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### THE NARRATIVE VOICE IN MELVILLE'S

*Redburn, Moby Dick, and Billy Budd*

Over the period of the past hundred years and especially after Henry James (1843-1916), there has been a tremendous awareness and interest concerning the writing techniques in fiction. The focal point seems to have been the role of the narrator in the telling of the story. In traditional story-telling the author, apart from describing persons and reporting action to his readers, often goes beneath the surface of the described action and gives a view of a character's mind and heart. This is obviously an artificial device, for in life we never know anyone but ourselves by thoroughly reliable internal signs while our knowledge of other people's internal thoughts and feelings is limited, often based on inferences, and, therefore, unreliable. In literature, however, we have been given information about the characters' motives and secret thoughts by an omniscient author, information which we must accept if we are to grasp the meaning of the story. We also seem to accept the author's judgement without question and allow our beliefs, interests and sympathies to be controlled by the author's authority.

This form of "artificial authority", this omniscient author's point of view, has been present in most narrative until recent times but is has come to be considered "inartistic". Modern writers seem to have developed Aristotle's hint in the *Poetics* when he praised Homer for speaking in his own voice less than other poets, although even Homer scarcely writes a page without some kind of direct clarification of motives, of expectations, or of the relative importance of the facts, thus directly guiding us to what we should hope for and what we should fear.

Thus, in modern times, there has been a shift from the "artificial authority" of the omniscient author/narrator —who summarizes, explains and judges his characters and situations for us with the obvious result of rigorously controlling our beliefs, interests and sympathies— through a more "impersonal" and "objective" narrator (the dramatized narrator) towards the complete effacement of the narrator, which is considered to be more "artistic". As Percy Lubbock claimed in the twenties "the art of fiction does not begin until the novelist thinks of his story as a matter to be shown, to be so exhibited that it will show itself"<sup>1</sup>, a statement which implies complete effacement of the author/narrator's voice.

Jean Paul Sartre in his *Situation of the Writer in 1947* objects in the name of "durational realism" to all evidences of the author's meddling. The reader, he holds, must be hurled "into the midst of a universe where there are no

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1. Percy Lubbock, *The Craft of Fiction*, (London: The Traveller's Library, 1926), p. 62.

witnesses"<sup>2</sup>. This statement clearly implies that the author/narrator must not summarize, nor explain, nor curtail conversation and never telescope the events of three days into a paragraph because, Sartre goes on, "If I pack six months into a simple page, the reader jumps out of the book"<sup>3</sup>, a claim which implies that Sartre leaves all judgement to the reader.

Since Flaubert, it is true, many authors and critics have been convinced that "objective" or "impersonal" or "dramatic" modes of narration—that is to say a narration presented without comment, thus leaving the reader without guidance or explicit evaluation—are superior to any mode that allows for direct appearances by the author or his reliable spokesman. The technique of "showing" a story, as Booth put it, has come to be considered as more artistic compared to the inartistic "telling" of a story.

The fight over the effacement of the author/narrator's manipulating presence has not come to an end. Wayne C. Booth in his *The Rhetoric of Fiction* discusses some of the more important arguments for the "authorial objectivity" or "impersonality" which call for eliminating certain overt signs of "the author's many voices" and concludes that in writing fiction we cannot do away with the distinctive literary allusion which makes recognizable the personal touch of the author's voice. "In short", he says, "the author's judgement is always present, always evident to anyone who knows how to look for it"<sup>4</sup> despite the narrative devices by which the author tries to hide himself. Moreover, Booth recognizes the necessity of authorial judgement especially in cases of increasing complexity of the virtue or vices within the same character, and he points to works of literature which are not of less artistic value in spite of the author's obtrusive presence, such as Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* or Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*. He very reasonably holds that "neutrality is impossible and that the success of a work does not depend upon whether it makes use or not of the selective presence of a narrator but upon the "appropriateness" and the "usefulness" of a "central intelligence" within the particular context.

Along these lines, Henry James, who particularly valued the "telling" method as creating a more intense illusion of reality, points out that "the house of fiction" has "not one window, but a million"; that there are, in fact, "five million ways" to tell a story, each of them justified if it provides a "center" for the work. A novel or story, thus, is good, if it succeeds "wonderfully in what it attempts", as he tells us in his *Letters*. Aristotle, too, had already remarked in the *Poetics* that "if such-and-such an effect is desired, then, such-and-such a point of view will be good or bad".

