized but described as a painful separation of the soldier "enlisted for sad fight", prepared to meet the "desperate dark shore" that civilians can only begin to imagine.[534] No sense of togetherness, therefore, can be created among the four Americans, and no togetherness does even emerge among the three Northerners alone, since characters remain locked within their individual subjectivities (e.g., Vine's self-centeredness, Clarel's initial rejection of Rolfe). The only character who will be capable of 'hosting' the plurality of other worldviews available to him within his own self is Rolfe, who critically puts together and analyzes others' views, and makes an effort to respectfully approach others even though these others remain inside the walls they lock themselves in.

In spite of the catastrophic view of the future that characterizes it, Ungar's pessimism is not self-consuming, like Celio's or Mortmain's, or passive, like Agath's, but features a philosophy of endurance and active fight in face of the continuous suffering caused by existence, which may be comparable to Djalea's.[535] Ungar is aware

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[534] Some poems in *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War* (e.g., "The College Colonel") also emphasize the gap between civilians' and soldiers' perceptions of the war. Readers themselves –possibly civilians unbaptized in the hardships of battle– are invited in the journey through the tragic battles and "Aspects of the War" that the poems in the volume encourage.

[535] According to William Potter, "if the material world can no longer be transcended […] then it can only be endured" (2004: 165). Potter emphasizes the Lebanese Druze Djalea as one of the most important figures of endurance in *Clarel*, a man of noble blood now working as a guide for the pilgrims in Jerusalem: "The depiction of Djalea at equilibrium with his harsh and unyielding environment and maintaining his faith with the simple (partial) Islamic 'shahada,' 'No God there is but God... / Allah

that his harsh evaluations of Western civilization and the United States are perceived as madness by characters such as Derwent, who dismisses his critiques as irrational in the same way as the priest dismisses Mortmain or Cyril as mad, or Vine as "queer" (2.2.10). Despite his angry evaluations of the world and humanity, readers are left to believe that Ungar will continue fighting in order to keep on living as best as he can in such a degraded world after he leaves the group of pilgrims in Bethlehem, for, after all, he is a soldier. Unlike his other pessimistic companions, Ungar can find "something to look up to yet!" (4.7.100), which provides him with a certain warmth and space for agency despite the harshness of "the age" (4.7.99).

Some other minor yet equally interesting pessimist monomaniacs are Cyril and Habbibi, both introduced in Part 3, as the pilgrims visit the monastery of Mar Saba. A ghostly character who used to be a soldier in his youth but who at present dresses in a shroud and dwells in a gloomy vault in the hills surrounding the monastery, Cyril is met by Derwent, the Lesbian, Mortmain, Clarel, and readers. Even though not many details about his life are revealed, readers are told that it was the world which turned Cyril into the spectral presence he is at present. Like Mortmain, who visits Cyril's grotto,[536] Cyril could once find hope to his existence but is now only able to see despair and death, as demonstrated by his occasional addresses to visitors who approach him, and his requests of the password 'Death' from them. Clarel is the first character to see Cyril in his cave and Cyril's first and only apparition is to demand the countersign 'Death' from Clarel before withdrawing again in the depths of his grotto. Clarel is moved by the

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preserve ye, Allah great!' (3.15.115, 123), and indulging in the simple pleasures of the *Kayf* is the most powerful such image of the endurance of faith in the poem, and it fully exemplifies the narrator's exhortation in the epilogue" (2004: 165). Potter's reading of *Clarel* as a 'comparative religion' poem, however, leans on the recognition of a transcendental 'Truth' behind the different systems of belief that the poem brings together, a premise which, I believe, *Clarel* rejects in its understanding that such 'Truths' or 'Meanings' are non-existent.

[536] Mortmain's visit to Cyril's cave is narrated in 3.28 "Mortmain and the Palm".

strange ex-soldier and asks the friar outside the cave the origins of Cyril's grief, to which the friar briefly yet significantly replies: "Go—ask your world" (3.24.80), before dismissing the student. The portrait of this "world" is the one which Mortmain and Agath, in this part of the poem, and Ungar, in the next, will be in charge of painting. Significantly, the shrouded character will not welcome the jovial singing of the Lesbian and Derwent, who, in turn, will depreciate Cyril as mad (Derwent actually feels some pity for him too), not sharing the sympathy of the young Clarel, who is moved by Cyril. Realizing Derwent's pity for the ghostly monk as well as the priest's consideration for the "queer" Vine, whom others in the cavalcade regard highly, the Lesbian criticizes those who canonize as wise 'mad' men such as Cyril or Vine. He also dismisses any possibility that Cyril may be the sage that some deem him to be (3.27.83-96). Still haunted by the ghostly presence of Cyril, the two travelers subsequently observe the 'absent presence' of the dead monk Habbibi, on the other hand, whose writings are inscribed on the wall of his cave. In the Lesbian's opinion, Habbibi is but yet another mad monk:

> How like you it—Habbibi's home?
> You see these writings on the wall?
> His craze was this: he heard a call
> Ever from heaven: O scribe, write, write!
> Write this—that write—to these indite—
> To them! Forever it was—write!
> Well, write he did, as here you see. (3.27.112-118)

It is inevitable to compare Habbibi's necessity to write –conceived as an obsessive madness by the Lesbian, and therefore as another kind of extreme monomania in the general context of the poem– to Melville's own necessity to write, which even some members in his family seem to have considered either a maddening obsession or an obsessive madness, much in the same way that the Lesbian or Derwent deem

Habbibi's.[537] In relation to the particular context of postbellum United States, it is interesting to note that a part of Habbibi's writings may be claimed to bear indirect resonances of the U.S. Centennial (the "… teen .. six", the "hundred summers run", and the "cicatrix", the reference to the aloe and May [3.27.129-138]), as has been noted earlier following Cody Marrs work.[538] The rest, I believe, indicates the (self-)knowledge gained through the very act of writing, itself a process of diving (like young Clarel's, dismissed by Derwent during their private conversation) which may generate both pain ("*I, Self, I am the enemy / Of all. From me deliver me, / O Lord*" [3.27. 123-125]) and also pleasures ("*There is a hell over which mere hell / Serves—for—a—heaven*" [3.27.126-127]). As a kind of transtemporal connector, a note at the door of the cave warns about the potentially transforming effect that Habbibi's writings may have upon their readers: "*Ye here who enter Habbi's den, / Beware what hence ye take!*" (3.27.149-150).[539] What is to take is something that neither Derwent nor the Lesbian can comprehend, but which "eagle-eyed" ("Hawthorne and His Mosses" 1850: 60) readers may be, hopefully, in the process of grasping. This line, I argue, creates an intersubjective moment with those *Clarel* readers who decided not to give up like Glaucon and continued the pilgrimage.[540] What may be taken from the poem-pilgrimage, then, is for every reader to discover in a fascinating intersubjective exercise with the text. In *Moby-Dick*, Ahab explains remarkably well the complex intersubjective interaction that takes place between text

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[537] See Section 2.1 in this chapter. See also Judge Lemuel Shaw's letter to his son Samuel (September 1, 1856) on page 212.

[538] See Section 3.3 in this chapter.

[539] These lines, the editors of the 1991 Northwestern-Newberry edition of *Clarel* note, "slightly resemble the inscriptions over the gateway to hell in canto 3 of [Dante's] *The Inferno*" (816). These may be related, in turn, to the quote from "Inferno" in *Pierre*: "Through me you pass into the city of Woe; / Through me you pass into eternal pain; / Through me, among the people lost for aye. / * * * * * * / All hope abandon, ye who enter here" (1852: 199).

[540] Immediately preceding "Sodom" (canto 2.36), the narrator warns readers "who green or gray retain / Childhood's illusion, or but feign" (2.35.38-39) to skip the canto. Another moment when readers are addressed is after Glaucon and the Banker abandon the pilgrimage, as the narrator asks readers whether they are still there or they have, too, left (2.13.112). See the quotation of this passage on page 279 in this chapter.

and reader, how the most private may unfold in the act of reading and interpreting, and how readers may read themselves in the text:

> There's something ever egotistical in mountain-tops and towers, and all other grand and lofty things; look here,—three peaks as proud as Lucifer. The firm tower, that is Ahab; the volcano, that is Ahab; the courageous, the undaunted, and victorious fowl, that, too, is Ahab; all are Ahab; and this round gold is but the image of the rounder globe, which, like a magician's glass, to each and every man in turn but mirrors back his own mysterious self. (*Moby-Dick* 1851: 382)

Yet, if texts make evident the most private they also expose how the particular and the universal, the individual and the global, intermingle with one another. In the multidirectional and complex intersubjective dialogue they create, texts constitute both products of, and accesses to, the particular (on the one hand, the author-creator's own subjectivity and the temporal, geo-political, social, literary, etc. contexts in which both the creator and the text itself are inscribed; on the other hand, the reader-interpreter's own subjectivity and contexts, from which s/he examines the text) and the universal (the 'sample' of humanity that texts incorporate into and fictionalize in the literary worlds and words they create, and the fact that both their creator and their readers, as well as characters, are each and all of them representatives of their particular contexts, and their own subjectivities, in the same way that they are representatives of humanity and of the diversity of the earth, and each of them constitutes one expression of the universal that is in relation to others). It is in these complex interactions that is located the possibility of intersubjectivity with the reader in the transtemporal present. Being both representative of the plurality of humanity and of her/his particular context, each reader will 'extract' different questions from a same text. Are books then human

beings?[541] With a conditional 'if', *Clarel*'s narrator seems to respond to this question in the affirmative:

