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Space and Place in Melville's "The Piazza"

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"The Piazza", which Melville wrote as an introductory short story to his collection of short fiction called The *Piazza* Tales, is set at his home near Pittsfield, Massachusetts, where he and his family lived from 1850 through 1863. Melville named the home "Arrowhead" after the Indian artifacts he found there. Like the narrator in "The Piazza", Melville actually built a piazza on the north side of his home, and, like the narrator, he located his piazza where he would face, not the sun on the south, but the tallest peak in Massachusetts, Mount Greylock, to the north. The mountain fascinated Melville, and in 4852 he dedicated *Pierre* to it. Melville had climbed Mount Greylock in the company of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Oliver Wendell Holmes, and Evert Duyckinck. He took pains to ensure that for thirteen years he looked at it every day.

The *Plot as* Quest

In "The Piazza", the journey into the landscape is a journey into the mindscape, a journey that tells us about not only Melville and the Berkshires, but also American cultural history. As Melville had in real life, the narrator of "The Piazza" becomes attracted in mind and body to the great mountain he contemplates from his piazza. Inevitably, the magnetic quality of the mountain gives Melville the opportunity to build his story on the archetypal pattern of the quest. Similarly, the narratives of myth, folklore, and literature are quite often plotted on the protagonist's course of adventure during which the hero quests after some goal such as a golden fleece, a new idea, or self-discovery.

As in "The Encantadas" and "Benito Cereno", the objects and locations in "The Piazza" are ambiguous; as the narrator journeys to the fairy window, he passes through a landscape of fluid forms. This fluidity is suggested first of all by imagery which likens dry land to the sea. The grass and grain undulate like waves and swells of water. Also, the piazza seems like a beach, a mediator between the surety of place and the fluidity of space. In addition, mountains seem like gigantic breakers,

and the meadow seems like calm water. But in this spaciousness, "the vastness and the lonesomeness are so oceanic, and the silence and the sameness, too, that the first peep of a strange house, rising beyond the trees, is for all the world like spying, on the Barbary coast, an unknown sail".[1] The stationary, predictable forms of place are further transformed into the formlessness of space by imagery which suggests that the environs on the way are a dreamland, the narrator's interior landscape. For example, the narrator sees "drowsy cattle, that, less waked than stirred by day, seemed to walk in a sleep" (p. 8). The circular image of stirring undercuts the rectilinear image of the journey. Metaphorically, the narrator is travelling as peripatetically as are the cattle.

Allusions and imagery provide foreboding harbingers that the trip will not regain the innocence of a lost, spacious paradise but will result in a fall into the experience of limited horizons; on the journey to the mountain that the narrator calls "Charlemagne" (p. 4), signs promise failure. For example, there is an allusion to the murder of Hamlet's father and to the ill-fated struggles against monarcy in 1848. The narrator says the sky was "ominous as Hecate's cauldron" (p. 16) and refers to two hunters resembling Macbeth and Banquo. In addition, the sense of a divided nature struggling against itself is contained in the allusion to Lucifer and Michael in *Paradise Lost*. Moreover, the stream that the narrator passes has carved out stone like "skullhollow pots" (p. 10), again recalling Hecate's cauldron. Also, a decaying wagon looks like a "sunken wreck" in the deep woods. Similarly, a saw mill has fallen to ruin, further suggesting a fall from the pinnacle, the "barren heights where none stood to welcome" (p. 9).

As in many romantic versions of the quest, the hero is too optimistic. Like a transcendentalist, he claims that Don Quixote is the "sagest sage that ever lived" (p. 9). And when he is swallowed up in the forest and can no longer see his destination, he is sure that the golden wildflowers will show him the right way: "I was not lost; for roadside golden-rods, as guide posts pointed, I doubted not, the way to the golden window" (p. 8). Like Captain Delano in "Benito Cereno", one of the *Piazza Tales* that "The Piazza" introduces, the narrator is attracted to the bright side of things.