2. Jean-Paul Sartre, «What is Literature» in *Situation of the Writer in 1947*, trans. by Bernard Frechtman, (London, 1950), p. 235.

3. Ibid., p. 169.

4. Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1961), p. 20.

In the light of such ideas, I intend to discuss the effect of Melville's use of the narrator's voice in *Redburn* (1849), *Moby Dick* (1851) and *Billy Budd* (written in 1891, publ. in 1924).

In *Redburn*<sup>5</sup>, the narrator is dramatized which is a movement away from the omniscient narrator's voice. Melville takes up the mask of Wellingborough Redburn, who, thus, becomes the author's "second self", and tells us the story of his first voyage to Liverpool in a first-person narrative. It is through young Redburn's point of view, then, that we look at the story. It is through his eyes that we observe the outer appearance of the other characters and their actions; through his ears that we listen to the conversation of the people involved in the story, and through his inexperienced mind that we judge them. Our point of view, therefore, is limited to one prolonged "inside view" of a young inexperienced boy on his first sea journey into the world. Redburn does not have the privilege of the omniscient author. He has doubts about the motives of the other characters and is never able to account either for his adventure in London with Harry, or Harry's mysterious character. His view is limited as anybody's would be in real life. The effect, therefore, is that we see the characters of the story as if from the outside; we watch their manner and actions but we know very little of what actually goes on in their minds except for what Redburn tells us about them. However limited his view as a narrator, Redburn gains in credibility as a character participating in the same action as that of the characters he describes.

As a narrator Redburn is not only a reflective story-teller. His narration inclines both towards dramatic enactment with vivid dialogue or scenic representation on the one hand, and towards "picture" or reflective narration on the other. Thus, when Redburn describes scenes in which he himself is a participant, he achieves a sort of detachment from himself and seems to be looking at himself objectively. The result is vivid, humorous scenes in which the reader also feels he is participating. There is a tremendous sense of immediacy created and the description is admirable as, for instance, in the scene on the boat from his home-town to New York or in the scene when, while roaming in the countryside outside Liverpool, he gets attracted by the beautiful daughters of a farmer and lingers around until he gets an invitation to tea. In such scenes there is affected a sort of alienation between Redburn, the sailor, and Redburn, the narrator. When the narrator-Redburn thus detaches himself from the sailor-Redburn, he eliminates the distance between himself and the reader who gets the feeling that side by side with Redburn, the narrator, watches Redburn, the sailor. The same effect we have when Redburn, the narrator, addresses his

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5. Herman Melville, *Redburn: His First Voyage*, (Boston: The St. Botolph Society, 1924). All subsequent quotations will be to this edition.

sailor-self in the second person: "Alas! poor Wellingborough, thought I, you will never see your home anymore" (p. 50).

Thus, there is a distinction between the narrator's "past self" and "present self" which is engaged in the act of remembering his "first voyage", which is insisted upon by Redburn, the narrator, when he writes that "many years have elapsed, ere I have thought of bringing in my report". His ironic vision, then, is to be distinguished from that of his younger self which was "blind to the real sights of this world; deaf to its voice; and dead to its death".

Most of Redburn's story is rendered in what we recognize as reflective narration or "telling" of the events, which is to say that events and dialogue are reported, and which is done in a vivid, fast pace which carries the story on unless the maturer Redburn indulges in brooding over general matters, a fact which slows down the narrative pace and increases the distance between reader and action as when Redburn, the narrator, muses on the intricate and confusing names of the ropes on the ship; or when he broods over the dignity of horses; or on music provoked as he is by Carlo's singing; or on the dehumanizing transportation conditions of the immigrants. It is in these instances that the reader feels more intensely the instrusion of the narrator-Redburn whom he finally tends to identify with the author himself because such parts full of pedantic allusions and references to ancient authors, philosophers, historical personages, Italian painters and far-away geographical places cannot belong to the experience or the way of thinking of a young, almost ignorant boy on his first journey into the wide world. Such knowing generalizations about life and sharp insights into the human condition mirror a more sophisticated, maturer presence. It is as if "there are two brains behind the seeing eye", as Percy Lubbock in *The Craft of Fiction* put it, "and one of them is the author's who adopts and shares the position of his creature and at the same time supplements his wit. If you analyse the picture that is now presented, you find that it is not at all the work of a personage whose vision the author has adopted. It is as if someone is looking over his shoulder seeing things from the same angle but seeing more, bringing another mind to bear upon the scene. It is an easy and natural extention of the personage's power of observation"<sup>5</sup>.

