Reverent self-construction in Herman Melville's "Clarel"

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REVERENT SELF-CONSTRUCTION IN
HERMAN MELVILLE'S CLAREL

by

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ABSTRACT

Reverent Self-Construction in
Herman Melville’s Clarel

by

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The present study discusses Herman Melville’s late career narrative poem Clarel as the title character’s process of self-discovery and self-construction. During his experiences in and around the environs of Jerusalem, Clarel transforms himself through a new appreciation for subjective standards of truth. The internal transformation occurs as Clarel learns to recognize the validity of opinions different from those he previously holds. Most succinctly considered, Clarel learns the value of a constructed self independent of the previously influential notions of spiritual and physical love. A young theology student whose faith is waning, Clarel travels to Jerusalem because he imagines that the physical setting of his pilgrimage will provide the means to renew his faith. However, Clarel learns to recognize the integrity of his individual subjectivity only through experiences that disintegrate his previous beliefs and belief systems. Instead of renewing his faith, the pilgrimage becomes an arena for the systematic breakdown of Clarel’s various levels of commitment to spiritual, emotional, and intellectual processes. He discovers that he cannot learn from the example of another because this process
serves only an introductory purpose. Clarel's hope to find an appropriate guide in the Holy Land who may show him how to live does not work effectively because he discovers no guide can teach another individual about his own subjective responses, interpretations, or evaluations; nor can the guide's contributions supersede the experiences accrued by the individual on his own. At this recognition, Clarel accepts that the pilgrimage becomes the means by which he reconstructs his subjective interpretation and evaluation of the world. Once Clarel "unlearns" all of his previously held beliefs; once he establishes his own criteria for evaluation; once he accepts his own construction of truth; he possesses the capacity for questing that ultimately may yield a self more wholly realized and constructed.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ............................................................................................................................. iii

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ..................................................................................................... vii

CHAPTER ONE  *Clarel*: A Pilgrimage of Self-Discovery .................................................. 1

CHAPTER TWO  A Brief Critical History of  *Clarel* .......................................................... 12
  The 1920s ........................................................................................................................... 16
  The 1930s .......................................................................................................................... 19
  The 1940s .......................................................................................................................... 20
  The 1950s .......................................................................................................................... 23
  The 1960s .......................................................................................................................... 26
  The 1970s .......................................................................................................................... 27
  The 1980s .......................................................................................................................... 34
  The 1990s .......................................................................................................................... 36
  2000 and Beyond .............................................................................................................. 45

CHAPTER THREE  The Reverent Pilgrim-Readers of the Pilgrimage ............................. 48
  *Clarel* .................................................................................................................................. 71
  Derwent .............................................................................................................................. 97
  Nehemiah ......................................................................................................................... 119
  Rolfe .................................................................................................................................. 126
  The Narrator ..................................................................................................................... 129

CHAPTER FOUR  Clarel’s Developing Appreciation for Subjective Truth ................... 133
  Nehemiah ......................................................................................................................... 146
  Vine .................................................................................................................................. 154
  Rolfe .................................................................................................................................. 161
  Derwent ............................................................................................................................ 168
  The Results ....................................................................................................................... 172

CHAPTER FIVE  The Five Gams of the Pilgrimage ......................................................... 174
  The Syrian Monk ............................................................................................................ 176
  The Dominican Monk ................................................................................................... 186
  The Cypriote ................................................................................................................... 207
  The Lyonese .................................................................................................................... 213
  The Muscovite ................................................................................................................ 224
  The Results ...................................................................................................................... 228
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CHAPTER ONE

CLAREL: A PILGRIMAGE OF
OF SELF-DISCOVERY

Unlike most of Herman Melville’s writings, Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land has not yet received its due attention. For reasons of length, subject matter, and form, just to name three of the more prominent challenges, most readers feel overwhelmed, deciding that the investment in the poem is too great, and the rewards too few, to make the project a worthwhile venture. Clarel represents twenty years of Melville’s sustained effort, spanning his 1856-7 trip to Palestine and Europe to the poem’s publication in 1876. Characteristic of his other literary efforts, in Clarel Melville attempts to reconcile the place of faith in a society vastly altered—and continuing to be altered—by scientific advancement. It is easy to appreciate the aspiration and achievement of a known, though not always revered, novelist who chose to write an 18,000-line narrative poem. As such, Clarel’s complexity presents challenges not easily met. However, Melville constructs a narrator capable of providing the necessary assistance by drawing attention to Clarel’s development and self-construction over the course of the poem.