Unlike most questers in the narratives of pre-modern societies, but like many of the questers in the narratives of modern societies, the narrator is not true to his quest. He admits, recalling his journey, that unlike Spenser's quester, he did not have the true heart. Rather, this hero voyages for self aggrandizement. He seeks the purple of Mount Greylock; purple (formerly a rare and expensive color) is part of the trappings of royalty and is appropriate to a mountain that the narrator calls "Charlemagne". In addition, the brightness to which the narrator is at first attracted is not enlightenment but "gold" (p. 6). The narrator

never uses the term yellow. And when Marianna, looking at the house in the distance and not knowing that it is the narrator's home, says the inhabitant must be "happy", the narrator's response reveals that for him happiness means wealth: "You judge some rich one lives there?" (p. 13).

Melville undercuts the romantic optimism of "The Piazza" when the narrator fails to rescue the damsel from the tower of Mount Greylock. When she says that she would be happy if only she could journey to the blessed person in the house in the valley, the narrator does not tell her that he is the resident of the realm of her dreams:

> Oh, If I could but once get to yonder house, and but look upon whoever the happy being is that lives there! A foolish thought: why do I think it? Is it that I live so lonesome, and know nothing?
>
> I, too, know nothing; and, therefore cannot answer; but, for your sake, Marianna, well could wish that I were that happy one of the happy house you dream you see; for then you would behold him now, and, as you say, this weariness might leave you. (p. 17).

Critics have tried to answer why the narrator does not tell the fair lady who he is. For example, Darwin Turner states that the narrator "refuses to destroy her dream" (p. 59). And Marvin Fisher contends that because the narrator is not happy, he is not lying when he says that he is not the happy one she seeks.'

A closer look at Marianna's statement reveals that she is the one who is breaking the news gently. She states that the notion that the grass is greener in the distant house is "a foolish thought" (p. 14). Then she asks Socratically if the notion of a saviour in the distance is caused by lonesomeness and innocence. But does the narrator understand her veiled revelation? By saying, "I, too, know nothing" (p. 14), the narrator changes from literal-mindedness to irony and knowingly reveals that he has learned that it is foolish to believe in a fairyland. Mocking his former self, he reveals that he understands the unstated message she has slipped to him. He admits to himself that he has had romantic pretensions, has pretended to be that happy person, and will not so pretend any longer. After this point, he no longer believes that a pretty maiden can restore him to innocence, even though it is pretty to think so. Instead, as we will see later, he comes to embrace artistic creativity.

As an archetypal quester, then, the narrator gets his wish: he falls from his innocent, romantic illusions into experience. Just before he meets Marianna, he discovers the apples – "Eve's apples" (p. 10) – which taste like the ground. The fruit that his journey will bear will be fallen, but he will eat from the tree of knowledge. He finds that the lure of brightness is chimerical. When he finally sees the other side of

Marianna's window, the window which had reflected the sunlight, catching his eye and his fancy, he finds that the light which passes through the window torments Marianna, blinds her with brightness, burns her with heat, and sets the flies and hornets stirring.

The light, then, turns out to be false; but the dark turns out to be true. Recalling the journey from his piazza, the narrator says that when the sun goes down and the light which permits fancy is gone, "truth comes in with darkness" (p. 18). Thus he learns from Marianna that darkness is truth. She believes not in light but in shadows. For example, her dog, as we noted, is a shadow thrown by a rock, and her dear friend, who had been the shadow of a tree, lies buried where the tree's remains are stacked after the tree was killed by lightning. Death, then, comes with excessive light. The narrator, when first hearing from Marianna that she regards the shadows as true beings, responds with simple light-of-day incredulousness. But as he realizes that brightness is chimerical, he recognizes that she is right, and he tells her, "I should have said, 'These are strange things,' rather than 'Yours are strange fancies'" (p. 14). Yet Melville the ambiguist qualifies his criticism of brightness: there would be no concept of darkness, there would be no shadow, without light.