> Nevertheless,
> Were it a paradox to confess
> A book's a man? If this be so,
> Books be but part of nature. Oh,
> 'Tis studying nature, reading books:
> And 'tis through Nature each heart looks
> Up to a God, or whatsoe'er
> One images beyond our sphere. (2.32.74-81)

It may seem strange that, over forty years after Roland Barthes proclaimed the death of the Author, I insist in continuing to claim such a strong connection between texts and their creators. Nevertheless, mine is not a defense of an Authoritarian or author-based conception of literature which annihilates the possibilities of interpretation in its defense of the 'Author's Meaning'. Authorial intentions, opinions, and 'Meaning' are, in fact, expressly resistant to being graspable as monolithic, one-sided Meanings in Herman Melville's texts, yet in my opinion the author is present in the fluidity of the words, which is not to claim that Melville might be 'located' in any particular character. Melville himself was well aware that meaning, like the whale, must remain "unpainted to the last" (*Moby-Dick* 1851: 240), both, meaning and whales, being as elusive as they are ungraspable:

> The more I consider this mighty tail, the more do I deplore my inability to express it. […] Dissect him how I may, then, I go but skin deep. I know him not, and never will. But if I know not even the tail of this whale, how understand his head? much more, how comprehend his face, when face he has none? Thou shalt see my back parts, my tail, he seems to say, but my face shall not be seen. But I cannot completely make out his back parts; and hint what he will about his face, I say again he has no face. (338)

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[541] While I am aware that literary texts are *representations* of reality, my approach to literature, as I stated in the Introduction, is based on the belief that we cannot separate literary texts from their creators or from the context(s) and material conditions in which they are produced.

Books are the products of their creators, each creator, in turn, 'produced' by a series of specific contexts and experiences that have constituted her/his individuality (an individuality which is not monolithic but inscribed within such contexts and in relation to the individualities of others). Being the product of one human being, and at the same time constituting global contexts in their capacity as microcosms which represent and are peopled by a more or less characteristic 'sample' of humanity, books are both products and 'accesses' to humanity. It is according to this line of thought that I interpret Derwent's affirmation that "'Tis studying nature, reading books" (2.32.78). The writer gives threads and thoughts to pursue, but, nevertheless, it is the reader who comes up with his or her own interpretations through the act of exploration and analysis that is specially enabled through reading. As Stubb soliloquizes in *Moby-Dick*, "Book! you lie there; the fact is, you books must know your places. You'll do to give us the bare words and facts, but we come in to supply the thoughts. That's my small experience" (*Moby-Dick* 383). Melville was well aware that only special readers might be willing to engage in the dialogic exercise of reading and interpreting; as he had Ishmael note: "In this Afric Temple of the Whale I leave you, reader, and if you be a Nantucketer, and a whaleman, you will silently worship there" (402).

In spite of their only brief apparition in the poem, both Cyril and Habbibi constitute important figures that encourage a reflection about art and the creative process, at the same time that they expose the unclear boundaries between madness and sanity, mania and tragic wisdom, and the self-destructive consequences of bleak pessimism to characters who remove themselves from humanity and whose hopelessness becomes a self-annihilating poison. Among the pessimistic monomaniacs in *Clarel*, Ungar is the only one whose pessimism is not nihilistic but retains some

degrees of –certainly dark– hope (perhaps the hope of fighting on in spite of being aware of the impossibility or elusiveness of victory) and, thus, agency, despite the deep disillusionment and fatalist conception of the present and future professed by the character. Unlike Celio, Mortmain, Cyril, and even Agath,[542] Ungar's belief that there is "something to look up to yet!" (4.7.100) –in his case, probably, his Catholic faith and belief in God, his spirituality and pleasure at contemplating nature (he lays "Lingered, in adoration there / Of Eastern skies" [4.7.93-94] when he utters the previous remark),[543] together with his being a soldier– keeps him alive and struggling in a world he regards as universally fallen ("the age, the age forget—" [4.7.99]): "The distance between Mortmain and Ungar is crucial. Mortmain's descent becomes unmanageable; he is seized by what divers call the rapture of the depths. Ungar's mania is not toward self-extinction, but the eradication of evil. War is his business; he is a professional" (Bezanson 1991: 593). Walter Bezanson concludes that "Ungar is Mortmain with a resuscitated will, Agath with a mind" (593). Although Ungar and Mortmain never actually meet, it is particularly interesting to analyze these two characters together, since it happens to be soon after Mortmain's death in a sort of self-euthanasia[544] that Ungar enters *Clarel*, which allows Melville to give continuity to the harsh judgments on the presence of evil in the world that Mortmain (and before him Celio) had initiated. Mortmain is committed to death; Ungar commits himself to life, but life pains him and

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[542] Agath's passivity and lack of vital energies may lead readers to imagine for him a fate closer to Mortmain's than to Ungar's.

[543] Similarly, in his last apparition in the poem, Djalea is portrayed in peaceful contemplation of the stars. Timothy Marr has argued that this description of the Druze is "Melville's most powerful evocation of Djalea's deeply human blending of mind, heart, and soul" (2006: 256), noting that the canto in which this scene is described, "The Night Ride", is named "for the ascent that the Prophet Muhammad made to the seventh heaven while in Jerusalem" (256).

[544] Mortmain's death is not presented as painful but rather as the calm release of a hero who falls into a quiet slumber after having reached a deep state of peace in contemplation of the palm. This peaceful death evokes the last words of the Swede in the poem, which are addressed to the hovering palm to which he prays: "When the last light shall fade from me, / If, groping round, no hand I meet; / Thee I'll recall—invoke thee, Palm: / Comfort me then, thou Paraclete!" (3.28.88-91).

angers him.[545] Although it is true that Ungar's observations, as I have argued, resemble Mortmain's in the catastrophic vision of the future of humanity they predict, I also believe that the main disparity between Mortmain and Ungar, as well as between Celio or Agath and Ungar, is the potentiality that each of these characters allows for agency in an existence they perceive as painful. Despite their bleak pessimism, the dark monomaniac "Unworldly yearners" (3.1.14) in *Clarel* are portrayed in a heroic way.

Both Mortmain and Ungar provide powerful critical points of view which enable readers to rethink important questions about democracy, progress, imperialism, colonialism, good and evil, madness, etc. They belong to a group of monomaniac characters that, as William Potter claims, excel in "heroic grandeur over the other characters and easily beguile the unwary reader into being blinded to their faults" (2004: 123). Despite their eloquence, however, these characters also personify the blurry boundary between totalitarianism and democracy, since they, on the one hand, proclaim themselves as defenders of democracy but, on the other hand, they also remain locked in their own selves and one-sided views of humanity. As Dennis Berthold has noted, this authoritarianism makes both characters problematic: Mortmain, himself a "Prophet of peace" resorts to violence in the name of democracy and is dogmatic in his claims that humanity and the world are evil; and Ungar's stubborn views on American democracy are permeated by his conservative Catholicism and even by racism and xenophobia (2006: 159).[546] Both Mortmain and Ungar, Berthold shows, are authoritarian voices lacking in essential human values such as magnanimity and

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[545] Walter Bezanson notes how Mortmain's name may be phonetically connected to 'mort' in French (1991: 626), while Ungar's may point to 'anger', a feature which becomes a dominant force in his eloquent speeches.

[546] It is an important paradox that, while denouncing the history of Anglo imperialism and colonialism, Ungar also associates himself professionally with the Turks, therefore becoming a participant in other forms of imperial violence, at the service of the Ottoman Empire.

manysidedness, so often vindicated in Melville's works (2006: 159).[547] It is, thus, important to keep a critical distance from them, even though their analyses are indeed intellectually stimulating, and even though they are characters who –borrowing Ishmael's phrase in *Moby-Dick*– possess "high qualities, though dark" (1851: 119) and stand as representatives of a universally suffering human race. In the same way as other maniacs in the poem (religious, optimistic, scientific, egocentric), the pessimistic monomaniacs are instances of myopic or one-sided thinkers who withdraw from any possibility of developing intersubjective bonds with other human beings, and chose, instead, to be locked within the walls of their individualities and tormented by their own egos. It is, above all, significant that Melville chose to end the pessimistic monomaniac series with Ungar among all the dark monomaniacs, since it is only Ungar who is endowed with enough will to keep struggling in a world which, he knows, will probably continue making him feel painfully unhomely and dislocated. Ungar's challenge, like Clarel's at the end of the pilgrimage, will be not to lose his vital energies and not to become deadened by his own grief; since, as we saw earlier, Ishmael warns in *Moby-Dick* that "There is a wisdom that is woe; but there is a woe that is madness" (*Moby-Dick* 376).[548] Clarel's task throughout his pilgrimage is not to fall into the self-destructive mania which dominates other Melvillean heroes (Taji, Pierre) and fellow travelers in *Clarel* (Mortmain, Nathan, Celio), especially when he undergoes his own experience of grief. However, as the young Clarel remarks as he retells the words of a countryman recently arrived from Jerusalem and whom he met in Jaffa, "To avoid the deep saves not from storm" either (1.1.99).

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[547] Rolfe may well be the only character in the poem that embodies those values. See the analysis of Rolfe in "b" of Section 3.7.2.