The question that immediately occurs to any reader of Clarel has yet to be answered: Why did Melville switch to writing poetry after a lengthy career in prose? No critic
satisfactorily answers this question because any response must necessarily be speculative. Because Melville left no correspondence directly addressing this transition in his writing, we must satisfy ourselves by looking for evidence in Melville’s own reading history. Merton Sealts offers the most comprehensive presentation of books read by Melville in his lifetime, and from these records, critics form the basis for limited conclusions. Agnes Cannon, by reading Melville’s marginalia in his copy of Arnold’s *Essays in Criticism*, concludes Arnold’s influence, through his criticism of Homer, Milton, Shakespeare, Pope, Chapman, and Cowpers, encouraged Melville’s experimentation with form. Carolyn Karcher claims the effects of the Civil War, both for the United States and Melville, personally, demanded Melville “find a new literary medium to express the trauma” (Karcher 260). Douglas Robillard stresses Melville’s adherence to the tradition of narrative poetry as practiced by Spenser, Milton, Wordsworth, and Byron (Robillard, *The Poems of Herman Melville* 14). Finally, Bryan C. Short asserts Melville’s switch to poetry comes from a frustration with the “impatient questing of the novels” (Short, “Form as Vision” 553).

Most succinctly considered, *Clarel* contemplates the personal development of the title character, one who learns the value of an independent construction of self during his pilgrimage. A young theology student whose faith is waning, Clarel travels to Jerusalem because he imagines that the physical setting of his pilgrimage will provide the means to renew his faith. However, Clarel’s experiences teach him something vastly different. Over the course of the pilgrimage, he learns to recognize the integrity of his individual subjectivity only through experiences that disintegrate his previous beliefs and belief systems. Instead of renewing his faith, the pilgrimage becomes an arena for the
systematic breakdown of Clarel's various levels of commitment to spiritual, emotional, and intellectual processes. He discovers that he cannot learn through the example of another because this process serves only an introductory purpose. Clarel's hope to find an appropriate guide in the Holy Land who may show him how to live does not work effectively because no guide can teach another individual about his own subjective responses, interpretations, or evaluations. Another's guidance cannot supercede the experiences accrued by the individual. At this recognition, Clarel accepts that the pilgrimage becomes the means by which he reconstructs his subjective interpretation and evaluation of the world. Once Clarel "unlearns" all of his previously held beliefs; once he establishes his own criteria for evaluation; once he accepts his own construction of truth; he possesses the capacity for questing that will yield self-discovery.

This search for self applies as much to other readers as to Clarel. The external reader of the poem and the other internal readers in the poem learn in much the same fashion as Clarel. Each expects certain results to come from reading, either a basic familiarity that comes from the completion of a given reading task; or the more comprehensive recognition of the process of reading that stresses the experience of reading, rather than its results. This distinction raises a few questions: Should one address the tasks of reading for results and reading as process as distinct and separate activities? Should one address these two tasks simultaneously? At what point, if ever, should one consciously discard one pursuit in favor of the other? Asked simply: How should the reader read? This question implies that two kinds of responses are equally valid: 1) the question desires an "answer," a kind of directional guidance that yields a specific end to the task; and 2) the question acknowledges the limitations of the interpretive processes due to the
complexity of the process of reading. This duality encapsulates the challenge for the external reader. Formulated as a question, “How should the reader read?” one might incorrectly assume a desired end to be an answer. In Clarel, this is not always the case because answers offered between pilgrims do not always satisfy curiosity, nor do they satiate a need to know more. Clarel wants to know what he must do in order for his faith to return because he imagines the answers exist externally, rather than internally. But, he does not recognize the question as anything other than a means to an end. If he asks the “right” question, he imagines he will receive the “right” answer. Clarel, through the “unlearning” process, recognizes the limitations of this logic. Instead of seeing questions as a means to an end, he begins to understand the intrinsic value of the questions. He begins to accept that his own questions and his own answers, regardless of their overlap with any sense of objective truth, represent his accumulating experiences in Jerusalem.

