

Lauriat Lane, Jr.

## DICKENS AND MELVILLE: OUR MUTUAL FRIENDS

(A revised, slightly condensed version of a paper given at the Dickens Centennial Festival, York University, Toronto, September 29, 1970, and at the Charles Dickens Centenary Celebrations, Dalhousie University, Halifax, December 9, 1970.)

Dickens and Melville: our mutual friends. "What connexion can there be?" asked Dickens in *Bleak House*, "What connexion can there have been between many people in the innumerable histories of this world, who, from opposite sides of great gulfs, have, nevertheless, been very curiously brought together?" One might well ask the same question of my linking together Dickens and Melville.

What has Captain Cuttle, say, to do with Captain Ahab? Little or nothing, I suppose. But I cannot resist remarking that one school of critics might find that they had both been symbolically castrated. Moreover, Captain Cuttle may have been reincarnated on the deck of a whaler, having changed his "hook instead of a hand attached to his right wrist", for "a white arm of sperm whale bone, terminating in a wooden head like a mallet".

Is it not half way round the globe from Hampstead Heath to Typee Valley, from Dingley Dell to the Mardian archipelago? And almost as far, in literary miles, from the Thames River to the Mississippi. Again, I admit it. But even these unlikely places may prove to have more in common than seems likely.

To start with the most general connections, Dickens and Melville were both writers of prose fiction in English, whose careers flourished during roughly the same three decades of the nineteenth century. Both men failed for some time to gain the very high critical reputation they have today: Melville probably because he had never been that widely recognized; Dickens, possibly because he had been too widely recognized. As writers, Dickens and Melville got significant inspiration from a number of the same models, as well as from some

very different ones, and responded strongly to many of the same social and historical circumstances.

What I shall be examining in this paper is an almost purely literary relationship: one based, to start with, on a number of general resemblances in literary background, on certain coincidences of subject-matter, and on apparent similarities in fictional method. Examined more closely, in specific writings by Dickens and Melville, these resemblances of background, subject, and method should illuminate both the Dickensian side of Melville and, possibly, a Melvillean side of Dickens. These likenesses should also lead us to the differences within them, and by so doing, should help us define Dickens' and Melville's art, and more generally, to suggest two divergent modes of poetic fiction, of what Donald Fanger, in his comparative study of Balzac, Dickens, Gogol, and Dostoevsky, calls "romantic realism", the work of "the visionary and the myth-maker".

Critics of Dickens or of Melville have had little to say about these resemblances between the two writers. Dickensians, at least in their writing about Dickens, tend to ignore Melville and his writings almost as completely as Dickens himself seems to have done. Harry Stone has contrasted Dickens' and Melville's portrayals of Father Taylor, the sailor preacher. A flurry of articles in *The Dickensian* some years back finally concluded that Dickens' and Melville's use of death by spontaneous combustion, in *Redburn* and *Bleak House*, had small resemblance and little else to do with one another. Mark Spilka compares Dickens' and Kafka's use of the grotesque with that of Melville in "Bartleby"—a number of Melvilleans have also made this comparison, one I shall be looking at later. Edgar Johnson contrasts Dickens' unobtrusive allegories with Melville's and Kafka's more insistent ones, and also suggests that Dickens' reading "is seldom mirrored in his books", unlike that of writers such as "Melville, Dostoevsky, and Mann".

Melvilleans, and presumably Melville, are more aware of Dickens, for many obvious reasons—ranging from the flooding of the nineteenth-century American market with pirated reprints of Dickens' fiction to the plain truth that Melville has not yet gained either Dickens' national popularity or his international reputation and, to be honest, probably never will. One writer on Melville, Perry Miller, in *The Raven and the Whale*, does state at length how much Dickens' writings, or one version of them, dominated Melville's immediate literary surroundings, as a constant challenge to any would-be American novelist: "Here, it seemed, was the way in which we, by frank imitation, could reconcile Christian sentiment with a technique that could safely abandon the

outmoded romances of Scott and Cooper, which could remain faithful to universal Nature and yet permit writers to treat, without embarrassment, the individualities of cities. American literature would be saved by Charles Dickens. . . . Henceforth let the writer who strove in America for originality take warning. It would not be enough that he excel Irving in humor, Bryant in landscape, Cooper in action: he would now be measured by the standard of Dickens; he would suffer should he fall short of what conservative Americans took to be Dickensian naturalness, morality, and universal wholesomeness". Most other reviewers and critics of Melville, however, make only as much reference to Dickens, usually his comic characterization, as they do to many other English novelists—far less than they do, for example, to Shakespeare.