Thus, in *Redburn*, we observe a double image of the narrator: that of the younger Redburn as a fully dramatized narrator who is made into a character as vivid as those whom he tells us about, and that of the maturer Redburn as an implied, undramatized narrator who is not distinct from the author. But, in spite of what Lubbock says about "an easy and natural extention" of the narrator's vision, the effect seems to me that of a kind of contradictory seeing eye. The continuity of the point of view is split and the result is a double perspective which creates two contradictory narrative styles: the vivid, crisp style dispersed with humorous comments, a style in which the scenic and therefore more interesting part of the narrative is rendered, and the languid,

highflown and, at times, sentimental and almost boring style in which the reflective passages are rendered. The fact that most of the pedantic and mature commentary occurs in the second part of the book lends itself as a clue to a possible development of Redburn's personality, an explanation which one might not be willing to accept as there is nothing in the text that alludes to any extensive reading on Redburn's part either before or during the trip to justify all those pedantic references, or any maturing of his mind except for the maturity his disillusion about travelling has offered him.

At this point, Edgar A. Dryden's view on Melville's fiction may help rationalize this seeming contradiction away. In his excellent book on Melville's "art of telling the truth"<sup>6</sup>, he discusses the ways by which Melville deals with the problem of the discrepancy between the man and the artist, between private and literary consciousness. He points out the striking autobiographical element in Melville's fiction; tells us how his "fictive first person narrators" stand "as a portrait of the artist par excellence"<sup>7</sup>, and how, by trying to find out the truth about their experience of the past, his heroes—in the process of remembering— invent the meaning of their earlier experiences in the light of the experience they have acquired in the meantime. Consequently, all this erudition which is hard for the reader to attribute to the young Redburn is explained away if attributed to Redburn's maturer self who inserts this knowledge and wisdom in his story as he tells it. However, Dryden, too, remarks that there is a great distance between the "time-of-action voice" and the "time-of-writting voice" which "never merge as they do in *Great Expectations* and most other picaresque first person narratives"<sup>8</sup>.

Though *Moby Dick* is a far more complex work than *Redburn*, the structure as to the narrative voice is to a large extend similar. As in *Redburn*, the narrator in *Moby Dick* is also dramatized. As in the earlier book, so in *Moby Dick*, Melville takes up the mask of Ishmael to tell us in a first-person narrative about his personal experience of whaling. But unlike the young Redburn who starts off telling us his story in a vivid, dramatic way but whose voice finally fades behind that of an elderly and wiser one which we identify with that of the author himself, Ishmael, the narrator in *Moby Dick*, makes it clear from the very beginning that he is going to tell us the story of Ishmael of "some years ago". Thus, it is from the very beginning that we are aware of two Ishmaels existent in the novel: the young Ishmael who sets off on a whaling trip as a way of "driving off the spleen and regulating the

6. Percy Lubbock, «The Point of View», Chapter 17 from *The Craft of Fiction*, as adapted and included in *Approaches to the Novel*, ed. by Robert Scholes, (San Francisco: Chandler Pub., Co., 1961), p. 107.

7. Edgar A. Dryden, *Melville's Treatment of Form, The Great Art of Telling the Truth*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1968), p. 33.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 59.

circulation", and the narrator Ishmael who tells us the story and through whose experienced eyes we see and judge past events. There is not, naturally, any question of dual personality involved here. The "I" which is remembering is ineluctably linked to the "I" which is the object of the narration. The older narrator is simply the younger man grown older; He is the man who has already experienced all that which we shall watch the forecastle Ishmael go through as the story is told. But, unlike in *Redburn* where there is some confusion as to whether the maturer voice which prevails over the second part belongs to the inexperienced young sailor, in *Moby Dick* there is only one voice with which the story begins and film-like, while the voice goes on, the events on the forecastle of "Pequod" unravel themselves before the reader's eyes and under the narrator's interpreting voice. And there is no incongruity between the two Ishmaels. The forecastle Ishmael starts off unmistakably as a pondering young man of strong imagination and complex temperament very likely to develop into the wise narrator of his own story.