But what does the truth of darkness portend? The narrator reveals that before his fall he was alive with fantasy. He fancies that Mount Greylock is Mount Sinai, and, as was noted, pretends that the mountain is also Charlemagne. To him, the countryside around his home seemed like the realm of Oberon and Titania. Similarly, he took literally not only the allegories of *The Faerie Queene* but also the quest of Don Quixote. In addition, he speaks of his home's surroundings as a picture gallery. And on his piazza, he wears his old navy clothes and imagines that he is on a ship deck, that the pasture is the sea, and that he is rounding Cape Horn. Moreover, he likens Marianna reacting to her first sight of him to "Some Tahiti girl . . . catching sight . . . of Captain Cook" (p. 12). But the truth of darkness does not rob him of his ability to create artifice. Rather, he no longer takes artifice, such as Spenser's voyage, literally; he is no longer capable of believing that Don Quixote is the sagest sage. Narrating after his fall, he speaks ironically when presenting the illusions he had before the fall. But his fall is not into another kind of literal mindedness, that which would forswear all fancy and metaphor. He does not quit dreaming; rather, he dreams better dreams. He speaks of his piazza and surroundings as an "amphitheatre" as well as a "box royal" (p. 17). He can watch himself making his artistic productions on his own stage. He has gained an ironic, detached self-awareness. He can pretend that "Madam Meadow Lark", his "prima donna", sings a note "struck from the golden window" (p. 18) of

Marianna. But in the dark he does not pretend to believe in bright illusions.

The ambiguity of light and dark as an example of the appearances – that is, the ambiguity of objects in space – is ubiquitous in The ***Piazza*** Tales. For example, in "Benito Cereno", dark and light merge into grey, a grey as inscrutable as Bartleby's grey eyes. And in "The Encantadas", dark and light objects merge into other objects: what appears to be a ship is a rock, and what appears to be flowing is static. In "The Piazza", an indication of the unreliability of appearances is implicit in the epigram from "Cymbeline": "With fairest flowers,/whilst summer lasts, and I live here, Fidele –" (p. 1). Arviragus speaks these words over the dead Fidele; however, Fidele is really alive, and Fidele is really Imogen, a girl who is pretending to be Fidele. In another example of the unreliability of the physical, spatial world, the narrator notes that a mountain far and high can appear to merge with one nearer and lower, so that the viewer cannot tell the top of the lower mountain from the side of the higher mountain. What we see, then, varies with point of view and distance. But what we see also depends on luck. The rim of the mountains which surround the narrator's home backgrounded by the stars would not be visible if the house had been built anywhere but within a perimeter, several yards in diameter, which encircles the house. It was only by luck that the house was built where it was and that sunlight hits Marianna's window and reflects to the piazza when the narrator happens to be there – an event which happens only a few times a year. These examples suggest that Melville's works are profoundly anti-empirical and that he conceived of truth as revelation. Melville was a doubter who wanted to receive truth from that which he doubted. To Hawthorne, he stated that he could neither believe in God nor accept disbelief.

The ambiguity of light and dark and the unreliability of appearances symbolizes the difficulty of establishing not only truth and falsity, but also good and bad. In "The Piazza", brightness is something which deludes us. Similarly, the narrator's Chinese creeper also deludes us: it is an image of brightness on the outside, but the worms hidden within are an image of darkness and badness on the inside. This image of intertwined good and bad, light and dark, is, as Helmbrecht Breinig notes, an image of the inseparable oneness of good and evil (p. 272). But the image of the creeper also shows the illusion of appearances – the confusion of truth – as well as the confusion of good and bad. Worms are not inherently bad; they perform a valuable function. And the very color symbolism – that light is good and dark is bad – Melville undercuts, as we saw, with the brightness, which causes damage and illusion. However, before we conclude that Melville was a nihilist, we must remember what several critics have shown: that despite what appeared to Melville as a problematic and ambiguous world, he posited certain

truths and values. Even John Seelye, who reads Melville as an extreme ambiguist, notes that we must pay attention to the first word in the following statement that Melville wrote to Hawthorne: "Perhaps, after all, there is no secret."[3]

Landscape as Mindscape

According to the conventions of the quest narrative, the journey into exterior space is a metaphor for the struggle for knowledge, particularly self-knowledge; accordingly, the narrator of "The Piazza", in finding Marianna, discovers something important in himself. Journeying to her, he journeys to himself and is delivered from his literal mindedness and renewed in his artistic creativity. In other words, in Marianna the narrator discovers his Muse. It is fitting that, as Breinig points out (p. 276), Marianna is taken from the Marianna in Measure for Measure, for Shakespeare was one of Melville's foremost influences. In addition, Marianna suggests the Blessed Virgin Mary and her mother Anne. This tale, then, is an allegory of rebirth. In the end is the narrator's beginning.