But in another, less direct way, critics of Melville and Dickens do support my linking together these two writers. For in writing about one they continually reach generalizations that could apply to the other. Consider the following eight excerpts:

1. this writer has been unduly withheld from universal recognition as one of the foremost poetic imaginations in the world's literature.

2. what is more significant is the deliberate enrichment of the texture: the copious use of metaphor and simile; the conversion of the orthodox form into a mixture of the lyrical and the dramatic.

3. with a wisdom that must have been partly instinctive he chose for his central symbol one most familiar to him in actual experience, which he could charge at will with every kind of emotional or conjectural allusiveness.

4. the satire is easy, varying little from what, knowing [him], we should have learned to expect; thorough and outspoken in places, though never so savage as Swift nor so bitterly devastating.

5. [his] manipulation of these [city] scenes is more dexterous: he plies the reader with catalogue and fact until his instinct warns him that the interest will slacken unless revived with an anecdote; and his unresting eyes dart and peer brightly as the narrative quickens and slackens, lighting up a splash of colour here and a murky corner in shadow there, until the whole town hums with a vitality.

6. with this episode the bright cinematic liveliness of his method narrows down to a grim and deliberate realism, in which without obtrusiveness and without obvious intent the emotions are challenged and seized.

7. every one of these and of a dozen other incidental topics draws [his] tireless eloquence and heaps up to the cumulative effect of one of the most

powerful broadsides upon a restrictive and inhuman system that any man of specialized experience has ever delivered.

and, 8. here appears once again that fascination with the problem of evil, and the examination and anatomisation of its essence, that occupied [him], emotionally and intellectually, for much of his life . . . and so, in this or that piece of characterization, in this or that incident or symbol, [he] marshalled the powers of evil.

Actually, all the above statements were made about Melville. But they could apply just as well to Dickens.

These quotations suggest some of the common ground we shall find Dickens and Melville sharing: the poetic imagination, copious use of metaphor and simile, symbolic use of actuality, outspoken but un-Swiftian satire, vivid city scenes, cinematic liveliness mingled with grim realism, an attack on oppressive systems, and obsession with the problem of evil. To which we might add: semi-mythological characters, including various disguises of the devil, and the use of the grotesque as a vehicle for psychological and metaphysical meaning, as well as more particular matters that may emerge from the remainder of this paper.

Another possible bond between Melville and Dickens is the common literary ancestry they shared. However, they often responded very differently to the same models. Both, for example, were influenced by Shakespeare. A close examination of how this influence differed would give insight into the varying forms of Shakespeare's impact on prose fiction, as well as the good and bad effects thereof. I would suggest, without trying to prove it, that Dickens responded chiefly to Shakespeare the dramatist, that, in fact, he may have seen and heard, and spoken, more Shakespeare than he ever read, and that this conditioned the terms of his response. Melville, on the other hand, even as he adopted certain obvious Elizabethan dramatic conventions in *Moby-Dick*, was responding closely to Shakespeare's text—Melville's own marked edition has survived. Thus his response is as much if not more to Shakespeare's poetry and moral philosophy and to the characters that speak them, as to his stage situations and his stage rhetoric. Also, Dickens and Melville have obviously a common debt to Shakespeare's comic characters. This whole relationship calls for a more thorough and knowledgeable consideration than I can give it.

In *David Copperfield* Dickens paid a famous literary tribute: "From that blessed little room, Roderick Random, Peregrine Pickle, Humphrey Clinker, Tom Jones, the Vicar of Wakefield, Don Quixote, Gil Blas, and

Robinson Crusoe, came out, a glorious host, to keep me company". Dickens' indebtedness to Smollett's fiction and to the other books mentioned here has been scrutinized. Less well-known is a slightly garbled but similar tribute Melville pays at the end of *Omoo*: "one day—joy to us!—Po-Po brought in three volumes of Smollett's novels, which had been found in the chest of a sailor, who sometime previous had died on the island/Amelia!—Peregrine!—you hero of rogues, Count Fathom!—what a debt do we owe you!"

*Omoo* is Melville's closest imitation of Smollett, and early reviewers were quick to point out the resemblance, but Melville's full indebtedness to Smollett has yet to be established—as has his indebtedness to Defoe and Cervantes, also shared with Dickens. This common ancestry can make locating direct Dickensian influences in Melville's writing all the more difficult. But it could provide an occasion for discriminating helpfully between, say, the influence of Don Quixote on the character of Mr. Pickwick and on that of Captain Ahab, Dickensian and Melvillean versions of the same great original, with all that the difference implies.