[548] Ishmael's warning in *Moby-Dick* may be related to Glaucon's song at his departure from the pilgrims in canto 2.13 "Flight of the Greeks". See page 476 in this chapter.

4. Impossible Intersubjectivity — Impracticable Universalism. Conclusions

> "Israel's heart was prophetically heavy; foreknowing, that being of this race, felicity could never be his lot."
>
> (Herman Melville, *Israel Potter* 1855: 605)

> "Far inland, nameless wails came from him, as desolate sounds from out ravines. […] In an instant's compass, great hearts sometimes condense to one deep pang, the sum total of those shallow pains kindly diffused through feebler men's whole lives. And so, such hearts, though summary in each one suffering; still, if the gods decree it, in their life-time aggregate a whole age of woe, whole made up of instantaneous intensities; for even in their pointless centres, those noble natures contain the entire circumferences of inferior souls."
>
> (Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick* 1851: 482-483)

> "Sour camels humped by heaven and man,
> Whose languid necks through habit turn
> For ease—for ease they hardly gain.
> In varied forms of fate they wend—
> Or man or animal, 'tis one:
> Cross-bearers all, alike they tend
> And follow, slowly follow on."
>
> Accents of undetermined fear,
> And voices as in shipwreck drear:
> A sea, a sea of spirits in pain!
>
> "But though the freshet quite be gone—
> Sluggish, life's wonted stream flows on."
>
> (Herman Melville, *Clarel* 1876: 4.34.38-44; 4.15.55-57;
> 4.33.75-76)

> "Each lonely scene shall thee restore,
> For thee the tear be duly shed;
> Belov'd till life can charm no more,
> And mourned till Pity's self be dead."
>
> (Herman Melville, "The Chola Widow" 1854: 121)

Chapter Two has analyzed *Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land* (1876) as a poem that gives continuity to Melville's life-long literary project of intersubjective universalism. In *Clarel*, I have claimed, Melville articulates universalism as a potentially

democratizing process created through the intersubjective dialogic encounters of characters who stand as representative samples of human plurality, and who are made to analyze different individual and common human concerns, and negotiate questions affecting human cohabitation. In its emphasis on, and encouragement of, plurality and plural thinking, as well as in its rejection of one-sidedness and monolithic Meanings, Melville's universalist project, I have argued, contains a transformative potential that may contribute to democratizing the ways in which we conceive human relationships, as it may enable the transcendence of inter-personal 'walls' (national, cultural, social, 'racial', ethnic, religious, sexual, generational, etc.), often enforced by individualist attitudes as much as by communitarian forms of belonging separating human beings. Melville is aware of the limitations and of the partiality of this project, however global the exploration may be; as King Media replies to Babbalanja's observation in *Mardi* that "Surely, our brief voyage, may not embrace all Mardi like its reef?": "much must be left unseen" in the diving; we can only and inevitably, like Babbalanja, contemplate the "infinite sea" and wonder "what regions lie beyond?" (*Mardi* 1849: 1092). Also importantly, Melville is conscious of the difficulties that may impede the development of universalism and cause its undoing: at the same time that he creates in *Clarel* a poem that points toward intersubjective universalism as a democratizing enterprise that may de-transcendentalize monolithic Meanings, encourage plural thinking and open up one-sided imaginations, *Clarel* reveals how human beings thwart the possibility of intersubjectivity at the very doors of togetherness, choosing instead to remain locked within their egocentric natures and –frequently (self-)destructive, as the poem shows– one-sided thinking parameters. The majority of characters in *Clarel*, with very few exceptions, leave the pilgrimage alone and are incapable of visualizing their next

destination.[549] One of the final images of the poem that exemplifies most powerfully one of the basic theses I have been defending in this dissertation (i.e., the fact that human beings, conditioned by multiple selfish and communitarian ways of conceiving themselves and the world, remain oblivious of their connectedness) is that of the Via Crucis, or Via Dolorosa,[550] in Jerusalem flooded by a crowd of suffering individuals. William Potter has juxtaposed the final image in *Clarel* to that of *Moby-Dick*, noting that "that earlier 'isolatoe' Ishmael […] finishes his journey after the catastrophe of the *Pequod* alone and tossed mercilessly about in the deepest waters of the Pacific, [whereas] Clarel completes his spiritual journey in the midst of a great cosmic march, yoked inextricably together with human and animal fellow sufferers" (2004: 71). However, despite being together as representatives of the human race in the particular, global, contexts that, I have analyzed, Jerusalem and Palestine constitute, the individuals in the Via Crucis are disconnected from one another, each of them alone and separately enduring his or her pain. The final image is, thus, indicative of the inter-human walls the poem portrays: no sense of togetherness is felt by these sufferers, as each individual sufferer remains blind to the pain of others, as well as oblivious to his/her universal connection with other sufferers. Melville forces us to watch this parade of separate "varied forms of fate" (4.34.41), yet he also connects these sufferers beyond and

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[549] The exceptions are the Greek Banker, his daughter, and his future son-in-law Glaucon. All three leave the group of pilgrims when they reach the Wilderness.

[550] In any of its two forms, the name of this Biblical street denotes pain: "Via Dolorosa" (The Way of Pain/Martyrdom),"Via Crucis" (the Path of the Cross). As Walter Bezanson argues, the cross becomes "a tragic symbol" to many characters in the poem: "Celio faced its paralyzing power at the Arch of Ecce Homo (1.13). Mortmain scrawled his bitter lament to the Slanted Cross on a great rock overlooking the Dead Sea (2.31). Agath wore a sailor's 'crucifixion in tattoo' on his forearm (4.2.51). Ungar's sword, his primary symbol, becomes a double emblem: "'Tis true; / A Cross, it is a cross,' he said" (4.14.29-30)" (1991: 564-565). Similarly, Clarel will also bear his own cross at the end of the poem, which symbolizes his personal experience of pain by the end of his pilgrimage.

without the walls[551] of their separate identities, revealing that pain is the ultimate, inevitable, human condition, transnationally, transhistorically, universally. Suffering becomes the ultimate condition of humanity; as Ishmael had claimed in the "The Try-Works" chapter (number 96) of *Moby-Dick*, "The truest of all men [is] the Man of Sorrows" (1851: 376). The particular and the global fuse here as well, and it is certainly relevant that Melville should return his characters to the walled Jerusalem ("At last, Jerusalem! 'Twas thence / They started—thither they return, / Rounding the waste circumference" [4.29.11-13]) by the end of their pilgrimage(s), since, after having explored the possibilities "beyond the walls", most characters abort the opportunities of developing intersubjective bonds with other characters and, consequently, remain trapped within their individualities and egocentric thinking parameters. The particular and the global fuse in Clarel too: the student is one among the sufferers, yet he is Clarel, his individuality, as others', asserted in the midst of "A sea, a sea of spirits in pain!" (4.15.57). Conscious of the absorptive power of the sea and its "heartless immensity" (*Moby-Dick* 1851: 367), the narrator individualizes the suffering crowd, emphasizing its diversity:

> As 'twere a frieze, behold the train!
> Bowerd water-carriers; Jews with staves;
> Infirm gray monks; over-loaded slaves;
> Turk soldiers—young, with home-sick eyes;
> A Bey, bereaved through luxuries;
> Strangers and exiles; Moslem dames
> Long-veiled in monumental white,
> Dumb from the mounds which memory claims;
> A half-starved vagrant Edomite;
> Sore-footed Arab girls, which toil
> Depressed under heap of garde-spoil;

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[551] I intend to evoke here the phrase that gives title to canto 1.7, "Beyond the Walls", and the phrase "without the walls" in the entry to Melville's 1856-57 journal, with which the present chapter opened.

The patient ass with panniered urn;
Sour camels humped by heaven and man,
Whose languid necks through habit turn
For ease—for ease they hardly gain. (*Clarel* 4.34.26-40)

Muslims, Jews; soldiers, civilians; young, old; men, women; locals, exiles, citizens, slaves; veiled and unveiled; humans and even animals; the description underlines the plurality –and yet common condition– of this procession of sufferers in their respective living natures: "Or man or animal, 'tis one" (4.34.42). Longing for ease from their permanent pain and unhomeliness,[552] like the camels turning their necks for relief or the expressive eyes of the Turkish soldiers, the "Cross-bearers" endure their existences with both fortitude and resignation, since "[…] though the freshet quite be gone— / Sluggish, life's wonted stream flows on" (4.33.75-76). As King Media notes in *Mardi*: "[…] endurance is the test of philosophy […]" (1849: 1143). It is evident at this point that, as Stan Goldman claims, "Dogma" (and/or, I add, nationality, ethnicity, communitarian affiliation, etc.) "may divide humanity, but suffering unites it" (1993: 69). *Clarel* reflects how pain is a shared condition by both human and non-human living beings: "the only true democracy allotted to man, [is] that of universal suffering. […] it makes all men equal, […] 'Cross-bearers all' ", a lesson which, Joseph G. Knapp claims, is only learned through experience, as does Clarel (1971: 113). James E. Miller also claims that, by the end of his pilgrimage, Clarel learns to embrace the brotherhood of humanity (1962: 217). Initially referred to by the pronoun 'he', Clarel emerges as one of the rovers in the Via Dolorosa, slowly following the other sufferers. Having undergone his own experience of pain after the death of Ruth, at the end of the poem Clarel is placed at the same level as the other sufferers concurring such a street of pain, perhaps