There is much evidence that Marianna and the narrator are part of the same being. Their respective places, or homes, are interchangeable. (The home is often a symbol of the self.) From his home, the narrator imagines that a charmed, transcendent being lives in her home; from her home, she imagines (or pretends to imagine) the same thing in reverse. When the narrator reaches her home, he notices his own home "glimmering much like this mountain one" (p. 13). And whereas he, from his home, is struck by how the light plays on her home, she tells him of how light plays on his home: "You should see it in a sunset" (p. 13). He has not imagined what his home looks like in the sun; likewise, she cannot believe that the sun would make her home shine. And while the narrator early on suspects that it is only his imagination that a fairy cottage exists, Marianna says of the narrator's home in the distance, "Sometimes I think I do but dream it is there" (p. 13). Moreover, both live amongst magic circles. The path to Marianna's home is marked by a "ring" (p. 10), and the narrator's home, as we saw, was fortuitously situated within a "charmed ring" (p. 1) on the only spot where the circle of the mountains cuts the circle of the stars. Further, the red apples at the narrator's home lie strewn on the ground, and the apples near Marianna's "tasted of the ground" (p. 10). In addition, their homes are both associated with the heart: the foundation stone of the narrator's home is from the "heart of the hearth stone hills" (p. 10), and the narrator imagines that the shining spot is in the mountain's breast pocket.

Marianna is a part of the narrator in another sense: he has symbolically given birth to her. Nine months have passed between his first sighting

of the spot on the mountain – when he conceives of the fairy maiden – and her appearance. There is yet another familial implication in the story. Marianna states that she has a brother, who comes home only to sleep. The narrator is that brother. On his journey, he passes several images of sleep, as if he were falling into a dream on his way to her. And, of course, the journey to self awareness is often associated with dream images. There is an additional implication that, as in Pierre, the two are brother and sister. The narrator notes of Marianna and her brother, "Long had they been orphans, and now, sole inhabitants of the sole house upon the mountain" (p. 12). But the narrator, too, is an orphan, at least in his imagination, for he never mentions any member of his family. Like Ishmael, the narrator is one of Melville's many orphan heroes, one of his many "isolatoes". Further, the ambiguity of the word "now" suggests that it is the narrator and Marianna who are the inhabitants. And the compression of these two figures into one person is suggested by the ambiguity of the word "sole", which suggests that Marianna and the narrator are brother and sister in the soul, are soul mates. Moreover, as she appears to the reader (who shares the narrator's point of view) to be part of him, he appears to Marianna as part of her: she must not think of him as a separate being if she can say that "no guest came, no traveller passed" (p. 12).

Similarly, it is appropriate for this seemingly bachelor narrator that the virginal Marianna's home looks like one kind of female who has not given birth: her cottage is "capped, nun-like, with a peaked roof" (p. 10). Also, the journey contains harbingers of what the quester will find out about his woman within. Just before the narrator finds Marianna, he sees a crescent moon (often a feminine symbol) at the end of his trail, and this moon looks "maidenly" (p. 10). Also consistent with reading Marianna as the narrator's feminine side is the fact that his behavior is influenced by hers. He listens to "her story" (p. 13) and then writes his own. And after meeting this restless insomniac, he walks his piazza deck "to and fro" (p. 18) at night for lack of sleep. In addition, he notes that her "quiet words" and "quiet act" make him "mute" (p. 14).