Dickens and Melville shared a third and more immediate influence, that of Thomas Carlyle. Carlyle's influence on the novel may have been a crucial force in the evolution of nineteenth-century fiction. With Dickens and Melville, this influence, like that of Shakespeare, took significantly different forms. There have been several articles and some unpublished dissertations on Dickens and Carlyle and on Melville and Carlyle. But no one has yet contrasted closely Dickens' more selective response to Carlyle's writings on "the condition-of-England question" with Melville's apparent attempt to absorb Carlylean themes and manner into *Mardi* and his later, gloomier versions of Teufelsdröckh's search for truth and identity, in *Moby-Dick* and *Pierre*.

Up to now I have suggested various general relationships between Dickens and Melville, some more literary than others. I have noted, only too briefly: how infrequently previous critical comment has connected the two; how each writer has, however, often been described in terms that suit the other; and Dickens' and Melville's common but dissimilar debt to such predecessors as Shakespeare, Smollett, Cervantes, and Carlyle. In the space remaining, I should like to take up, briefly and tentatively, certain more specific topics, in this order: *Pierre* and *Great Expectations* as disguised autobiography; "Bartleby the Scrivener" as a Melvillean addendum to *Bleak House*; *Our Mutual Friend* and *The Confidence-Man* as prose satires; and Dickens' and Melville's last, unfinished moral fables, *Billy Budd* and *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*. For lack of time I must forego, regretfully, other promising topics

such as: *Pickwick Papers* and *Mardi* as versions of the encyclopaedic picaresque; *Oliver Twist* and *Typee* as two kinds of romantic escape, the city and the garden; the intrusion of Dickensian material into *Moby-Dick*, especially during the sixth gam, on board the *Samuel Enderby*, of London; Dickens' and Melville's criticisms of American, and British, politics and society in the mid-nineteenth century; Melville's striking condensation of the atmosphere of *Bleak House* in the final chapters of *Israel Potter*; and a general comparison of the ship and the city as microcosms of society.

Obviously, *Great Expectations* and *Pierre* can be viewed in other, perhaps more profitable ways than as disguised autobiography. But they can be taken in this way, and as such, they could help define the literary relation and distance between Dickens and Melville.

In both books, the initial autobiographical clues and displacements are topographical. Both heroes begin their stories in rural surroundings whose landmarks can easily be identified with autobiographical reality: the Kentish downs and tidal flats of Dickens' childhood, the Berkshire hills and farmlands of Melville's adolescence. But whereas Dickens darkened the fictional analogue of his trouble-free childhood with foreshadowings of his London despairs, Melville re-formed the impoverished years after his father's death into an idyllic world of landed gentryhood, ruled by a mother of wealth, intelligence, and suspiciously youthful beauty.

From these very different rural beginnings, both heroes migrate, also under strikingly different auspices, to the cities of their author's respective failures and recoveries: the London of the blacking-factory and *Pickwick* triumphant, the New York of Allan Melville's bankruptcies and his son's first modest literary successes. But whereas Dickens made Pip's self-swindling progress as a proper gentleman the pathway to moral education and salvation, Melville's *Pierre* finds in the city only nightmare and disaster and death. That is to say, Pip's life, like his name and some of his surroundings, always carries the seed of change and growth; *Pierre's* life, as suits his name and most of his surroundings, moves from one set of stony absolutes to their opposite, from white innocence to black experience, from heaven to hell—with no hope of Pip's Dickensian purgatory.

Pip journeys to London alone and lodges at first alone and later with Herbert Pocket. *Pierre*, on the other hand, takes to the city his "sister" (in quotation marks) Isabel, together with the "fallen" Delly Ulver, and is later joined by Lucy Tartan, thus completing one of the most remarkable sexual triple plays in all American literature. To appreciate fully the distance from

Dickens, one need only imagine Pip gathering Estella, Bidly, and Mrs. Joe together under one uxorious roof. The complicated and interwoven autobiographical sources of figures such as these lie much deeper for Melville than for Dickens; so deep, perhaps, that they may never be fully unearthed and disentangled.

The urban worlds of *Pierre* and *Great Expectations* are dominated by two figures who at first seem to play strikingly similar roles in the moral educations of Pip and Pierre. Jaggers, coolly and Pilate-like washing his hands of his clients, has much in common with Melville's Plotinus Plinlimmon, that bland, blue-eyed, embodiment of non-benevolence. But Jaggers' apparent inhumanity is born not of any philosophy of chronometrics and horologicals but of moral desperation. Lacking Plinlimmon's symbolic tower—to which the closest but ironic analogue might be Wemmick's castle—and lacking Plinlimmon's absolute egoism, Jaggers proves, at the crisis, to be as human as Pip, and to have his own dreams. Plinlimmon, on the other hand, has no Wemmick; or does the ill-defined Charlie Millthorpe, Melville's version of Herbert Pocket, also play this role?