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[552] Mortmain finds such 'home' only in death. By the end of his pilgrimage, Clarel is unhomed (perhaps homeless), as he loses the home he expected to find in marriage and can find no home in faith either; his challenge, to find a 'home' in such unhomeliness.

symbolizing the young man's understanding of his belonging to a universal community of 'Cross-bearers' in "diverse forms of fate", both human and animal, who push their existences against the hardships of life and the multiple forces (political, socioeconomic, good and evil,[553] etc.) by which their lives are conditioned. What Clarel attains at the end of his pilgrimage is not the balm for existential doubts that he expected to find in the Holy Land,[554] but the awareness that pain is the inevitable, universal state of the human condition and that there is no possible balm; in other words, the realization that his doubts can have no answer because no Answer (religious, scientific, ideological, etc.) exists that is not a provisional, biased, and always partial interpretation. Goldman interprets the end of the poem as revealing Clarel's hiddenness, not maturation: "[Clarel] is left only with silence and a return into the 'obscurer town' (4.34.56)", arguing that "Clarel merely walks back into hiddenness, back to the universal procession of sufferers" (1993: 69). My view is that the end does portray Clarel's maturation, but this growth is enabled by the student's unlearning of 'Truths' such as religion which he expected, at the start of his pilgrimage, would provide answers to his pressing doubts. By the end of his journey, "[h]is attempts to find answers in the teachings and observations of religious orthodoxy [are] thwarted, Clarel has, nonetheless, undergone a great process of spiritual growth and evolution; and though the lessons learned may be ultimately sad […] he will, like his mighty ancestor Ishmael, somehow endure and survive […]" (Potter 2004: 146).[555] Clarel's "victory" (the very word with which Melville closes *Clarel* in the enigmatic "Epilogue" [4.35.34]) is to

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[553] Evil is one of these important forces, which Babbalanja describes in *Mardi* as "the chronic malady of the universe; and checked in one place, breaks forth in another" (1849: 1186). Rolfe also supports this view when he exclaims that "Evil and good they braided play / Into one cord" (4.4.27-28), recognizing that these two tendencies always cohabit, even within the human heart.

[554] This reminds of the poem's construction of Jerusalem as a place of shattered expectations, disillusionment, aloneness, and separation, unlike the biblical image of Jerusalem/Palestine as a land of promise and fulfillments.

[555] Potter's thesis is that Melville defends endurance by the end of *Clarel*.

understand that there are neither 'Truths' nor 'Answers'. As the narrator asserts in

Pierre:

> For there is no faith, and no stoicism, and no philosophy, that a mortal man can possibly evoke, which will stand the final test of a real impassioned onset of Life and Passion upon him. Then all the fair philosophic or Faith-phantoms that he raised from the midst, slide away and disappear as ghosts at cock-crow. For Faith and philosophy are air, but events are brass. Amidst his gray philosophizing, Life breaks upon a man like a morning. (1852: 337)

The "Via Crucis" canto is one of despair and aloneness in the midst of universal pain;[556] little hope is present in the closing cantos before the "Epilogue", and readers remain unsure of whether Clarel is actually aware of the possibility of hope that the narrator expresses in his final advice: "Like Job, Clarel suffers but lives. Only when disappointment and suffering are complete—close to despair—does the Epilogue's encouragement come to hope. As Heraclitus suggested, the way down is also the way up. The way up, however, is apparent only to readers, not to Clarel" (Goldman 1993: 69).

Yet, if faith and belief can provide no consolation to the grieved student, the "Epilogue" to *Clarel* also underlines the incapacity of science to satisfy the yearnings and concerns of the human heart. It is the heart and not the mind that the narrator favors in the closing canto ("Then keep thy heart, though yet but ill-resigned— / Clarel, thy heart, the issues there but mind"), the heart being where he might find the

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[556] William Potter reads Clarel's vanishing into the streets of Jerusalem as annihilation, comparing it to the Buddhist notion of 'Nirvana' by which annihilation becomes the transcendence of self (171). Referring to Melville's exclamation in the poem "Buddha" ("Nirvana! absorb us in your skies, / Annul us in thee"), Potter quotes Melville's contemporary William Rounseville Alger's distinction between the Western conception of annihilation and the Buddhist view: "By annihilation we [of the West] mean a boundless negation, the deprivation of all being; and we regard it as a blank horror. By Nirvana the Buddhist thinkers mean a boundless affirmation, the resumption of that relationless, changeless state of which every form of existence is the deprivation; and they regard it as an infinite entrancement" (Alger 1866: 199; qtd. in Potter 2004: 175).

balm that reason or religious faith alone cannot provide.[557] Clarel's realization of the impossibility of Truth is an initiation into the feeling of pain that most of the fellow travelers he met throughout the pilgrimage were already familiar with (some, like Mortmain or Celio, were even eventually annihilated by it) and which Clarel realized was overwhelmingly felt by Ungar.[558] This impossibility of Truth is manifested in the death of Ruth, the 'truth' that Clarel expected to find at his return in Jerusalem to provide meaning to his existence, in the same way as Taji's Yillah in *Mardi*. Analyzing *Mardi*, James E. Miller has claimed that "Taji's Yillah cannot be found wherever evil exists; and since evil is universal, a condition of existence, Yillah can never be discovered—indeed, does not exist. As Babbalanja finally tells Taji, 'She is a phantom that but mocks thee'" (1962: 47). Miller's affirmation, I believe, applies to Clarel's yearning for Ruth: Ruth and Yillah, respectively (as well as Lucy in the 1852 *Pierre*), constitute the possibility of happiness to Clarel and Taji, which the questers, however, renounce: Clarel leaves Ruth with her mother and her community in Jerusalem and decides to join the all-male pilgrimage, while Taji refuses to look for Yillah in Serenia, the isle of love and spiritual peace: "thy Yillah is behind thee, not before", Hautia tells Taji, "Deep she dwells in blue Serenia's groves, which thou would'st not search" (1849: 1311).[559] Miller argues that Taji becomes a monomaniac by the end of *Mardi* (1849: 52-53); even though he still has the possibility to return to Serenia, he again renounces the possibility of happiness, blinded by his own pain: "Nay, madman! Serenia is our haven. Through yonder strait, for thee, perdition lies. And from the deep beyond, no voyager

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[557] See my analysis of Melville's defense of the heart on page 425 in this chapter.

[558] "[…] he's most strange; / Wild, too, adventurous in rage; / And suffers" (4.17.49-51).

[559] Similarly, Pierre also renounces the possibility of a happy marital life with Lucy when he resolves to escape with Isabel.

e'er puts back", warns his companion Mohi.[560] Early in age has Clarel found "the heavier tree" (4.34.48), symbolized by the cross the student carries as he walks the Via Crucis, and, even more harshly and importantly, he learns that he is alone to carry it, no possible certainty or meaning to which he may cling onto, nor fellow man who might alleviate its weight. At the same time that he discovers personal pain, Clarel also discovers that pain is a universal phenomenon. William Potter beautifully captures this idea with his claim that "at the sad conclusion of the poem he [Clarel] is suffering both alone and as part of the great cosmic train"; only his contact with representatives of the plurality of humanity allows him "to comprehend both the diversity and the similarities among peoples" (2004: 210). His challenge, as the narrator warns him in the "Epilogue", is not to follow Taji's fate (or Mortmain's, or Celio's, or Nathan's) and die swallowed by the sea.[561]

The last cantos in the poem, before the "Epilogue", represent a Jerusalem that is different from the city of segregated communities which, as I have analyzed, the poem had revealed in Part 1. Portraying the Easter festivity of Jesus's resurrection, the narrator describes what first appears as a uniting celebration that gathers together different (usually confronted) Christian denominations (Armenians, Roman Catholics,

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[560] Vincent Kenny (1973: 214) interprets Babbalanja's decision to remain in Serenia as an embrace to a life of illusion. I, however, believe that, by deciding to stay in the land of love that Serenia represents, Babbalanja embraces the possibility of happiness that men such as Taji reject.

[561] As a matter of fact, Clarel also relapses into a wish of death when he discovers Ruth's body. Even though he confesses that "faith's gone", unlike Taji, Clarel resolves to "endure" (4.30.117, 114). James Duban has read *Clarel*'s message of hope in the "Epilogue" as a possible evocation to the Polynesian notion of 'manaolana', itself an expression of hope also referred to as the 'swimming thought'. In his analysis of *Clarel*, Duban claims that this term had reached some Americans in the early 1860s: "Possible knowledge of the term ['manaolana'] among Westerners in the nineteenth century was not limited to persons who, like Melville, had traveled in Polynesia and who had had first-hand encounters with its dialects. Indeed, the expression was discussed in an 1860 New York newspaper: 'Among some of the South Sea Islanders the compound word for hope is beautifully expressive. It is *manaolana*, or the *swimming thought*—faith floating and keeping its head aloft above water, when all the waves and billows are going over" (1991: 476). Even though he recognizes the hopeful message in the Polynesian 'swimming thought', Duban also notes how, in some cases, Melville converted the hopefulness into despair: "Melville could, however, subvert the spiritual efficacy of flotation to illustrate the opposite attitude of despair: he does so in *Moby-Dick* by having Ishmael remark of Pip that 'the sea had jeeringly kept his finite body up, but drowned the infinite of his soul' " (1991: 477).