Thus, the narrator Ishmael becomes the informing voice of the novel and while the forecastle Ishmael is busy hunting whales, the narrator's shifting memory and imagination are in search of the meaning of the dark adventure he has experienced, trying to explain "in some dim, random way" what happened in the past, for "explain myself I must". As a character the younger Ishmael drops in and out of the narrative with such abandon that at times we wonder if he still exists or has gone overboard. On the contrary, the narrator-Ishmael becomes the defining force of the novel, "the dynamic operating on both matter and narrative which distinguished *Moby Dick* from logs, journals and histories", as Walter E. Bezanson put it in his article "*Moby Dick: Work of Art*".<sup>9</sup>

It is, then, the narrator's enfolding imagination which sets and defines the symbolic mode that pervades the entire book. He is predisposed to see events, however incidental, as "the sign and symbol" of something larger, because for Ishmael "some certain significance lurks in all things, else all things are little worth and the round world itself but an empty cipher..." Thus, he tries over and over again to communicate to us the timeless and spaceless concept of "the whiteness of the Whale", suggestive of divinity or "retribution, swift vengeance, eternal malice" as well as "of evil or in anyway of the supernaturalism of his hue".<sup>10</sup>

It is also the narrator who is brought forward as the essential and primary sensibility in terms of which all characters and events of the story are conceived and evaluated as, for instance, the humanity of the savage

9. As it appears in the Norton Critical Edition of Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, (New York, 1967), pp. 651-671.

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 166-169.

Queequeg, the devilishness of Ahab who in the night of "The Candles" is presented as a devil figure brandishing his flaming harpoon against his crew. It is through the narrator's sensibility that Ahab is associated with fire from when he first appears on deck: "He looked like a man cut away from the stake when the fire has overunningly wasted all limbs without consuming them"<sup>11</sup>. It is through the narrator's eyes that Ahab is presented like a being "tortured by his blazing mind" who finally "burst his hot heart's shell upon it [the Whale]". When, in the morning following the night of "The Candles", Ahab gives the lightning-twisted binnacle a new needle and seems more than ever determined to carry out his malignant purpose, the narrator remarks: "In his fiery eyes of scorn and triumph, you then saw Ahab in all his fatal pride", suggestive of Lucifer and his fall because of pride.

It is the narrator again who sets the tone for humour. Through his own quickness to see incongruities, he creates instances for laughter as when he remarks of the whales that they spout steam because they think so much; that they have no nose, but do not really need one; that they are very healthy because they get a lot of exercise and are always out of doors though rarely in the fresh air; or that they like to breakfast on "sailor tarts", that is whaleboats full of mariners. But his most characteristic laugh is when he begins his story with a mock confession of suicidal impulses; sends young Ishmael running to his bunk after his first encounter with the whale to make out his will; reports that some sailors are so neat that they would not think of drowning "without first washing their faces"; delights in Queequeg's solemn decision, when mortally ill, not to die because he suddenly "remembered a little duty ashore, which he was leaving undone" and quickly recovers.

Unlike the limited I-narrator's view in *Redburn*, in *Moby Dick* the I-narrator is omniscient and coincides with the traditional editorial authority. Ishmael, the narrator, apart from the description of events and people's appearance, and apart from the revelation of his own motives, can see through the minds of the characters of the story he narrates, as when in Chapter 26 he gives a deep psychological analysis of the first mate, Starbuck, explaining to us why this brave and principled man could not withstand the spiritual terrors which the enraged and mighty Ahab conveyed; or when he gives us an analysis of Ahab's character in Chapter 41, in which the wild vindictiveness Ahab cherished against the white whale is explained as well as Ahab's being conscious of his madness about the whale and of his consciously dissembling to mankind; or again in Chapter 48, in which Ahab's calculating thoughts of how to win over and keep the sympathy of his crew to his purpose are revealed to us by the narrator.