In style, too, *Pierre* and *Great Expectations* show Dickens' and Melville's responses to the differing pressures of their material, be it imagined or remembered or a subtle blend of both; and these responses suggest a general principle. By adopting a single, fictitious point of view, one firmly contained within the story, Dickens was able to achieve an almost perfect style, varied, poetic or dramatic as needed, and yet wholly adjusted to the personality of the teller.

Melville, on the other hand, chose to retain the liberty—in *Pierre*, the licence—of an omniscient point of view and of shifting perspectives. The result, stylistically, was an apparent chaos that has baffled readers ever since 1852. To quote from the most recent analysis: "Depending on which critic one is reading, or sometimes on which passage in a particular commentary one is looking at, Melville is seen as wallowing in literary sentimentality or parodying it, assenting to Pierre's speeches or regarding them as rant, presenting his protagonist as a tragic hero or as a repulsive egoist, writing with detached amusement or showing a desperation equal to that of Pierre. Melville's first use throughout an entire work of the omniscient narrator technique resulted, ironically, not in the relative poise and consistency of attitude we might expect but in astonishing tonal discontinuities". And later, "Perhaps, it has been suggested, the sexual and familial feelings of Pierre were too close to those of Melville himself, too powerful for him to have rendered them in a controlled way".

Whatever the cause, I would suggest that the real irony is that Melville jettisoned the lessons of his fiction before *Pierre*, and chose to ignore the one method that might have shaped into artistic unity the personal or archetypal emotions that surge through *Pierre*: namely, a single, controlled, fictitious, first-person narrative like that Dickens so triumphantly employed in *Great Expectations*.

*Bleak House* began appearing monthly in *Harper's* in April 1852, the same month Melville sent the proofs of *Pierre* to Richard Bentley for possible publication, an offer refused on the grounds of the uncertain state of copy-writing American books in England. In November Melville renewed his subscription to *Harper's*, in which *Bleak House* was continuing to appear, shortly before he himself began work on the story of Agatha Robertson, which he had first given to Hawthorne as a subject. Early in 1853 he tried unsuccessfully to get a consulate from the new President, Franklin Pierce, a close friend of Hawthorne. During the final months of the appearance of *Bleak House*, from June through October, Melville must have written "Bartleby the Scrivener", the first half of which appeared in *Putnam's Monthly Magazine* on the 1st of November, immediately after the close of *Bleak House* in *Harper's*.

It is hard to believe that this timing was accidental. For Melville's story has obvious Dickensian characteristics which, by design or coincidence, would equip it to exploit the literary momentum *Bleak House* had built up over its nineteen months of circulation throughout the American reading public. The narrator of "Bartleby", for example, is an elderly lawyer, in his own words "one of those unambitious lawyers who never addresses a jury, or in any way, draws down public applause; but, in the cool tranquility of a snug retreat, do a snug business among rich men's bonds and mortgages, and title-deeds. All who know me, consider me an eminently *safe* man". In short, a more benevolent Tulkinghorn. At the time of the story, he had recently acquired "the good old office, now extinct in the State of New York, of a Master in Chancery . . . not a very arduous office, but very pleasantly remunerative". The regular employees of this charitable old parasite are two copyists, Turkey and Nippers, and one office-boy, Ginger Nut.

Turkey is a Micawber-like Englishman of about sixty, whose florid morning face becomes blazing red after his noon-day meal, and who then displays "a strange, inflamed, flurried, flighty recklessness of activity about him". "His clothes were apt to look oily, and smell of eating-houses". When his kindly employer suggests that Turkey reduce his working-load to the less inflamed morning hours, with no loss of pay, "his countenance became intoler-



ably fervid, as he oratorically assured me—gesticulating with a long ruler at the other end of the room—that if his services in the morning were useful, how indispensable, then, in the afternoon?”

Nippers, the other copyist, is “a whiskered, sallow, and, upon the whole, rather piratical-looking young man, of about five and twenty . . . the victim of two evil powers—ambition and indigestion”. He has “a certain impatience of the duties of a mere copyist, an unwarrantable usurpation of strictly professional affairs”, and “a fondness . . . for receiving visits from certain ambiguous-looking fellows in seedy coats”. Nevertheless, Nippers “wrote a neat, swift hand; and, when he chose, was not deficient in a gentlemanly sort of deportment”. In short, blood brother to William Guppy.