Clarel’s experiences in the poem provide for him a specific learning opportunity, one equally important for the external and other internal readers. However, these same experiences also reinforce learning to be a life-long quest. While this distinction seems redundant, this is not the case. The specific learning opportunity, as such, exists for those experiencing the pilgrimage that takes place in and around the environs of Jerusalem. This includes the external reader of the poem because, with each reading, he involves himself in a journey with a specific starting point and a specific ending point. This makes one aspect of the learning process exist within a finite boundary because it lasts only as long as the reader reads the Clarel text. He may restart the pilgrimage at any time, but this signals a different process, though subject to the same initial restrictions. The poem as a representation of a less specific, life-long learning process is also finite,
but its duration spans the lifetime of the reader without regard to a specific text. This learning process may be considered the pilgrimage of greatest significance, the one of self-construction, the one each pilgrim within the poem addresses to varying extents.

Once his own pilgrimage of reading begins, the external reader quickly discovers the wealth of reading that takes place throughout the poem. Reading becomes an entry-point for self-evaluation, and the pilgrims read many texts: books, engraved lines and passages, poems that line the interior of travel trunks. The pilgrims “read,” “scan,” and “trace” the materials before them, and each reads with varying degrees of diligence that determines his capacity for interpretation and comprehension, the standard for measuring the accomplishments of the reading pilgrims. The more accomplished the reader becomes, the more reverent he may be. For the purposes of this study, the reader who maintains a reverence for reading will maintain a reverence for the legends and mythologies that serve as a basis, many times, for the texts under consideration.

The external reader experiences the journey simultaneously with the other pilgrim-readers of the poem. In essence, he enters the poem, becomes one of the pilgrims, participates in the lengthy, outbound journey from Jerusalem through the desert wilderness to the Dead Sea; and returns through Mar Saba and Bethlehem, until the pilgrimage comes full circle at its return to Jerusalem. Though a silent participant, the external reader hears the philosophical and religious discussions undertaken. Throughout these discussions, the pilgrim-readers create opportunities for learning about the self and the reader must recognize when and what he needs to learn as well. While this characteristic reinforces the exclusivity of the poem’s pilgrim-readers and forces the reader into the role of outsider, this same distance offers an opportunity to be included in
a fashion beyond the pilgrim-readers. When the narrator speaks, either as mediator for the specific thoughts of specific pilgrim-readers or to summarize events happening beyond the scope of the narrative, the reader again hears and learns. Whatever disadvantage may be observed in the former case becomes an advantage in the latter. Within each of the poem's 150 cantos, the reader comes to understand that the narrator's focus on reading, either as past activity or current exercise; either from a specific text or the reading of another's facial features or intentions; underlies the present action.