Another function the I-narrator in *Moby Dick* usurps from the conventions of the editorializing third-person omniscient narrator is his privilege of

11. *Ibid.*, p. 109.

unmediated commentary, that is to say his direct addresses to the reader in order to either convey his opinion on characters and events or on matters not immediately connected with the main line of the plot. Thus, Ishmael often breaks the continuity of the story in order to convey his knowledge on the Right or Sperm Whales in independent chapters, the so-called Cetology Chapters. This kind of directly addressing the reader cuts the latter off from the immediate action of the story and the distance between reader and characters is, therefore, increased in such a way that the actual story seems remote.

Thus, Melville utilizes the possibilities of the traditional third-person omniscient narrator's voice which presents, summarizes, reports and evaluates for the reader by fusing it with his I-narrator's voice. This endows the I-narrator with an authorial omniscience which he exploits to his purposes. On the other hand, Melville also shows a tendency to eliminate the intrusive narrative presence as it becomes evident from his employment of "inside views" into the minds of certain characters such as Ahab's, for instance, in Chapter 37 in which Ahab sits in his cabin alone, gazing out through the stern window and pondering on himself and his purpose; or Starbuck's in Chapter 38, in which he is pondering on Ahab's "impious end", "his heaven-insulting purpose" and the magnetic influence Ahab's arrogant behaviour has had over his own attitude, which he describes as having "blasted all his reason out of him". In both cases the "I" voice is not that of the I-narrator's but Ahab's and Starbuck's respectively. It is not the I-narrator who is the narrative consciousness of the story but the characters themselves who become the "central intelligences" of the narrative.

In such cases as well as in some long soliloquies and asides, which the characters are allowed to have, we detect Melville's unconscious, I believe, effort to eliminate the mediating presence of the narrator and, therefore, the distance between reader and characters. And he seems to go even further to the extreme end of the spectrum when in some chapters he employs a completely non-novelistic form. These are chapters which have a dramatic structure —dramatic here used in a technical, and not in a qualitative sense— similar to those of the playwright's script, such as italicized directions, set speeches with the name of the speaker preceding in capital letters, or straight soliloquies and asides without commentary. More than a tenth of the chapters are dramatic in this sense, some ten having strictly dramatic form without any narrative instruction, and another half a dozen or so using some script devices along with the narrative. Thus, Chapter 36, entitled "The Quarter-Deck", begins with the italicized stage direction: "Enter Ahab: Then all", and the chapter is completed with an interchange of dialogue and very short summary/commentary. Similarly, Chapter 37, the "Sunset", which is an inside view into Ahab's mind, begins with the stage direction: "The cabin; by the stern windows; Ahab sitting alone, and gazing

out", and in about the middle of the chapter at the end of the third paragraph comes another stage direction: "waving his hand, he moves from the window". Had Melville sensed the weakness of authorial intrusion and the effectiveness of "showing" his story as compared to the traditional "telling" of the story long before these terms came to stand for "artistic" and "inartistic" writing, one is to wonder. The characters' asides, for instance, in Chapters 36 and 39 are also an effort to eliminate authorial intrusion. Instead of the narrator's intervening and telling us what a character's unspoken thoughts are, Melville gives us an italicized and parenthesized "aside", in which there is continued the character's speech which the character thinks to himself but which we are allowed to overhear. Chapter 40, the "Midnight Forecastle" Chapter, is entirely in the form of a one-act play enacted, which superbly objectifies the crew in drunken exaltation over the quest. The early Chapter "The Quarter Deck" as well as "The Candles" later in the novel have also a powerful dramatic structure and, although, there are some descriptive passages in between the dialogues, the general impression is that of a play enacted on stage.