As for Ginger Nut, he too is as Dickensian as his name implies.

But “Bartleby the Scrivener” is not the story of these comic background grotesques but of Bartleby himself, the man who “would prefer not to”. Unlike the other copyists, Bartleby is “pallidly neat, pitiably respectable, incurably forlorn!”—devoid, in short, of any striking outward traits of appearance or personality, apparently non-Dickensian; almost, in fact, a non-character who exists chiefly by his obsessive, equally grotesque demands upon the narrator’s sympathy and tolerance, and upon the reader’s.

But is Bartleby in some profounder, more complex way, Dickensian? More specifically, would he fit easily into the world of *Bleak House*? Or does he embody some differing, perhaps more subversive vision of human trouble and alienation?

To answer this second question fully would require us to sort out not one but two problems of literary interpretation: not only why Bartleby is as he is, but what is the central, defining quality of the world of *Bleak House*. Critics of Dickens and Melville have disagreed widely on both of these questions. And yet, putting the two questions in this special, interrelated form might help us to answer both of them.

Interpretations of Bartleby’s rejection of involvement and finally of life have ranged from the directly autobiographical to the tautological—the discovery of the Bartleby complex, Henry Murray has called it. Bartleby has been identified as the allegorical expression of Melville’s frustrations as a writer, a “scrivener”, or of his domestic troubles, or of his more general *angst*. Bartleby has been diagnosed clinically as a catatonic schizophrenic. In social terms, he has been seen as the victim of Wall Street, of American utilitarianism, of the legal world, of city life, or simply of social pressure. Metaphysically, he has been taken to be the embodiment of the absurd, of alienation in the

West, of "an existential drive toward self-annihilation", of "the bitter metaphysical pathos of the human situation", of a subliminal death drive, of the ethic of the Eastern monk, of "the faded image of Christ in the soul of man", or of the Modern Exile.

Putting aside autobiographical ingenuities, the other interpretations I have just summarized attribute Bartleby's conduct to some fundamental alienation from mundane reality, to which alienation the critic then attaches a psychological, social, or metaphysical cause only faintly adumbrated within the story itself. For, and this is the crucial point in comparison with Dickens, is it not true that Bartleby, unlike the characters in *Bleak House*, has no real history, no dramatic motives, no fierce engagement with the forces of oppression and evil, no richly concrete symbolic identity? Dehumanized almost by definition, Bartleby inhabits a world both more and less meaningful than the world of *Bleak House*. For we are forced by the absence of specific motive to ascribe some larger meaning to Bartleby's resistance to life, at the same time as we lack the suggestive detail, action, and language that make interpretation of *Bleak House* at times almost as exciting as the book itself. This is why, although we may some day agree to agree on the essential bleakness of *Bleak House*, "Bartleby the Scrivener" will, perhaps, always confront us with, in Melvillean phrase, the mysteriousness of mystery.

*The Confidence-Man* and *Our Mutual Friend* are Dickens' and Melville's next-to-last novels—with the obvious difference that Melville wrote on, mainly in verse, for thirty-five more years. They are also partly symbolic prose satires in which human suspicion and greed are systematically tested and proven and in which myth and social reality move together across the fictional stage. To examine these and other relations between the two books, I should like to look at three representative issues: the river setting, the treatment of money, and the presence of the devil.

The river runs through *Our Mutual Friend*, and the whole action of *The Confidence-Man* takes place on the river. However, Melville's Mississippi, unlike, say, Twain's, has very little identity, literal or symbolic, apart from its obvious Americanness and its basic allegory as the river of life: "the dashing and all-fusing spirit of the West, whose type is the Mississippi itself, which, uniting the streams of the most distant and opposite zones, pours them along, helter-skelter, in one cosmopolitan and confident tide". Later in the book, the river and its burden acquire an almost preternatural momentum: "The sky slides into blue, the bluffs into bloom; the rapid Mississippi expands; runs sparkling and gurgling, all over in eddies; one magnified wake of a seventy-

four. The sun comes out, a golden hussar, from his tent, flashing his helm on the world. All things, warmed in the landscape, leap. Speeds the daedal boat as a dream". But this is all, and for Melville's purely satiric purposes, enough.