In order to accept the ever-changing world for better or worse, the pilgrim-readers consult multiple texts for guidance. These texts reference the legends, traditions, and rituals of ancient Christian, Greek, and Roman cultures. Regardless of text or context, the legends, traditions, and rituals all come from stories that must be read, and the reading produces the necessary reverence. As such, Clarel exists as an interactive text with regard to reading because the narrator intends for the external reader to experience a transformation similar to that of Clarel. The external reader of the poem is not too different from Clarel as the poem begins. Like Clarel, he needs a guide, one that may help him understand his own crisis of comprehension, a metaphorical substitute for Clarel's crisis of faith. Like Clarel, too, the external reader must decipher the experiences of the pilgrimage, textual enterprises or otherwise, in order to evaluate the same experiences relative to his own life. Like Clarel, the external reader must learn how to live with the discoveries that come. The external reader undoubtedly changes during the pilgrimage. But the external reader, like Clarel, must decide for himself what the conclusion of the Clarel text means for him individually. Clarel, for example, must reconcile all that he has read in the past, those teachings of Holy Writ and the scholarly
commentary upon them, with the images of the Holy Land he sees before him and the impact of these experiences. He must unlearn the teachings of the past that impede his receptivity to different perspectives in order to confront the present; but this same present depends upon his learning a new manner of interpreting the world. Clarel does not have the luxury of stasis. His identity depends upon reading as a principle activity, and the process of reading itself becomes a primary focus.

Chapter Two will address the critical history of Clarel. Without the pioneering work of Walter Bezanson, one of the earliest champions of the poem, perhaps the viewpoints of today would echo the bafflement characteristic of the late nineteenth century. Alongside Bezanson, Vincent Kenny and Joseph Knapp are acknowledged for their contributions to the reader’s depth of understanding. Many other critics receive recognition here, but the present study depends upon these three individuals particularly. Citing their work will position the relevance of this study in regards to Clarel’s greater tradition. Fortunately for the contemporary reader, the limitations of past critical positions help to construct the entry points for the present.

Chapter Three focuses on the activity of reading undertaken by Clarel, Derwent, Rolfe, and Nehemiah in order to establish what is read, how it is read, when it is read, the circumstances surrounding the reading, how the material is interpreted, and the results, if any, that come from the reading. An analysis of the poem’s reading pilgrims will show, through a careful tracking of their words and deeds, the objects of their reverence within the context of a religious mythology. These reference points help to explain each pilgrim’s motivation, as well as his anticipated goal. Once the values of the pilgrim-readers become clear, the external reader becomes more capable of understanding what
brings the pilgrim-readers on pilgrimage and what each pilgrim-reader hopes to gain from the experience.

Chapter Four discusses Clarel’s progression towards a subjective understanding of truth as created by his self-discoveries through reading in the previous chapter. Over the course of the poem, Clarel, through his interaction with Nehemiah, Vine, Rolfe, and Derwent, begins to recognize the importance of a subjective viewpoint. Coming to Jerusalem, Clarel imagines that some external, objective proof will renew his deteriorating faith. However, as time passes, Clarel’s experiences with his chosen “guides” reveal the necessity of finding the internal, subjective truths that make his life livable. Clarel distills from the conversations with the aforementioned pilgrims the means to determine for himself how he will choose to live.

Chapter Five draws a parallel between James D. Young’s “The Nine Gams of the Pequod” and similar encounters in Clarel. Writing about Moby-Dick, Young uses the gams of the Pequod, those encounters at sea with other sailing vessels, to discuss communication, its successes and its failures, in light of the different cases made by the nine ships. The gams of Clarel address communication by evaluating the stories being told, ascertaining the stakes of the communication, and noting the pilgrim-readers’ interpretations. The number of gams in Clarel differs from the number in Moby-Dick, but the gams remain singular, brief interludes that do not pass beyond the boundaries of the canto in which each begins. This limitation maintains fidelity to the definition of a gam as used by Melville in Moby-Dick. The five gams of the pilgrimage include the meetings with the Syrian monk, the Dominican monk, the Cypriote, the Lyonese, and the
Muscovite. These encounters further reveal Clarel's developing awareness of the need to choose his own manner of living.

Chapter Six notes the final stages of Clarel unlearning his past beliefs, particularly as the pilgrimage returns to Jerusalem where he observes there is no resolution, there is no summation, there is no moral to his experiences. Struggling with the messages from the Lyonese and the Muscovite, Clarel continues an examination of easy and hard joys. "The Night Ride" (4.29) and "The Valley of Decision" (4.30) cantos afford Clarel the opportunity to consider whether he will pursue spiritual quests or sensual quests. In an attempt to compensate for spiritual loss, Clarel seeks to reunite with Ruth, the young love he must leave behind while on pilgrimage. Ruth represents Clarel's hope that physical love can replace his loss of faith in spiritual love. By deciding a life with Ruth may substitute for his inability to find spiritual solace, Clarel hopes he finds a satisfactory way to live.