Verticality in "The Piazza"

As cultural geographer Yi-Fu Tuan shows, the vertical is associated in most cultures with home, stability, and the sacred. Americans (of the dominant culture at least) conform to the widespread association of the vertical with the sacred. For example, good fortune is often said to be "heaven sent" or to fall from above – for example in the phrase "it just fell in my lap". In "The Piazza", vertical imagery renders the good fortune that places the narrator's home where it will catch reflections of

Marianna's window: the building site was chosen as if Damocles' sword pointed to the charmed spot. The narrator considers it magical to be able to see the fairy window from within this lucky circle, as well as to see the circle of the mountains cut by the circle of the stars. For the narrator, therefore, it is uplifting to receive missives from above and to view the workings of the earth reaching up to meet the heavens. Another example of verticality lies in the image of the Chinese creeper aspiring to reach up to the heavens. The narrator calls it a "starry bloom" (p. 8), comparable perhaps to *Billy Budd's* Starry Vere. Similarly, the narrator treats his quest in vertical terms associated with rising to the heavens. On his path to Marianna, he is led for some distance by a goat. And he calls the goat after its astrological terms, "aries", and notes that it "led along a milky way . . . past . . . Pleiades and Hyades" on an "astral path" (p. 9). Pleiades and Hyades are stars in the constellation of Taurus.

Mount Greylock is the story's most important symbol of verticality. The highest peak in Massachusetts, Greylock, as we have seen, had great meaning for Melville: he dedicated *Pierre* to it, and he viewed the mountain every day at Pittsfield while writing not only *Pierre* but also *Moby-Dick* and *The Piazza Tales.* The mountain, then, both inspired his creative ascent and symbolized it. Perhaps the mountain, a great white mass in winter, stirred Melville's notion of the indomitable and unfathomable whale. As such, the mountain is a blank slate on which Melville, like Ahab, projects the artifice of his culture's cosmology and ethos. Certainly the narrator of "The Piazza" so projects. He remarks that Greylock is "Sinai" where "swart Moses" must be climbing (p. 6). The mountain also signifies the self because the narrator has taken "an inland voyage" (p. *5)* into his own mindscape. The mountain, then, through its association with a religious figure (Moses), a King (Charlemagne), and the self, also signifies self-deification. Through the medial figure of Charlemagne, the chronometrical and horological are made to correspond. As a symbol of verticality, then, Mount Greylock absorbs Melville's thoughts on the chronometrical/horological conflict; it represents the transcendent as well as man's effort to apprehend it.

While the upward direction of the vertical is often associated with transcendence, the downward direction is often associated with immersion in worldly woe. Accordingly, we often speak of learning the limits of life as a "fall". Similarly, the narrator describes the Chinese creeper as "unblessed" (p. 8) after it has fallen prey to worms (denizens of the lower regions). To Melville, the fall is not necessarily negative but rather an entry into the realm of knowledge. One of the commonplaces of Melville scholarship is that he preferred people who "dive" as opposed to people who float. Imagery in "The Piazza" reveals how the lower end of the vertical can be seen as enlightening rather than darkening. The

narrator remarks that the shining spot on the mountain glowed like a "mine" (p. 6). Mines suggest a descent into darkness, but not in this case. Similarly, the narrator describes the window as "dazzling like a deep-sea dolphin" (p. 8).

But in American culture, as in some others, the notion of a sacred place under the vertical axis is weakened by a sense that a sacred space can be found through horizontal movement. American culture contains many motifs of paradise just down the road, or over the hill, or around the corner, or at the end of the tunnel. Studying this notion in pre-modern cultures, Victor Turner calls it "the center out there".[4] It is the notion found in restless societies, which put more value on the space and less on place. As Klaus Poenicke points out, "The Piazza" comments on the tendency of romantics in American culture to continue the Puritan myth of a mission that "sanctifies America's landscape before that of all other nations . . . as the hallowed place of a new revelation".[5] From the Puritans, the Transcendentalists inherited the tendency to read God in nature, though the Enlightenment changed the reading in many ways.