In *Our Mutual Friend*, on the other hand, the river is given a full physical, symbolic, and thematic identity and function within the book. From the opening pages we are aware of its physical presence, sweating tar and oil at the London docks or winding through the pastoral country-side. Similarly, it winds through the stories of both major and minor characters, binding them to a common setting and a related destiny. Finally, it takes on various symbolic identities, all organic to its real nature and role: as the source and symbol of life and rebirth, and of death; as the image of time, of passion, and even of thought; as an epitome of the movements and rhythms of existence itself. Above all, the Thames, literally and analogically, carries on its surface and in its depths Dickens' anti-satiric vision of modes of reform and rebirth hardly ever hinted by Melville's anatomy of human folly, and surely never symbolized by his Mississippi, in this respect, too, so unlike Twain's.

In a famous comment, Lionel Trilling suggested that "the novel is born with the appearance of money as a social element". Each in its own way, *The Confidence-Man* and *Our Mutual Friend* examine the value and power of money: one by materializing it, the other by dematerializing it; one by turning it into magic, the other by making it the myth of Victorian England.

In one of the climactic chapters of *The Confidence-Man*, "Showing that the Age of Magic and Magicians is Not Yet Over", "Frank Goodman", the last and most impressive of the diabolic tricksters, recalls his intended victim to friendship and faith by surrounding him with a "magic ring" of ten gold pieces. This is but the most flamboyant of the many occasions actual money has charmed the passengers on this "ship of fools". As versions of this same pattern recur again and again—sometimes with bills or coins whose very brightness or crispness belie their integrity—the reader cannot help be struck by, among other things, the trivality of this physical substance on which mankind bases so much, yet of which it can be fleeced so easily, by methods so childish and primitively magical, founded, Melville suggests, on little more than pure superstition, the most superficial and tawdry kind of confidence.

In *Our Mutual Friend*, however, money is a great, impersonal force that hovers over and energizes the world of the novel, a power whose most conspicuous concrete embodiment is not coins or bills but Boffin's dust-heaps and the plate of Podsnap and Veneering—essentially symbolic, even granting their literal worth in Victorian England. What little money we actually see

is promptly converted to the social energy that constitutes its true identity. Instead, we are continually exposed to talk of money, by which means, too, it becomes legendary, fabulous, without, of course, losing any of its real power to move men and women to significant action, its power to energize, in fact, almost the whole plot of the novel, even to the point of making well at the end all that can be made well by this means.

The devil has a long and honorable history in literature generally, and in Dickens' and Melville's fiction in particular. His exact power as a character will depend, no doubt, on the reader's special cultural and even theological conditioning. But that the devil has power as the embodiment of cosmic mischief and metaphysical evil will not, I hope, be denied. As a result, his presence and role in any work of literature can have the effect, at the least, of lifting the temptations and mis-doings of the story to a wholly different level of potential significance. Beyond this tentative generalization, one would have to turn to the numerous extended treatises on the Prince of Darkness: his literary, cultural, anthropological, and metaphysical ontology, motivation, and behavior.

Broadly speaking, Dickens began with the devil, and Melville ended with him. From Fagin through Littimer, we have assorted devils in Dickens' fiction, some more medieval, like Quilp, some more sophisticatedly Mephistophelean, like Montague Tigg or, if you prefer, Tigg Montague. Krook, however, affects *Bleak House* mainly by his analogy to the Lord Chancellor, rather than directly. And the devils that follow him, Harthouse and Rigaud, have little real power in *Hard Times* and *Little Dorrit*, and function mainly as pointers toward more human evils that seem to dwarf what metaphysical or mythological pretensions such late-Dickensian devils may still claim.

In Melville's fiction, on the other hand, the devil, although foreshadowed by Jackson, in *Redburn*, and Bland, in *White-Jacket*, makes his first real appearance on the deck of the *Pequod*, in Melville's sixth book, in the mingled guise of the Mephistophelean Fedallah and the Satanic Ahab. He next appears as "The Lightning-Rod Man", before dominating the world of *The Confidence-Man*.

In *Our Mutual Friend*, Dickens' latest and least powerful incarnation of the devil is Mr. Alfred Lamble, that shoddy, down-at-the-heels operator along the edges of the novel. First introduced explicitly as a "spurious Mephistopheles", whose cane leaves marks in the sand "as if he were of the Mephistophelean family indeed, and had walked with a drooping tail", Lamble conspires unsuccessfully against Podsnaps and Boffins alike. After failing to entrap even

Fascination Fledgeby, Lammle contents himself with caning that gentleman and then retiring to that legendary home for unsuccessful British devils, the Continent, leaving the real centres of corruption in the novel unmoved by either his presence or his departure.

But *The Confidence-Man* is full of the devil: either a single, shape-changing demon who continues throughout the book or, as I prefer to think, a troupe of lesser demons who carry out the comedy of action of the first half, followed by one supreme devil, who performs the comedy of thought of the second half. Melville's masquerade allows for either possibility, and from a lofty enough perspective, as high, say, as heaven, no doubt the distinction dissolves.