Clarel's pilgrimage begins and ends at the same physical place, but he changes notably over the course of the poem. Its circularity, its repetition, and its endlessness reinforce the importance of process, not the product of the process. The true search, as noted by William Dillingham, undertaken by the various pilgrim-readers is not for any physical object. No object can provide the solace these travelers need. The value of the search comes from its existence as an activity. Simply being a part of the search provides everything the pilgrim-reader needs. The reverence for reading and the reverence that develops through reading help the pilgrims to appreciate, if not fully comprehend, the worth of reading, thus pilgrimage, in its own right. If practiced rightly, with endurance, with attention to process and not product, without hope for using the process to resolve
conflict or answer questions, reading as an activity affords the reader experiences that assist with personal reconstruction. It can do no more. This best condenses the dilemma presented through Clarel.

The repetition of specific terms and phrases throughout this introduction—the reader, the pilgrim-reader, the process of reading, reading as pilgrimage—suggests the focus of this study to be the continual interaction between reader, author, narrator, text, and character. The present analysis of Clarel straddles several theoretical approaches without adhering too rigorously to any one. The study embraces reader-response criticism without ever accepting that the reader, through interaction with the text, “writes” the text. The study embraces close reading because the text is central to the investigation. Though the pilgrim-reader’s reactions, interpretive, evaluative, or otherwise, to the texts within the poem are crucial, the study does not intend to approach Clarel psychoanalytically. The study will not provide definitive answers regarding the poem’s meaning nor speculate regarding Melville’s intentions. Rather, it intends to note how successful pilgrim-readers, both in and of the poem, through past and present moments of reading, attribute value to process and accumulated experience through questing (i.e., through pilgrimage) over product or results or answers. Simply stated, the investigation itself will be an exercise in experience. It will be a process of the external reader’s self-discovery as much as textual discovery without demanding the discoveries possess value outside of themselves. It attempts to be exploratory and hopeful, without insisting upon an absolute comprehension. After all, the honor and the glory belong to Melville, not to the present study.
In such a skeletal introduction, it is neither practical nor possible to address all aspects of consideration. Amongst the overwhelmingly numerous images of death, desolation, and decay, Melville constructs a great deal of hope. The power of his hope echoes in Clare’s words as the poem moves to its end: “Conviction is not gone / Though faith’s gone: that which shall not be / It ought to be!” Clarel’s reverence, like Melville’s, comes as the sum of accumulating experiences. By accepting the need for action, for movement, for process, without a preconceived concern for results, regardless of whether he ever understands the “purpose” of his decisions, Clarel trusts the experiences to come. Simply, he endures, and this deserves acknowledgment. By the poem’s end, Clarel reveres the human condition, its myriad triumphs and tragedies, as essential to self-creation.

\[1\] Herman Melville, Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land (Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern UP and The Newberry Library, 1991): 489. All subsequent references to this text will be parenthetical, citing part, canto, and line number(s).
CHAPTER TWO