Thus, we observe that both *Redburn* and *Moby Dick* are meant as autobiographical relations of some past experience of the dramatized narrator. Both are first-person narratives. But while in *Redburn* the point of view is split between the "time-of-action" and the "time-of-writing" voice, in *Moby Dick* the point of view is consistently that of the maturer Ishmael's, whose voice sustains the whole narrative, and becomes the "central intelligence" of the story, an intelligence which reports events, comments on characters and incidents, tells us about his motives and other characters's motives, shapes, in short, our opinion about the relative importance of events and the moral value of characters. Thus, although in *Redburn* there is a double perspective created because the sensibility of the younger and maturer Redburn never merge in the narrative voice, in *Moby Dick* the informing sensibility is that of the maturer Ishmael, who, in the process of relating his experience, interprets it and invents its meaning. In both novels, however, there is a tendency observed on the part of the I-narrator to transcend his limited I-point-of-view and expand his prerogatives into those of the conventional, editorializing, omniscient author. Thus, besides often addressing themselves in the second or third person, the I-narrators in both novels directly address the reader or other people such as the shipowners of Nantucket in *Moby Dick* with general information and advice in an effort to directly communicate their thoughts to the reader usually in long, essay-type passages. The effect in both novels is that in these cases the reader feels cut off from the immediate action while engaged in a person-to-person conversation with the narrator. Thus, in both novels the distance between reader and action is in inverse ratio to the distance between reader and narrator.

*Billy Budd*<sup>12</sup> on which Melville was still working in the year of his death (1891) is the story of a "handsome sailor" who is impressed on the "Bellipotent", a British warship, around the critical year 1797. There, he is falsely accused by the master-at-arms of plotting mutiny. The captain, a reasonable man, doubting Claggart's story brings Billy in to confront his lying accuser. Overcome by a stutterer's indignation, Billy strikes Claggart dead. Though he recognizes Billy's innocence, Captain Vere has to hang him in the name of strict naval law for killing an officer.

The story, unlike the earlier works discussed, is rendered by an undramatized narrator in a third-person narrative, more in the form of summary or "picture" than in "scenes" or dramatic representation. The story is also full of essays on ethics, digression or "by-paths" as well as chronicles of the navy besides the character sketches and the reported action which are necessary constituents of a story. Thus, *Billy Budd* gives the impression of being "less a story than a commentary on one", as William York Tindal observes in his essay on "The Form of *Billy Budd*"<sup>13</sup>. The center of this form of editorial presentation seems to be rather the teller of the story who tries in retelling the story which he heard or witnessed (we are never told which) to come to some conclusion as to the true value of the events. That truth is what he is after, the narrator tells us in chapter 28, where he tries to apologize for the formlessness of his narration by saying that "The symmetry of form attainable in pure fiction cannot so readily be achieved in a narration essentially less to do with fable than with fact. Truth uncompromisingly told will always have its ragged edges"<sup>14</sup>. And it is true that the story gives the illusion of a report, discursive and factual with all sorts of commentary, biblical allusions and images by which the narrator tries to illuminate and put into perspective the various characters in relation to the events of the story.

In *Billy Budd*, this abundance of commentary and evaluation by the undramatized narrator is more than in *Moby Dick* absolutely necessary for a correct comprehension of the nature of the theme and the message Melville wants to convey to his readers. Since the reader hears the characters express their opinions and thoughts very rarely, he has to rely heavily on what the narrator says about them. Thus the reader has the impression that he is watching a rather inarticulate puppet show and he is able to follow the story by reliance on the commentator's information. Yet the symbolic meaning of the characters and the theme come through quite clearly.

12. Herman Melville, *Billy Budd*, edited from the manuscript with an introduction and notes by Harrison Hayford and Merton M. Sealts, Jr., (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1962). All references to the text are made to this edition.

13. William T. Stafford, ed., *Melville's Billy Budd and the Critics*, (San Francisco: Wadsworth Pub. Co., 1961), pp. 125-131.

14. *Billy Budd*, op. cit., p. 128.