If we took the most obvious attitude toward both the literal and mythological identities of Melville's confidence-men, we should have to conclude that such figures are socially criminal and metaphysically evil. But things are more complicated than this—and also more complicated than any of Dickens' uses of the devil, effective as those may be for their different purposes. For traditionally the confidence-man has often been a figure of wit and charm, far more attractive aesthetically and even morally than the greedy gulls he preys upon, and this is quite true of Melville's swindlers. Moreover, for me at least, the final confidence-man who dominates the last half of the book with his attempts to find confidence, just one scrap of trust, on board the *Fidele*, is an ambiguous, even persuasive figure. For this devil, if he be such—and not an unrecognized savior, addressing a world as unready for him as it was for the lamb-like mute at the opening of the story—can hardly be blamed for the skepticism and cynicism that meet him at every turn. Or is this, perhaps, the devil's, and Melville's, biggest joke of all?

There are several possible parallels between *Billy Budd, Sailor*, and *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*. Again, I shall choose a few, significant topics: the context of authority, the identity of the villain, the victims of evil, and the possible Christian fable. Rather than get involved in the debate over the plot of the incomplete *Edwin Drood*, I shall take for granted certain truths that seem plain enough—at least to me: the most obvious, that John Jasper is guilty of the murder or, just possibly, the near murder of his nephew, Edwin Drood—the difference being, for the story's purposes, negligible. And that the main action of the story is a struggle between the forces of light and darkness: to reveal the truth, redeem the falsely accused, confound the wicked, and preserve the innocent: in short, a main action which is, apart from its outcome, much like that of *Billy Budd*.

Dickens and Melville chose to set their stories within contexts of great

traditional authority: the cathedral town, Cloisterham, and the ecclesiastical authority of the Established English church, whose ancient origins and traditions Dickens emphasizes; and the English, seventy-four-gun ship-of-the-line, *Indomitable*—or *Bellipotent*, if we adopt Melville's late revision—whose captain's personal conservatism breathes moral life into the established Articles of War and Mutiny Act. For both Dickens and Melville such a context of authority intensifies the distance between the rough judgements of a fixed code and the finer ones of the individual character and the individual conscience. Such a context also, by its traditional associations, gives an allegorical potentiality, historical or theological, to any conflicts dramatized within its confines, and both Dickens and Melville at least toyed with such possibilities.

Dickens, however, chose a context less restricted, more open, than did Melville. For not only is the ship obviously a tighter setting than the town—witness the many significant trips to London in *Edwin Drood*; but Melville has added conditions—the recent mutiny at the Nore, the separation from the main fleet—which make the circumstances even more stringent. Dickens' Cloisterham establishment, on the other hand, apart from its timid conventionality, is a rural, relaxed, relatively unrestrictive version of Anglican episcopacy, its authority muted, if not compromised, with few of the tensions of Trollope's Barchester. Dickens' world is also more richly furnished than Melville's, its details less tidy, less unified to a single end, and the result is a world with greater room for surprise, for coincidence, for authorial and narrative freedom.

Dickens' and Melville's villains, John Jasper and John Claggart, are members of the church and naval establishments respectively, but neither is central or important enough to embody clearly that establishment, as might Captain Vere, say, or the Bishop of Cloisterham. Instead, both Claggart and Jasper are independently subversive forces enabled, for differing reasons and to a differing degree, to hide within the context of authority and, where appropriate or possible, make use of it for their own unauthorized ends. In both books, this partially undermines that authority and adds to the moral complexity of the story. For after Claggart has lied about Billy and been struck dead, all the power of naval law fulfills Claggart's original aims, and he is served as well as if he were still alive to contribute to the result. Jasper, however, while he too can mask his personal identity beneath his professional one—and they are far more contradictory than with Claggart—does not really use the power of authority to the same extent. This different relation to authority is fully consonant with the difference between the human complexity of Jasper's motives and the metaphysical absoluteness of Claggart's.

Claggert is clearly, on one level, Melville's final incarnation of the devil, envious and amorous toward Billy's innocence, fated to re-enact the fall on a more modern stage, and disguised, for the purposes of realism, as the tyrannical but highly efficient master-at-arms of H.M.S. *Indomitable*. Jasper, on the other hand, is a fully human villain, more Faustian than diabolic, or, like the wicked monks of Gothic fiction, diabolically possessed. He has, to be sure, an attendant imp, Deputy, and a witch-like familiar, the opium woman, but they are, appropriately enough, not the means by which he damns but by which he will be damned. No monster of iniquity or Mephistophelean conspirator, Jasper is a divided and tormented man, struggling—unlike Claggart—against his malevolent impulses, obliquely warning his victims, maddened by unanswered passion and by his drug addiction. Claggart is also latently or covertly homosexual, and this characteristic, at least, he may have in common with Jasper.