Greek Orthodox, Syrian, Copts…) only to underline how the numberless crowds of pilgrims dissolve by the end of the festivity, leaving Jerusalem deserted:

> The rite supreme being ended now,
> Their confluence here the nations part:
> Homeward the tides of pilgrims flow,
> By contrast making the walled town
> Like a depopulated mart; (4.33.67-71)

The desert has invaded the global city at this stage: communities have been replaced by individuals by the end of *Clarel*, Jerusalem having become a city of separate human wails and of pain and aloneness that not even communities or religious belief seem to have been able to remedy; above all, it is a global context of inter-personal gulfs without bridges. This final description of the holy city reminds us of the narrator's description of Clarel's thoughts on how no gate or wall can prevent the desert from penetrating the human soul.

> "The gate," cried Nehemiah, "the gate
> Of David!" Wending thro' the strait,
> And marking that, in common drought,
> 'Twas yellow waste within as out,
> The student mused: The desert, see,
> It parts not here, but silently,
> Even like a leopard by our side,
> It seems to enter in with us—
> At home amid men's homes would glide.
> But hark! that wail how dolorous:
> So grieve the souls in endless dearth;
> Yet sounds it human—of the earth! (1.24.77-88)

As I remarked earlier, at this early point of the poem, at the end of canto 1.24,[562] Clarel already feels the wail of human souls grieving in desolation, conceiving this wail as a

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[562] This same passage is discussed to illustrate my argument on Melville's pointing to the transcendence of walls in *Clarel*. See Section 3.6 in this chapter.

universal condition which seems to come deep from the very earth itself. However, despite sharing in the humanity of such grieving souls and empathizing with their pain, Clarel conceives their wail as something external to him, of which he is not part; it is only after the pilgrimage has introduced him to suffering that he becomes one among the wailers. Stan Goldman reads *Clarel*'s ending as an affirmation of hope rooted in the belief in God, despite His hiddenness;[563] I, on the contrary, believe that religion fails to give consolation to Clarel's grief: "Where, where now He who helpeth us, / The Comforter?—Tell Erebus!" (4.32.103-104), "The cheer, so human,[564] might not call / The maiden up; *Christ is arisen*: / But Ruth, may Ruth so burst the prison?" (4.33.64-66), wonders Clarel as he watches the Easter celebrations. Not even communities can constitute a bond that does not dissolve as soon as temporary gatherings are over. Despite the narrator's words of consolation to the young student in the suffering human chain, there is no peace in the "Epilogue", as Individuals continue grieving alone.[565] As Joseph G. Knapp notes, after Ruth's death, Clarel understands that he must face life alone: "Clarel's innocence has changed to experience. […] He must live with himself, in history, and in society with other men. Clarel now has no delusions. Linked with the other 'crossbearers,' he 'Vanishes in the obscurer town' (V, xxxiv, 56)" (1971: 109). Even though Jerusalem is a global microcosm charged with the very possibility of

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[563] Goldman argues that the "Epilogue" reinforces faith or the giving of one's heart to God as solace, claiming that *Clarel*'s does not ultimately assert agnosticism but a form of hope and faith Goldman names 'protest theism', and which he defines as a theology of protest –yet a theology, nevertheless– which reinforces human faith and love of God who, despite being hidden, is not absent or dead (1993: 169): "In *Clarel*, Melville did not create a dark, nihilistic poem, but he did, paradoxically protest and love God unto death" (170). It is in this theism that Goldman locates the roots of Melville's faith and morality in *Clarel* based on the premise that religion "theoretically defends ethical behavior toward our neighbors" (132). Limiting thus morality to the belief in God –"giving the heart in love to God" (132)–, Goldman dismisses the possibility of any secular morality, being thus naïve to the fact that religion, as the poem itself shows, is frequently not followed by the ethical regard it, in theory, invites.

[564] This "cheer" contrasts with the cry to "crucify" (" 'Twas *human*, that unanimous cry, / 'We're fixed to hate him—crucify!'" [2.3.146]) described earlier in the poem (2.3.146). See page 479 in this chapter.

[565] The aloneness continues in death, as corroborated by Clarel's vision of the dead Nehemiah, Celio, Mortmain, and even Nathan, Agar and Ruth, who walk separately and alone: 4.32.81-102.

intersubjectivity that the poem points toward for the elimination of inter-personal walls (a possibility Clarel himself neutralizes in his failure to respond to Celio's intersubjective yearning or to remain with Ruth in Jerusalem after Nathan's death, which makes the young Clarel –among other characters in the poem– an example of what Melville describes as "man, suffering inflictor, sail[ing] on sufferance" in the middle of an "implacable Sea", in his late poem "Pebbles" [*John Marr and Other Sailors* 1888: 122]), *Clarel* characters remain in the most blatant aloneness. Pointing to the possibility of intersubjective universalism to transcend interpersonal walls, the poem shows how this potentiality, which it carefully constructs, is not eventually materialized, as the characters peopling the text are incapable of generating plural forms of togetherness or developing manysided thinking. Thus, by the end of *Clarel* readers are left with scattered subjectivities who are oblivious of one another and of the fact that they constitute different voices within a universal existential wail.[566] At the level of plot and character, the walls are reaffirmed, not dismantled.

As it could not be otherwise, being one of Melville's works, the closing "Epilogue" to *Clarel* provides no conclusion to the poem's divings: each reader may come up with his or her own conclusion about the future awaiting Clarel, hopefully aware that any conclusion a reader may come up with will be one possible interpretation in relation to others. As has been analyzed earlier, there were critics at the time of *Clarel*'s publication who complained that the poem did not provide any resolution to the numberless questions it raised. This is the same critique that king Media frequently poses to Babbalanja's endless philosophizings in *Mardi*: " 'Now, then, Babbalanja,' said Media, 'what have you come to in all this rhapsody? You everlastingly travel in a circle' "; to which the philosopher replies: "And so does the sun in heaven,

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[566] Not even the togetherness represented by the group of pilgrims is a durable form of togetherness, as they separate upon their arrival in Jerusalem.

my lord; like me, it goes round, and gives light as it goes" (*Mardi* 1849: 1115-1116). Such resistance to conclusions and conclusiveness, the rejection of one-sided interpretations of the world fossilized as monolithic 'Meanings', is both organic and coherent to the author's belief –so often expressed in his works–, that Meaning cannot be grasped. *Clarel* is an example of how Melville's works become no monolithic conclusions or 'full stops' but instruments encouraging plural thinking and readers' critical unfolding. By becoming conscious of the impossibility of Meaning, of the fact that there are no Truths but readings of reality and interpretations of human experience, one also grows aware that the process of diving without certainties is often a painful state of permanent unhomeliness and dislocation, of living searchingly, aware of the common humanity of human beings and of the discourses that erect walls against such common humanity. Diving, Melville shows in *Clarel,* as he shows in his other works, adds to human beings' existential pain, yet it is also that which makes human beings heroic. One has to be watchful, however, as *Clarel* emphasizes, not to be immured in the walls of pain produced by diving (like Celio or Mortmain in the poem) and turn such diving into a kind of (self-)destructive monomania. No Answers may be possible to ease our doubts, and even Meaning may not be there at all (the fearful vacancy of the pyramids that Melville described in the journal of his 1856-57 Mediterranean trip) or it may be totally split and unreachable ("Wending, he [Clarel] murmurs in low tone: / They wire the world—far under sea / They talk; but never comes to me / A message from beneath the stone [*Clarel* 4.34.50-53]). In the latter passage, stones emerge again as obstacles that keep Clarel from listening the "murmurs" under the sea (or perceiving the mysteries inside the pyramids),[567] an image

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[567] We have seen how throughout the poem, stones evoke walls, desolation, dearth. Joseph G. Knapp underlines Melville's use of "the abundance and universality of stones in much the same way that Walt Whitman uses grass: Stones are everywhere; they have been hurled from the time of Cain and Abel

which, in my opinion, is also reminiscent of Ahab's question in *Moby-Dick* "Will I have

eyes at the bottom of the sea, supposing I descend those endless stairs?" (1851: 494). It

is also interesting that these murmurs seem to disappear in *John Marr and Other Sailors*

(1888), the sea producing no echoes at all in "Pebbles" (2006: 102). Clarel is alone to

face the hardship of the diving and not to fall into "The craze of grief's intolerant fire /

Unwearied and unweariable" (*Clarel* 3.1.172-173), yet his challenge is not to keep out of

the sea but to immerse himself in it and not to drown, endure the hardships he may

encounter, and be conscious that, as Nathalia Wright asserts, 'truth' is an "endless

pursuit": "One is always traveling but never arrives" (1949: 172). The whispers from the

deep will probably never become any clearer; yet he may learn not to sink in the

exploration, accepting that unhomeliness is the permanent state of the diver, yet also

learning how to breathe in his immersions. This is, in a summarized way, the advice that

Melville-the narrator paternally seems to give the young character:

> Then keep thy heart. Though yet but ill-resigned—
> Clarel, thy heart, the issues there but mind;
> That like the crocus budding through the snow—
> That like a swimmer rising from the deep—
> That like a burning secret which doth go
> Even from the bosom that would hoard and keep;
> Emerge thou mayst from the last whelming sea,
> And prove that death but routs life into victory. (4.35.27-34)

Thrown alone in the immensity of the sea, Clarel's destiny is to learn how to "rise from

the deep", to dive deep –like the Catskill eagle that Ishmael describes in *Moby-Dick*[568] or

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by man against man, they have been used to build houses, erected into walls for cities, or hollowed out into tombs. This walling in, this feeling of enclosure, broods over the whole of Part I" (1971: 28).