The narrator alludes to this change from the Puritans' howling wilderness of hidden devils and an immanent god to the Transcendentalists' innocent nature of no devils and a remote god. Implying that the Transcendentalists have lost Puritan and medieval awareness of the power of nature, the narrator uses architectural imagery to describe the surroundings of his home as a picture gallery and the piazza as a stage:

> When reverence was in vogue, and indolence was not, the devotees of nature, doubtless, used to stand and adore – just as, in the cathedrals of those ages, the worshippers of a higher power did – yet, in these times of failing faith and feeble knees, we have the piazza and the pew. (p. 3)

The narrator repeatedly suggests that nature is sacred because it is innocent. He calls Mount Greylock a "monastery of mountain" (p. 3). And he associates the Hearth Stone Hills with sacred stone, "Christmas", and the "new-dropped lamb" (p. 11). In addition, he notes that "snail monks founded mossy priories" on Marianna's roof (p. 11). And on his ascent up the mountain, he finds that the stream as carved "empty chapels" in the rock where "Jacks-in-the-pulpit, like their Baptist namesake, preached but to the wilderness" (p. 9). This later image clearly undercuts the notion of finding innocent sanctity in the wide open spaces. In addition, the notion of nature as innocent is besmirched by the example of Marianna,[6] who turns out to be not a transcendent figure but an impoverished, lonely wretch bothered by wasps and hornets.

"The Piazza" further derides the Transcendentalists' notion of space by bringing it down to earth. Melville suggests that the attempt to uplift the city of man results in the sanctification of the mundane – what we

now call "civil religion". A notion which clearly tried to elevate the basest of human greed and corruption was the notion of the divine right of kings. The image of Mount Greylock as "Charlemagne" mocks not only the Transcendentalists' white-washing of nature but also their deification of self. The narrator, allegedly in worship, witnesses "the coronation of Charlemagne" in the disrespectful position of lying down "on the green velvet lounge" of his pasture amidst violets and strawberries grown for "heraldry" (p. 2).

Another of Melville's objections to Emersonian Transcendentalism is that, in effect, it contributes to the isolation of individuals by elevating them to godlike status. The narrator of "The Piazza", in his isolation from others and his willingness to see brightness in everything – in the All, we might say – is, as William Bysshe Stein puts it, a figure of "comic self-reliance".[7] And as we have seen, Marianna is the image of the failed isolatoe. The narrator likens her to Una, the lone one, which is also the name of the figure for one o'clock in "The Bell-Tower", the figure associated with the death of another isolatoe, Bannadonna, who literally raises himself on the vertical axis. The most hopeless image of isolation in "The Piazza" may be the hop vines that failed to reach out and grow into one another.[8]

Circularity

Implicit in our discussion of the structure of the story as a quest is the spatial pattern of the circle. In this story as in the others of its type, the protagonist returns to his point of origin in a narrative structure sometimes called a "round". As Seelye puts it, "In a round world, . . . the voyage out necessarily becomes homeward bound . . ." (p. 90). The narrator begins his story by tracing the four cardinal points, east, west, south, and north, thus taking us in a circle before he takes us on his journey. "The Piazza" also calls our attention to the cyclic path of the stars. From his vantage point on the piazza, the narrator watches the stars as they appear to spin on a round plate, rising in the east, arching upwards, and setting in the west. As the narrator looks north, the horizon is ringed 'round with mountains, "the circle of stars cut by the circle of the mountains" (p. 1).

But these circles are broken. The narrator's account of his journey skips the return home. Similarly, the narrator's introductory tour around his home does not come full circle to the east. And the stars' cycle is obscured by the earth as the stars appear to sink into the west and rise the next evening in the east. In addition, the appearance of a ring of mountains around the narrator's home is possible only when the viewer's back is to the south, which is flat. Like the chimerical rainbow illumi-

nating the fairy cottage, all of these are broken circles, false images, optical illusions of security and continuity. The narrator longs to break the circle of domesticity and venture into space for "the circle out there", but in the end he is restored to place and will "stick to the piazza" (p. 17), satisfied to be in the imperfect circles from which he can see the reflection from the mountain and enjoy an illusion of the ring of mountains.

Horizontality

The journey is also horizontal, that is, outward. He moves not only up the mountain, but also out to it. Conforming to the typical pattern of American movement of the time, the narrator begins his voyage by heading west. And the builders of Marianna's cottage have gone west and died (p. 14). Where Whitman and Emerson celebrated American spaciousness, Marianna finds that the woods are "lonesome, because so wide" (p. 16). In addition, the narrator finds that nature tries to retard his horizontal motion into space: the blackberries' thorns try to hold him back.