A BRIEF CRITICAL HISTORY

OF CLAREL

Since its publication in 1876, Clarel has received a considerable amount of critical response in light of its supposed barriers. Most susceptible to these barriers, the earliest reviewers of the poem were baffled and overwhelmed by the poem’s inordinate size and its philosophical and theological matters. Not surprisingly, the earliest reviews, like Hobbes’s famous characterization of Nature, were nasty, brutish, and short. When reviewers bothered themselves with the poem, they expressed exasperation and bewilderment. In his 1960 Introduction to the Hendricks House edition of Clarel, revised and reprinted in the 1991 Northwestern-Newberry edition, Walter Bezanson, the poem’s foremost champion, characterizes the American reception of the poem with disdain and indifference. For readers who remembered, Melville’s past writings held adventure and the excitement of travel. Clarel, as far as the reviewers were concerned, possessed no such adventure; and whatever excitement was to be found in the travels in the Holy Land were diminished by the insistent and incessant talk amongst the characters. The readers who remembered Melville by this time were very few. His brief celebrity as the writer of Typee and Omoo vanished soon after the publication of more mature works like Moby-Dick and Pierre. The readers remembering Melville’s past glory found Clarel beyond
comprehension. The readers who didn’t remember found no reason in *Clarel* to bother getting reacquainted.

As scathing as the earliest reviews tended to be, one reads them today with a sense of amusement. They stand as nothing grander than anecdotes, amusing bits of ephemera seemingly showcasing the whimsical desire of writers to construct small bits of nastiness. Bezanson succinctly reconstructs the history of critical responses. Starting with the American and British reviews, he traces the reputation of a poem, according to Melville’s own words, “eminently adapted for unpopularity” (*Clarel* 483), whose inauspicious beginnings could not have anticipated the interest of future readers. From its publication, Bezanson notes the contributions made by the notable giants of Melville studies from the 1920s until the early 1950s.

Vincent Kenny, in *Herman Melville’s Clarel: A Spiritual Autobiography* (1973) reassesses Bezanson’s analysis before continuing the critical account through the early 1970s. This includes what Kenny characterizes as the important work preceding his own publication. There are many other critics who acknowledge the same contributions as Bezanson and Kenny, but these two works stand as invaluable resources to any reader of *Clarel*. Therefore, these two works serve as the foundation from which this chapter will assess the contributions to the criticism of *Clarel* from 1971 until 2002. The last thirty-one years of criticism do not contain the same great interpretive strides as the fifty-four years preceding them. The contributions remain consistent along certain investigative lines. Critics continue to study the patterns of images and symbols in the poem; the poem’s thematic significance; the poem’s prosody (or lack thereof); the poem’s historical significance in relation to Melville’s greater body of work; the poem’s biographical
significance; and the poem’s capacity to shed light on Melville’s thoughts on religion, science, philosophy, and politics, just to name a few. Prior to beginning this catalogue, it is necessary to acknowledge the contributions made by Bezanson and Kenny.

Of the four major monthly magazines of the 1870s, Harper’s, Scribner’s, the Atlantic, and the North American Review, Bezanson notes that none bothered to review Clarel, even though travel literature about Palestine remained a subject of public interest (Clarel 543-4). In the August, 1876 edition, the month most likely to offer a review of Clarel, Bezanson notes Harper’s instead “printed a six-page sentimental ‘romance’ about a disguised love, blacked up as a courier, who follows the family of his American sweetheart down to the Jordan and up to Mar Saba, handily rewinning her favor by saving her from drowning in the Jordan” (Clarel 544). Such whimsical pieces, Bezanson speculates, make for delightful and entertaining reading; or, at the very least, the plot indulges in all manners of stereotype and sentimentality so as not to offend the sensibilities of the reading public. Further in his catalogue, Bezanson notes the six American reviews for which Jay Leyda provides excerpts: The New York-Daily Tribune (June 16) reviewer, possibly Edmund C. Stedman, critiqued the poem’s structure and Melville’s style, finally confessing disappointment at the result; The World (June 26) reviewer, possibly Richard H. Stoddard, saw too few noteworthy parts to balance the “overwhelming tide of mediocrity” throughout the poem’s flawed structure and inscrutable philosophizing; The New York Times (July 10) reviewer felt the poem deserved a better home in the prose Melville seemed much more equipped to write; The Library Table (August, 1876) reviewer called the poem’s length its greatest flaw; The Galaxy (August, 1876) reviewer called the poem “dull,” chastising Melville for such an
unforgivable sin; finally, the *Lippincott's Magazine* (September, 1876) reviewer echoed the *Times*, speculating prose to have been the preferred medium for the poem's subject matter (Leyda 750-6). Hugh W. Hetherington supplements Bezanson’s catalogue with one additional review from the Springfield *Republican*. The reviewer summarizes the position of the American reading public long accustomed to Melville’s absence: Melville’s “literary reputation will remain, what it has fairly become, a thing of the past—for all that his new book will do for it” (Heatherington 277). Aside from this singular amendment,^2 Hetherington reaches the same conclusions regarding the American reception of *Clarel*.