[568] "Give not thyself up, then, to fire, lest it invert thee, deaden thee; as for the time it did me. There is a wisdom that is woe; but there is a woe that is madness. And there is a Catskill eagle in some souls that can alike dive down into the blackest gorges, and soar out of them again and become invisible in the sunny spaces. And even if he for ever flies within the gorge, that gorge is in the mountains; so that even in his lowest swoop the mountain eagle is still higher than other birds upon the plain, even though they soar" (*Moby-Dick* 1851: 376).

the very diver Clarel himself has met in the manysided Rolfe– and "soar out" again (*Moby-Dick* 1851: 376), but in any case to endure and struggle "like Saba's green palm rising from the sterile rock", a symbol of persistence which Merlin Bowen reads as an affirmation of life (1960: 279). Like Celio, to whom the student failed to 'give himself'[569] when the Italian most needed him –consequently precipitating his death– Clarel is alone to embark on such search. As Joseph G. Knapp explains, "In his search for peace man must be prepared to dive, into himself. […] But each man must realize that, like Nathan, who 'Alone, and at Doubt's freezing pole / … wrestled with the pristine forms / Like the first man' (I, xvii, 194), he, too, will be alone in his search": also from Nathan, man needs to learn "to avoid extremes, for in this direction lies fanaticism and destruction" (1971: 110).[570] Such wisdom, Knapp claims, "is not a passive acceptance nor is it an intellectual conclusion; it is, rather, the fruit of endurance" (1971: 109). Knapp concludes that Melville points toward endurance as the only means through which human beings may prevail and, in the end, achieve their own "victory" (*Clarel* 4.35.34).

> Melville shows in *Clarel*, what Faulkner was to put into words much later, that only in endurance will man prevail, but to prevail does not mean that man will conquer and subdue the earth. On the contrary, man's victory is over himself. Endurance is an affirmation and a victory over temptations to actual or intellectual suicide. It brings with it a new knowledge and a new wisdom. (1971: 113)[571]

It is, however, an enigma how one may endure death to rout life into victory. Unlike his alter-ego Celio, Clarel chooses life, despite the pain. Clarel's only hope, according to the paternal narrator in the closing "Epilogue", is to "keep thy heart" (4.35.27) for, as

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[569] This expression is an allusion to Clarel's petition to Vine to "Give me thyself!" (2.27.70).

[570] Melville, however, embraces and analyzes extremes as a way to avoid falling on either side.

[571] Such wisdom, according to Knapp, is different from stoicism "although even stoics may be 'astounded into heaven' ": "It is, rather, a wisdom derived from the Christian perspective of the Cross" (113). As a matter of fact, Knapp defends that Melville is sympathetic in his treatment of Catholicism in *Clarel*, particularly of the Catholic characteristic of endurance (1971: 100).

Babbalanja asserts in *Mardi*, "Within our hearts is all we seek: though in that search many need a prompter" (1849: 1300). It is only in his heart that Clarel might ultimately find the balm that may allow him to continue living and which may keep him away from nihilism, madness, insensitivity, or bitterness when the desert penetrates his soul. So full of potentiality, the heart is, however, so limited by the very fact of being human. Like his fellow-travelers, Clarel is human, and therefore condidioned by a destructive and egocentric human nature, by the inevitable entanglement of good and evil, of hope and despair, within the human heart, by the bleak fact that it is in human nature to destroy our own possibilities of happiness and yearnings for togetherness. His challenge, when readers leave him at the end of the poem, is to learn how to live, without abandoning the diving (Rolfe), yet without sinking in the exploration, learning how to breathe after each immersion, accepting that pain and unhomeliness are the permanent states of the diver, and yet live –dive– on. *Clarel*'s final image of the swimmer emerging "from the last whelming sea" (4.35.33) is suggestive of Ishmael in *Moby-Dick*;[572] the difference, however, being that –unlike Ishmael, and apart from the "Epilogue"– Clarel does not have Queequeg's life-buoy; neither might there be in the end a *Rachel* rescuing another of her orphans.[573]

"Seaward he gazed," said Rolfe, "toward home:

An empty longing!" (*Clarel* 4.16.89-90)

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[572] The reference to the "crocus *budding* through the snow" (4.35.29; my italics) might also be read as an anticipation of the character of Billy Budd, whose (democratizing) potentiality will be eventually annihilated by the hierarchical and disciplinary forces of the *Bellipotent*.

[573] While Ishmael is symbolically "adopted" by the *Rachel* at the end of *Moby-Dick*, Clarel is significantly left alone and at a loss as he "Vanishes in the obscurer town" (4.34.54) joining the universal stream of sufferers before the narrator provides his consoling words.

"But as in landlessness alone resides the highest truth, shoreless, indefinite as God—so, better is it to perish in that howling infinite, than be ingloriously dashed upon the lee, even if that were safety!" (Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 1851: 110)

"*Better immersion than to live untouched*." (Tillie Olsen, "O Yes" 1956: 61)

CONCLUSIONS

"That voyager steered his bark through seas, untracked
before; ploughed his own path mid jeers; though with a
heart that oft was heavy with the thought, that he might
only be too bold, and grope where land was none."

(Herman Melville, *Mardi* 1849: 1213)

"And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know
madness and folly: I perceived that this also is vexation
of spirit. For in much wisdom is much grief; and he that
increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow."

(*Ecclesiastes* 1:17-18)

This dissertation has conceived universalism, on the one hand, as the real
connection of human beings (which is obscured by community-based barriers which
segregate humanity into groups and make individuals oblivious to their universal
connectedness), and, on the other hand, as a political project that may break through
the walls that human beings have interiorized as 'naturally' existing between them.
According to this second connotation, this dissertation has claimed the validity and
necessity of universalism as a democratic political project that moves beyond both the
imposition of a universalized particular, vindicated by traditional universalist projects,
and the sectarianism imposed by individualism and by communitarian views of the
world based on identities. In my defense of universalism I have rejected the premises
upon which traditional universalism has been historically constructed, in favor of a
decentralized and plural universalism which I have named intersubjective universalism.
My articulation of intersubjective universalism has developed from the possibilities
opened up by poststructuralist theory in its avowal of more fluid and non-essentialist
forms of conceiving individual subjectivity and human relationships. It has also been
decisively enabled by the analyses of subjectivity, community, interpersonal
relationships, politics, global ethics, and universalism carried out by contemporary

thinkers Giorgio Agamben, Hannah Arendt, Etienne Balibar, Zygmunt Bauman, Martin Buber, Judith Butler, Jacques Derrida, Roberto Esposito, Paul Gilroy, Ernesto Laclau, Emmanuel Levinas, Jean-Luc Nancy, Martha Nussbaum, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Linda Zerilli, among others, from the perspectives of poststructuralism, sociology, philosophy, politics, and ethics.

In this dissertation, I have claimed that nineteenth-century U.S. writer Herman Melville conceived and expressed in his literary production the type of universalism I defend in Chapter One (i.e., intersubjective universalism). I have maintained that Melville understood universalism as a political process that might be created through –or completely cancelled by– the interpersonal dialogic encounters of human beings who are different and who stand as representatives of both their own particular complex subjectivities and of human plurality. Melville, this dissertation has argued, conceives the local and the global as inseparable in every individual; he locates the possibility of universalism in intersubjectivity –the space of "shared understanding" (*SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods* [2008: 468] and *Encyclopedia of Identity* [2010: 402]) or of "meaning between subjects" (*Blackwell Dictionary of Sociology* [2000: 161]). It is my thesis that Melville attributes to universalism a transformative potentiality that may be democratizing for human relationships and that may undermine monolithic thinking in favor of more plural conceptions of being and of being with others, and of how signification is constructed. Among all of Melville's works, I have claimed that the 1876 *Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land* constitutes both a defense and an analysis of the political potentiality of universalism for the creation of more democratic human relationships in the midst of a context of deep human segregation. *Clarel*, I have argued, places in intersubjectivity the possibility of breaking through the multiple walls (national, cultural, social, 'racial', ethnic, religious, sexual, generational) separating

human beings –the "intervening hedge[s]" (Hawthorne and His Mosses" 1850: 48) that make individuals oblivious of their natural bonds– which are often enforced by egotistic behaviors as much as by communitarian forms of belonging. The particular fictionalization of the context of the Holy Land, which the poem depicts as a land of divisions and sectarianism, I have claimed, serves Melville's analysis of inter-human divisions in *Clarel*, while it informs his understanding of the need and, nevertheless, the difficulty of transcending such separation. *Clarel* shows how the political potentiality of universalism may create more democratic human relationships yet clashes with the walls of individualism and of traditional communities such as the nation-state, 'race', culture, and religious affiliation. These two forces –the potentiality as opposed to the difficulties preventing the materialization of this possibility– result from the potentialities and limitations of human beings who may either develop or neutralize the possibility of universalism completely. Universalism, therefore, is directly connected to, and dependent of, humans' imperfect humanity blending good and evil, two sides of human nature which, Rolfe informs us, "braided play / Into one chord" (*Clarel* 4.4.27-28). Thus, from my analysis of *Clarel* I conclude that, even if the poem defends intersubjective universalism as a process which may allow for the development of more democratic human relationships, it also expresses a sound lament at humans' failure to materialize such democratic potentiality. Thus *Clarel*, I have claimed, analyzes how human beings defeat the possibilities of developing intersubjective relationships with other human beings, revealing how these individuals choose, instead, to fortify their egocentric natures and reinforce their one-sided mindsets.