Rather than seeing them act, as observed above, we hear about the characters. Thus, through the narrator-commentator's allusions, we come to know Billy as standing for innocence and substantial goodness; as being like "Adam before the fall"; as "peacemaker", "a jewel", a "good soul", and by a stress on his youthful and perfect appearance as a combination of "strength and beauty" corresponding to an analogous "moral nature". Characteristic is the description in the introductory paragraph of the "Handsome Sailor" in which Billy is presented as a "superior figure" surrounded like a prince by his body-guard of other sailors but "with no perceptible trace of the vainglorious about him", which is reminiscent of a Jesus Christ figure surrounded by his disciples. And as the story goes on, we get comments presenting Billy as "a free heart... by no means of a satirical turn", or "without knowing it, practically a fatalist", "a novice in the complexities of factious life", "his simple nature remained unsophisticated by those moral obliquities which are not in every case incompatible with that manufactured thing known as respectability", a person "as if exceptionally transmitted from a period prior to Cain's city" with "just one thing amiss in him", "a vocal defect" which "under sudden provocation of strong heart-feeling" made him stutter or lose his voice. Thus, without having heard Billy conversing or doing anything much, we have a complete though somehow abstracted picture of the hero with a tragic flaw (innocence and stuttering under strong emotion) who is being symbolically transferred from the merchant ship "Rights-of-Man" to the warship "Bellipotent". Thus, the reader is sufficiently prepared for some kind of drama (involving this flaw), which this innocent and unknowingly fatalist young hero is bound to confront in the world of factious experience.

John Claggart's character is also conscientiously established by the narrator. The master-at-arms is represented as pure evil. The paleness on his face and his working underboard of the ship as contrasted to Billy's working high up on the top sails suggest a devilish element which the narrator successfully brings through by hints at the "peculiar human creature the reverse of a saint" and by talking of the Calvinistic dogma of innate human depravity or by alluding to outwardly respectable people "dominated by intellectuality" which they at times employ as an "ambidexter implement for affecting the irrational. That is to say: towards the accomplishment of an aim which in wantonness of atrocity would seem to partake of the insane". After trying to establish the wickedness of Claggart's character by indirection, the narrator tells us directly that there was in Claggart "the mania of an evil nature, not engendered by vicious training or corrupting books or licentious living, but born with him and innate", in short, "a depravity according to nature". Similarly, when he is struck dead, Claggart is likened to a snake. There is also a temptation scene in the story (the one in which Billy is approached to be initiated to the mutiny) which with

all direct and indirect commentary by the narrator alludes to Billy and Claggart as Adam — Satan figures. Through images and symbols, which are a mode of commentary, Billy is presented as a Christ figure. His death by hanging, the vapory fleece at the East like "the fleece of the Lamb of God", Billy's "ascention", the reverence with which his co-sailors keep parts of his hanging pole, his serenity at death, all point to such an interpretation.

The figure of Vere, the Captain, has provoked disagreement as to whether he was meant to be presented in a sympathetic light or not. Critics have been dissenting on whether Melville meant to verify Vere's decision to hang Billy or present him in an ironic light. E. L. Grand Watson in his essay "Melville's Testament of Acceptance"<sup>15</sup> contends that Melville is no longer a rebel, that "he has come to the acceptance of evil as a necessary constituent of life" while many other critics hold that *Billy Budd* might best be understood as a work of irony. On this point the attitude of the narrator is of a decisive importance. On the one hand Vere is presented as apparently the best type of British naval man, dignified, learned and of aristocratic lineage, but, as Phil Within observes in his "Testament of Resistance"<sup>16</sup>, we find implied criticism through the narrator in even the earlier description of Vere who is presented as "ever mindful of the welfare of his men, but never tolerating an infraction of discipline", "intrepid to the verge of temerity, though never injudiciously so" in which the second part of each statement completely cancels the virtue affirmed in the first. Billy becomes the witness of the cruel flogging of a novice soon after his coming on board of the "Bellipotent" for a slight negligence of duty humanely excusable in a novice — a scene which, though given without comment, points to Vere's government of his ship. When the junior lieutenant at the court martial asks Vere why, if they must convict, they cannot mitigate the sentence, Vere replies with the only argument that sea officers can really understand: "They [the crew] would think that we flinch, that we are afraid of them". The narrator's comment that "it is not improbable that even such of his words as were not without influence over them, less came home to them than his closing appeal to their instincts as sea officers..." suggests that, in spite of the finely spun speech of captain Vere, the issue was decided by fear. Thus, Vere's whole argument is illuminated by an ironic light.