Melville concentrates the role of victim in a single character, Billy Budd, foretopman, the Handsome Sailor, the peacemaker of the merchantman *Rights-of-Man*, the noble foundling, the first Adam and the second, whose name echoes both Buddha and the Druid deity, Beli Budd, and who, at the moment of his hanging for the act of killing the serpent without benefit of law, "ascended; and ascending; took the full rose of the dawn". Dickens divides the role of victim among three characters, whose names are curiously paralleled by Billy's identity: Edwin Drood (or Druid?), first-named for an early British king; Neville Landless, from India, whose noble-sounding first name complements his Melvillean last one; and, most obviously, Rosa Bud. Apart from the obvious fact that Dickens and Melville are building up a similar cluster of associations around their innocent victims, I am as yet so far from knowing what to do with these resemblances that I hastily pass on. One might also note the remarkable prevalence of orphans in both books, a condition that comes dangerously close to Gilbert and Sullivan.

By splitting up the role that Melville, instead, gives to Billy Budd alone, Dickens avoids the ritualistic or allegorical symmetry of *Billy Budd*. He also has room to mingle innocence with more human foibles and follies, thus avoiding Billy's absolute innocence. By dividing goodness up among male and female characters, he can avoid the overtones of Billy's beauty, "all but feminine in purity". And where Melville has awarded to Billy the musical powers of a nightingale, as one sign of his special nature, Dickens divides this ambiguous ability equally among villain, victim, and savior. It is also interesting that Dickens should bring to the aid of his innocents the three institutions: law

(Mr. Grewgious), navy (Lieutenant Tartar), and church (Canon Crisparkle), that Melville finds impotent to save Billy Budd.

Writing toward the end of their lives, with the imminence of death upon them, Dickens and Melville chose to include in *Billy Budd* and *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* a significant amount of Christian allusion and symbol. Critics have remained unsure what force to give this material, how to organize it, and, with Melville, how ironically to take it. This uncertainty may, of course, be of our own making, for some twentieth-century readers approach such religious matters with the embarrassment and confusion Victorian readers allegedly felt toward more obviously tabooed subjects. Dickens or Melville may, however, have consciously chosen to leave their projected Christian fables undefined or unresolved as more fitting to the total complexity of their stories. Or it may be that, even now, we simply haven't looked at these two books in the right way.

In any case, clearly both the world of Cloisterham and that of the *Indomitable* are inhibited, even corrupted, by traditional authority and badly need redemption. Both worlds are linked to established Christianity, the ship more obliquely so. In both books, powers of spiritual darkness are opposed to powers of light, and in both, there is a kind of human sacrifice, which may be the means, literally and allegorically, of redemption. In both, this redemption may be involved in historical process: in one, the political history of Europe during the age of the French revolution; in the other, the history and evolution of established Christianity both in itself and in relation to earlier British and to Eastern religions. And in both books these general patterns are further clarified—or should I say complicated—by such significant, potentially allegorical detail as Billy's Christ-like character and the crew's reaction to his "crucifixion", or Dickens' possible use of Christmas eve and of the allegorical names and identities of Rosa Bud and Septimus Crisparkle, that musical, muscular Christian, who converts or confounds the heathen, domestic and imported, whenever and wherever he finds them.

It has always been assumed that Dickens left *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* half-finished, whereas Melville, before his death, had essentially finished *Billy Budd*. At times, however, when comparing Dickens and Melville, I allow myself to entertain the feeling that Dickens died because he had essentially finished *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, and Melville died because he knew he could never finish *Billy Budd*. Dickens, that is, having devoted his career and his craft to foreshadowing factually, atmospherically, or symbolically, in the earlier chapters, what was to happen in the later ones, had finally, in this



respect, written his perfect book, one whose second half had been, for him at least, so fully foreshadowed that it did not need to be written. And so, with that beautiful passage in chapter twenty-three about the resurrection and the life, punctuated by a decisive stroke of Dick Datchery's chalk, Dickens ended his book. Melville, on the other hand, had finally posed himself a legal, social, ethical, and metaphysical problem so impossible he could neither cut the knot nor unravel it. And so, after complicating the character of Captain Vere and multiplying the endings of *Billy Budd, Sailor*, Melville, too, withdrew into eternity, leaving to us all the questions and few of the answers.