In a more detailed way, my defense of intersubjective universalism as a democratic political project, and my interpretation of *Clarel* as a poem that articulates,

investigates, and vindicates both the validity and necessity of such project, lead me to conclude that:

1) Universalism has historically –rightly– earned a very negative reputation as a project that dangerously neutralized the plurality of humanity while promoting the universalization of a particular identity that was white, Eurocentric, Western, Christian, 'Enlightened' (i.e., literate, rational), heteronormative, male. Thinkers such as Ernesto Laclau have noted how, during the Enlightenment, European culture would emerge as the particular body incarnating the 'universal', which was used to justify centuries of racism, and of European expansionism and colonization. In consequence, such "universal fascism" (Gilroy 2000: 225) has been severely criticized, on the one hand, from a postcolonial perspective, by indigenous and non-Western intellectuals (from Africa, Asia, South America, as well as from the point of view of Islam), and, on the other hand, by intellectuals within the West, who denounced the long history of marginalization of certain human groups (especially non-whites, women, GLTBQIA communities) by 'democratic' Western societies. As Linda M. G. Zerilli has noted, it is not surprising that this 'Universal' should be rejected "not only because, historically speaking, it has been a fraud, an inflated particular, but also because it is no longer desirable even as an ideal" (1998: 10). Likewise, globalization has at present become a 'bad' kind of universalism, which, rather than practically turning the world into a single space or eliminating inter-national borders for the free circulation of human beings, has continued serving the interests of certain nations, thus contributing to economic inequality and exploitation.

2) Despite the negative reputation that traditional universalism has logically achieved, I have assumed that universalism is not only defensible but *necessary* as a political project that may be democratizing to human relationships. In this respect, in my articulation of universalism, I have agreed with Etienne Balibar's remark that "no discussion about universality [...] can usefully proceed with a 'univocal' concept of 'the Universal'" (1995: 48). In this dissertation, I have understood universalism as the positive process of collaborative dialogue and dynamic negotiation of meaning, based on the difference and plurality of human beings, for which contemporary thinkers such as Zygmunt Bauman, Judith Butler, or Ernesto Laclau, among others, have advocated. This universalism, I have reasoned, is created (or tragically destroyed) through intersubjectivity. Following Hannah Arendt's conception of dialogue, Martin Buber's theorization on intersubjectivity, Jacques Derrida's arguments on interpersonal relationships, and Jean-Luc Nancy's conception of being as being-with, I have attributed to intersubjective universalism a democratizing potentiality for human relationships, both on a political and ethical level, as it involves individuals in processes by which they might potentially question and eventually transcend the rigid boundaries of individualism, communitarianism, and nationalism.

3) In my articulation of intersubjective universalism I have emphasized the neutralizing consequences of communitarianism upon individual subjectivity, and have underlined the segregating and thwarting character of community to human beings' realization of their universal connectedness, as well as to the development of democratic interpersonal relationships without community 'walls'. In this regard, I have engaged in a rethinking of the notion of 'community' enabled by the analyzes of Giorgio Agamben, Zygmunt Bauman, Judith Butler, Jacques Derrida, Roberto

Esposito, Alphonso Lingis, Kuang-Ming, and Jean-Luc Nancy, all of which have informed my defense of intersubjective universalism. For that defense, I have also moved away from other more or less global conceptions of 'world community' such as cosmopolitanism and internationalism, since, as I have analyzed in Chapter One, even though they claim for global allegiances, both of these worldviews ultimately reinforce nationalism and patriotic affiliation, and, therefore, become complicit in the segregation of humanity, communitarian views of the world, and exclusionist tendencies that are imposed through the nation-state model (by which are created national communities that privilege an identity over others, and the existence of which may generate stateless human beings who cannot lay claims to any national identity and to the privileges a national identity might entail them to). Thus, I have concluded that the global allegiances professed by both cosmopolitan and internationalist theorists such as Kwame Anthony Appiah, Pheng Cheah, or Bruce Robbins are both obscured and limited by their clinging to patriotic feelings and adherences, which reinforce communitarian intra-national (e.g., multiculturalism) and inter-national (e.g., UN) sociopolitical agendas designed to accommodate difference within a framework of tolerance but, still, promoting separation amongst human groups and, frequently, the defense of the interests of certain human groups over the welfare of others. To my analysis of cosmopolitanism and internationalism, I have incorporated Martha Nussbaum's critique of how nationalism makes human beings oblivious of their connection with, and responsibility for, other human beings beyond their particular national borders and patriotic sensibilities, as well as Paul Gilroy's rejection of the constructed and divisive category of 'race' in his embracing a planetary kind of humanism. Even though Nussbaum and Gilroy's theorizings are important grounds to my articulation of universalism, the intersubjective universalism I defend, as I have

remarked, stems most directly from the theorizations of (inter)subjectivity, community, interpersonal relationships, politics, global ethics, and universalism developed by the following thinkers, from the perspectives of poststructuralist theory, philosophy, sociology, politics, and ethics: Giorgio Agamben, Hannah Arendt, Etienne Balibar, Zygmunt Bauman, Martin Buber, Judith Butler, Jacques Derrida, Roberto Esposito, Ernesto Laclau, Emmanuel Levinas, Jean-Luc Nancy, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Linda Zerilli, among others.

4) From my study of the problematization and rethinking of community carried out by these thinkers and from my analysis of global adherences such as cosmopolitanism and internationalism (which continue to be deeply rooted upon communitarian loyalties), I have concluded that Melville's *Clarel* moves beyond those global projects, such as cosmopolitanism, which, since the eighteenth century, have reinforced nationalism and therefore prioritized certain human groups before humanity in its plurality. In this respect, I have claimed that Melville defended *universalism* in *Clarel*, and that the author correlated the possibility of universalism to the possibility of intersubjectivity, conceiving intersubjectivity as a process through which human beings might develop unity from and in their very difference.

5) I have connected my interpretation of *Clarel* as a universalist poem to Melville's oeuvre as a whole, and have analyzed other Melvillean works (*Mardi* [1849], *Redburn* [1849], *White-Jacket* [1850], "Hawthorne and His Mosses" [1850], *Moby-Dick* [1851], *Pierre* [1852], "Bartleby, the Scrivener" [1853], "The Chola Widow" [1854], The 'Gees [1856], *The Confidence-Man* [1857]) to validate my thesis that Melville's literary project is a universalist one. Most especially, I have defended the importance of

analyzing the 1876 *Clarel* together with Melville's volume on the U.S. Civil War *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War* (1866), in order to better understand Melville's disillusionment with postbellum United States in *Clarel* as well as the poet's critique of nationalism, already in *Battle-Pieces*, a critique which, I have claimed, *Clarel* continues. In my analysis of *Battle-Pieces* I have been attentive to the discussion initiated by scholars such as Carolyn Karcher, Carme Manuel, Deak Nabers, or Michael Paul Rogin. However, contrary to these scholars' conceptions of Melville's voice in *Battle-Pieces* as strangely, and surprisingly, conservative within the context of Melville's works, I have defended that Melville's political project in *Battle-Pieces* is a continuation, and not a breach within, his literary production, which in this dissertation I have interpreted as universalist. It is undeniable that both the poetic voice and the politics of *Battle-Pieces* are inscribed within, and actually constrained by, U.S. nationalism, as well as by the very Unionist patriotism of the readership the volume aimed to address. Yet, Melville, I argue, refuses to be complicit in any form of patriotic fervor (any patriotism being inevitably divisive), and subtly criticizes, for "eagle-eyed readers" ("Hawthorne and His Mosses" 1850: 60), how nationalism and patriotism make human beings blind to their common humanity, and turn them into "operatives" (the term the author significantly uses in the poem "A Utilitarian View of the Monitor's Fight" [*Battle-Pieces* 1866: 62])[574] of the forces of the nation who not only kill their equals but also sacrifice their own lives for the patriotic discourses they have, so effectively, interiorized. As I have claimed, it is no coincidence that Melville should invoke "Humanity" (*Battle-Pieces* 272) as the closing word to his Civil War volume –which seems to echo the "Ah Bartleby!

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[574] The use of the particular word 'operative' in this poem may be said to evoke the author's description of the pale young girls working at the paper factory in "The Tartarus of Maids" (1855), who have sacrificed their humanity to become pieces to the "Machinery—that vaunted slave of humanity […]" to the extent that "The girls did not so much seem accessory wheels to the general machinery as mere cogs to the wheels" (160).