When the surgeon, after seeing the dead body, hears Vere saying that the boy whom he calls "God's angel" must be hanged, he cannot help thinking whether captain Vere was "suddenly affected in his mind", whether he was "unhinged"; and when he reports the decision to the lieutenant and the captain-of-mariners "they fully stared at him in surprise and concern. Like him they seemed to think that such a matter should be reported to the

15. Stafford, ed., op. cit.

16. Phil. Within, «*Billy Budd: Testament of Resistance*» in *Modern Language Quarterly*, XX (June, 1959), pp. 115-127.

"Admiral" the narrator chimes in. And in the next chapter in which he talks of the difficulty in drawing the line where the violet tint in the rainbow ends and the orange tint begins, he remarks: "So with sanity and insanity... Whether Captain Vere, as the surgeon professionally and primarily surmised, was really the sudden victim of any degree of aberration, one must determine for himself by such light as this narrative can afford". The narrator here sounds noncommittal but behind the lines I suspect Melville, the conscious artist, winking his eye to the reader, urging him to look in the text itself for his own opinion about Vere's decision that we must bow to necessity, which will also give a sure direction as to the theme of *Billy Budd*. Two instances are worth mentioning in this respect: the analogy the narrator draws between the French Revolution as expressing the spirit of the age and the Great Mutiny in the British Navy, which implies that tyranny, therefore, can be resisted even within English confines; and his seemingly irrelevant digression on Nelson's career and death, which, however, comes into focus and gains importance when later on we are led to compare the careers and deaths of Nelson and Vere. Unlike Nelson's heroic death, Vere dies of illness on shore before he has "attained to the fulness of fame" — a death suitable to one who did not deserve such renown as the daring and imprudent Nelson, a man, however, capable, as Vere was not, of inspiring his men to loyalty and of substituting persuasion for coercion.

In conclusion, then, it is worth noticing that independent of the narrative form (I-narrative or third-person narrative) what the narrators in all three stories are trying to do is to put their stories into perspective and come to understand the truth in them. In *Redburn* and more successfully in *Moby Dick* the I-narrators are engaged in a conscious act of remembering through which they try to organize and understand their past experiences, thus making "the present a creative understanding of the past adventure that was experienced initially as an unintelligible and frightening chaos of sensations"<sup>17</sup>. By giving spatial dimension to a series of successive temporal events and by turning their experience into a story Redburn and Ishmael (and therefore Melville) place themselves outside that experience and, by objectifying it into a fiction, try to discover its truth. In the same way does the third-person narrator in *Billy Budd* try to discover the truth concerning his story by putting together facts in a formal order.

Therefore, it becomes clear that, far from eliminating the narrator/commentator from his last work as he had shown signs of doing in *Moby Dick* with all those structurally dramatic chapters, or in *Redburn* with the narrator's limited point of view, Melville felt that the presence of an omniscient narrator/commentator is necessary to guide the reader to a meaningful understanding of his story.

17. Dryden, op. cit., p. 35.

## ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Μ. Θ. Αναστασοπούλου, *Η Αφηγηματική Φωνή στου Melville τα έργα Redburn, Moby Dick και Billy Budd.*

Στον αιώνα μας κριτικοί και συγγραφείς έχουν υποστηρίξει, ότι μιά αντικειμενική και απρόσωπη ή «δραματική» παρουσίαση μιάς ιστορίας, δηλ. μιά παρουσίαση χωρίς σχόλια και αξιολόγηση από τη μεριά του παντογνώστη συγγραφέα-αφητητή, που να επηρεάζει την κρίση του αναγνώστη, είναι ανώτερος τρόπος αφήγησης από αυτόν που επιτρέπει την απροκάλυπτη ανάμιξή του. Έχει, όμως, εξ ίσου αναγνωρισθεί, ότι, όσο και αν παραμερίζεται η παρουσία του αφηγητή στην «δραματική» παρουσίαση μιάς ιστορίας, υπάρχει πάντα ένας πλάγιος τρόπος επηρεασμού του αναγνώστη από την αφηγηματική φωνή, ειδικά σε περιπτώσεις αυξανόμενης πολυπλοκότητας των χαρακτήρων.

Η αξία, επομένως, ενός έργου δεν συνίσταται στο αν δεν έχει χρησιμοποιήσει την εκλεκτική παρουσία του αφηγητή, αλλά στην καταλληλότητα και χρησιμότητα αυτής της παρουσίας. Στην εργασία αυτή εξετάζω τα τρία έργα του Melville σε σχέση με τη χρήση του αφηγητή και την καταλληλότητά του σύμφωνα με το σκοπό του συγγραφέα.