While "The Piazza" undermines the horizontal quest for spacious skies and purple mountains' majesty, it underscores the value of home and place. About her loneliness, Marianna tells the narrator, "Sometimes, 'tis true, of afternoons, I go a little way; but soon come back again. Better feel lone by hearth, than rock. The shadows hereabouts I know – those in the woods are strangers" (p. 16).

Like the narrator, she is adrift and she is striving to find place. But she discovers before he does that home is the spot for making a sense of place. She has learned before he has because she has preceded him in mobility. Her hut is a "mere palanquin, set down on the summit, in a pass between two worlds, participant of neither" (p. 11). She is only passing through and has learned from bitter experience the value of what we commonly call "roots" (which is an image of vertical anchoring). After learning his lesson from his Muse, the chastened narrator, as we saw, will stick to his piazza. But he does not forswear all voyaging: he negates only launching his "yawl" for "fairyland" (p. 17), but he will continue the quest for wisdom on his piazza, rusted wedges for splitting wood; and finally the rocks worn down in "ages past" from water acting like a flintstone that "itself unworn" (pp. 9–10), an image suggesting that the only thing timelessly constant is change.

At the beginning of his journey, the narrator was unable to accept the inevitable pain and decline brought by time. His illness, he states, has left him "so sensitive" that he "could not bear to look hpon a Chinese creeper of my adoption" because, as we saw it, it had become infested

with worms. He could not bear to see the decline of himself or that of his plant, which he speaks of as his child – his "adoption". And he remarks that those "germs" (p. 8) of destruction were in the bulb when he planted it. Thus he was troubled that decline is inherent in the life cycle. The narrator, in journeying to what he imagined would be a blessed El Dorado of timeless perfection, fled history. What the narrator fqund at the end of his journey was just as ravaged as his ship for journeying through the oceanic mysteries of existence. He needs his ship, his place, or he will drown.

Space as Time

"The Piazza" also uses space as a metaphor for time. The journey takes the narrator past objects that have suffered the ravages of time: a "sunken wreck"; "an old saw-mill, bound down and hushed with vines, that his grating voice no more was heard"; a chopping block, covered with ferns, from a forgotten time; by time as the objects at home and along the way: he finds that the fairy cottage is rotting. He finds that, like his journey through space, his journey through time is inevitably cyclical. His fall into experience is a fortunate fall: his hope for timelessness has died, but in this death is a rebirth. The symbol of the wisdom that he has gained from Marianna is a symbol of resurrection: the crescent moon rises over Marianna as he finds her.[9]

"The Piazza", then, looks out not only upon Melville's place but also upon his time. In early 1856, while composing "The Piazza", Melville was concluding four years during which he had written only short stories. Pierre had found such critical and popular disfavor that Melville had turned to writing short fiction for magazines, sometimes pseudonymously, because he had become unbankable as a novelist. But "The Piazza" overlooks not just the four years during which he wrote short fiction. Rather, it overlooks his entire career. While characters of his novels had ranged over vast spaces in allegories of the quest for knowledge or power, the characters of the short fiction are restricted in their movement through space. The protagonist of "The Piazza", for example, does not voyage for thousands of miles; rather, he fails in a day's outing to a nearby mountain. On his piazza, Melville greeted himself at the beginning of his long obscurity. The persona of the narrator of "The Piazza" just barely masks Melville's visage. By only marginally veiling himself in time and place, Melville allows us to strike through the mask.

NOTES

1. *The* Works *of Herman Melville* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1963, vol. 9), p. 7.
2. Marvin Fisher, "Prospect and Perspective in Melville's Piazza", *Criticism,* XVI (Summer 1974), p. 215.

3. John Seelye, ***Melville: The Ironic Diagram*** (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1970), p. 8.
4. Victor Turner, "The Center Out There: Pilgrim's Goal", ***History of Religions,*** XII (3: 1973), p. 191.
5. "A View from the Piazza: Herman Melville's Legacy of the European Sublime", ***Comparative Literature Studies,*** IV (1967), p. 278.
6. Ibid., p. 277.
7. "Melville's Comedy of Faith", E ***L*** H, XXVIII (1960), p. 320.
8. Ibid., p. 331.
9. Ibid., pp. 324–325.