Ah humanity!" that closed his 1853 "Bartleby, the Scrivener" (98)– avowing for the need for a humanity that the war sacrificed to the upholding of nationalism, and emphasizing a global dimension that breaks through the national boundaries by which the volume is hindered. In *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War*, I have argued, Melville vindicates inter-human responsibility, locating such responsibility in the expression of humanity *toward all* ("In all things and toward all, we are enjoined to do as we would be done by" [*Battle-Pieces* 268]), at the same time as he struggles against, and rejects, the confining and divisive nature of patriotism. *Battle-Pieces*, thus, does not turn away from but continues expressing the universalist consciousness that Melville had articulated in earlier works and would again defend in *Clarel*, which he probably started writing shortly after the publication of *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War* in August 1866. Analyzing *Battle-Pieces* and *Clarel* in relation to one another, I have defended, not only enables a better understanding of Melville's critique of nationalism and patriotism in his 1866 Civil War volume, but also of the universalist project the 1876 *Clarel* articulates and of the loss of hope in postbellum American democracy the poem expresses.

6) I have argued that Melville's critique of U.S. progress and democracy in the postbellum period, in particular, is connected to a more global denunciation of progress and democracy. *Clarel* portrays a world of universal waste and disillusionment, as no society or world region analyzed in the poem (most importantly, France, Britain, the United States, and Palestine) provides a higher degree of hope or relief than the others. While the poem criticizes, in particular, U.S. progress and the perversion of American democratic ideals by materialism and capitalism (*Clarel*, as I have analyzed following the work of scholars such as Cody Marrs, bears echoes of the 1876 Centennial), it also

connects the postbellum U.S. context to a global context of despair and of fallen ideals of democracy and progress.

7) In this regard, I have maintained that *Clarel* blends together the local and the global in the very adoption of the Holy Land as a literary context for its exploration: while, on the one hand, Melville's choice of the Holy Land –a land of divisions, segregation and sectarianism–, I have contended, is resonant of the inter-human divisions in 1870s U.S., on the other hand, it is also a microcosm of the global which gathers together a representative variety of characters of multiple nationalities, ethnicities, cultural backgrounds, and religious beliefs. Thus, I have agreed with Amy Kaplan's claim that Melville underlined in *Clarel* the global and plural character of Palestine (2010: 51), creating a fictional context through which the boundaries between the local and the global are blurred, and where multiple human beings come together in what constitutes a representative sample of humanity. This global Holy Land, however, is portrayed as a context of segregation and sectarianism amongst different human groups or communities that remain blind and deaf to one another and even compete for the domination of the land. Through this global context, I have argued, Melville critically features the sectionalization of human beings within different communities which erect walls against others thus separating human beings who are universally connected, making them interiorize such walls as 'natural', and therefore obscuring their universal human connectedness. More specifically, I have claimed that the Holy Land and the United States are particularly interconnected in the poem, that the 'promise' of Palestine echoes the 'promise' of America, and that the context of the Holy Land evokes the irreconcilable inter-human divisions of postbellum United States.

8) Following Hilton Obenzinger's work on U.S. Holy Land literature (1999), I have argued that *Clarel* exploits the foundational myth of the United States as a 'new promised land', which establishes an analogy between America and biblical Israel as covenantal lands. Through this connection, the poem critically exposes how the notion of exceptionalism (incompatible with universalism) has been inherent to the construction of U.S. sense of nationhood, and how exceptionalism has for centuries been (ab)used by the U.S. and by Zionists as a means to legitimize claims for their entitlement to the land (which they present as directly inherited from God) that have justified colonialist expansion and the genocides of indigenous population groups. The connection between the Holy Land and the United States upholds notions of exceptionalism and divine election, and, as Basem Ra'ad has noted, is reinforced by Melville's decision to refer to Jerusalem as 'Salem', the name of the New England colonial town, in several moments of the pilgrimage (2011: 15). Most significantly, following Hilton Obenzinger (1999), I have argued that Melville's critique of exceptionalism is largely developed through the character of Nathan, a descendant of Puritan settlers in North America who later in life converts to Judaism, and becomes a zealous Zionist. Not only does the poem connect Nathan's Zionist armed fight to colonize Ottoman Palestine with the colonization of North America by Angloprotestant settlers (Nathan's Puritan ancestors), but *Clarel* also establishes an analogy between the Native American tribe of the Pequots (against whom Nathan's forefathers fought) and the Palestinian Arabs (against whom Nathan himself fights in Jerusalem). While Nathan is the main figure serving Melville's problematization of exceptionalism in *Clarel*, the poem also questions the biblical exceptionalism of the Holy Land through recurrent images of geographic and spiritual barrenness, as well as by representing Jerusalem as a "wreck" and as a "deicide town" (*Clarel* 4.2.187;

4.29.127). By reflecting on the "wreck" of Jerusalem, I have argued, *Clarel* reflects on the wreck of the 'city upon a hill', thus questioning the U.S. narrative of national progress based on the notion of exceptionalism which attempts to consolidate a particular national identity against the plurality of humanity. The inter-communitarian tensions and violence that find expression in the poem's Holy Land, I have argued, allow Melville to evaluate the tensions that derive when peoples who are different come together, and the eventual incapacity of these peoples to live with one another despite the potentially democratizing possibilities to which their collaborative negotiation and creation of meaning might lead.

9) I have argued that, in *Clarel*, Melville points to the democratizing potentiality of universalism for human relationships and thinking, locating the possibility of universalism in intersubjectivity, at the same time that he laments how human beings (with the few exceptions of dialogic natures such as Rolfe in the poem) generally abort the opportunities of developing interpersonal bonds with other human beings beyond the walls that segregate them into separate communities or human groups that make them oblivious of their universal connection. This neutralization of intersubjectivity, and consequently of universalism, I have contended, prevents the development of more democratic interpersonal relationships and perpetuates one-sided worldviews dangerously threatening the diversity of humanity. Like the "deicide town" of Jerusalem (*Clarel* 4.29.127), where, according to the Bible, humans killed Jesus-God and, as a consequence, their own possibility of salvation, *Clarel* portrays how characters destroy the possibilities of developing bonds with other human beings, clinging instead to monolithic worldviews, egocentric behaviors, self-centered instincts, and selfish attitudes. Despite this incapacity, however, so often lamented in Melville's works, I

have argued that in *Clarel* Melville points to the possibilities beyond these interpersonal walls, and have noted how the author emphasizes the centrality of dialogue to the development of intersubjectivity and plural thinking that may challenge one-sided conceptions of 'Meaning', at the same time that he incorporates the reader in the intersubjective dialogue created by the text. Showing how the majority of characters in *Clarel* reject the possibilities of intersubjectivity and choose instead to become walled subjectivities, *Clarel* also features Rolfe as a positive example of a relational character that is capable of embracing a critical plural thinking as a mode of life that prevents him from falling into the manias, blindnesses, one-sidednesses, and egocentric behaviors that trap most of his fellow travelers. Rolfe's capacity for plural thinking constantly transcends inter-personal and inter-community walls, as the character constantly connects, compares, questions, negotiates, and evaluates different worldviews. Rolfe, I have argued, is a model for the young Clarel, whose destiny is to move away from rigid notions of Meaning and to learn how to live searchingly, looking into the heart of human nature without falling into either blinding optimism or (self-)destructive manias, madnesses, and pessimism, like most of the characters he has met in his journey. It is, paradoxically, in this permanent homelessness that Clarel may find his home.

The main objective of my project in this dissertation has been to break through the 'wall' of inattention and oblivion in order to release the potentiality of *Clarel*, for too long one of the most unread and unanalyzed of Melville's works even among Melville scholars. This dissertation aims to be a contribution to Melville Studies. In particular, it wishes to contribute to existing studies on the 'global' Melville (Grejda [1974], Hamilton [1983], Bryant [1984 and 1987], Sten [2001], Marr [2005], Waugh [2005], Gibian [2006], Lyons [2006], Kaplan [2010], and Obenzinger [2010]), and on Herman

Melville's 17,863 verse-long *Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land* (1876) (Bezanson [1943 and 1960], Knapp [1971], Kenny [1973], Short [1979], Hayford, MacDougall, Parker, and Tanselle [1991], Goldman [1993], Obenzinger [1999], Potter [2004]), which have enabled my own work. The dissertation also aims to join previous studies that have investigated the democratizing potentiality of human relationships that are not limited by individualist, communitarian, institutional structures which cut off the natural bonds between human beings. Most especially, it engages with, continues, and honors two lines of research opened by my advisor, Rodrigo Andrés, at the Universitat de Barcelona: on the one hand, on the subversive potentiality of love between men in Melville's *Billy Budd, Sailor*, and, on the other hand, on socialist universalism both in the writings of contemporary Jewish American authors Tillie Olsen and Grace Paley and in Herman Melville's representation of heterotopias. This dissertation respectfully pays homage to these studies, without which it could not have been articulated, and aims to contribute to them this interpretation of Melville's *Clarel* as a universalist poem that roots the possibilities of the development of universalism in the democratizing potentiality of intersubjectivity to human relationships. My dissertation hopes to stimulate future debate and research on Melville's oeuvre as a universalist political project, particularly on the subject of intersubjectivity and the potentiality of interpersonal relationships. I would like to support with my work the importance of reading Herman Melville as a poet in order to enrich the predominant vision of the author not only as a novelist and short fiction writer but also as a "manysided" human being and writer who experimented with, and broke through the boundaries of, different literary genres and forms. Most especially, I hope that this dissertation inspires the possibility of incorporating *Clarel* as part of a canon of U.S.

literature that imagines, analyzes, and rethinks universalism as a democratic –and necessary– political agenda.

"[…] for it is hard to be finite upon an infinite subject, and all subjects are infinite."

(Herman Melville, "Hawthorne and His Mosses" 1850: 62)

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