In England, the reviewers approached *Clarel* with an inquisitive skepticism, leading Bezanson to conclude that critics were divided on the issue of the poem. Many British reviewers echoed the scathing criticism of their American counterparts. Hetherington contrasts the "American cold dismissal of *Clarel*" with the "amazingly warm encomium given the poem by the London *Academy*, on August 19, 1876" (Heatherington 278). Both Bezanson and Hetherington quote the review at length. Each critic focuses on the ability of the British reviewer to anticipate the delight of future readers of *Clarel*. While the American reviewers exhibited how easily one could find flaws in the poem, the British reviewers made efforts to find the noteworthy, a far greater challenge. Both Bezanson and Hetherington conclude the quoted material with the same hopeful lines written by the *Academy* reviewer: “We advise our readers to study this interesting poem, which deserves more attention than we fear it is likely to gain in an age which craves for

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^2 Bezanson mentions the Springfield *Republican* review as footnote 47: “The Springfield (Mass.) *Republican* of September 8 reprinted part of this review noting that Melville’s poem ‘receives kindlier countenance in England than it has in his own land.’ The *Republican*’s own brief notice of July 18 had not been flattering. I am indebted to Jay Leyda for both *Republican* notices” (*Clarel* 546).
smooth, short lyric or song, and is impatient for the most part of what is philosophic or didactic” (Heatherington 278). When Bezanson laments the state of American poetry that begins his critical investigation of *Clarel*, he attributes the same gap in the tastes of the reading public to the poem’s failure. The “established rule of elderly gentlemen-poets” was “flanked by a middle-aged coterie of gentility that held power and set editorial tone . . . [*Clarel* arrived in] an era of canonization . . . devoid of intellectuality except in scholarship, and unaccustomed to prosodic experiment” (*Clarel* 542-3). Against a reading public unaccustomed to and unwilling to accept “challenging” poetry, both in content and form, *Clarel* stood little chance to be well-received.

**The 1920s**

If Melville’s efforts in *Clarel* stand as a testament to his foresight, perhaps the renewed interest in *Clarel* stands as a testament to the foresight of the *Academy’s* reviewer. His fears regarding the disinterest of the reading public lasted from 1876 until 1919. In a brief article, Frank J. Mather, Jr., champions, like the *Academy’s* reviewer before him, Melville’s literary effort. Though acknowledging the difficulties of the poem’s length, verse, and subject matter make focused attention difficult, he offers a humorous, self-deprecating remark that stands as both a lament for Melville’s lost reputation as a writer, as well as his own appreciation for an effort that stands as its own reward. Bezanson summarizes Mather’s humorous claim, noting the latter “reported himself ‘presumably the only survivor’” of *Clarel*’s limited readership, but offered that the poem stood as “‘America’s best example of the Victorian faith-doubt poem’” (*Clarel* 546). If *Clarel*’s reader accepts this position, he understands the dramatic differences between the intentions of Melville and the genteel poets criticized by Bezanson. *Clarel*
does not offer easy optimism for the bleak and harsh realities faced by America during the final twenty-five years of the nineteenth century. The poem would be a greater anomaly were Melville’s career concerns regarding faith and doubt somehow inverted or unaddressed.

Bezanson discusses the criticism of *Clarel* during the 1920s by focusing on three major developments in Melville studies. Raymond Weaver, Melville’s first biographer, wrote *Herman Melville: Mariner and Mystic* (1921), responding in his final chapter to Mather’s challenge by reading the poem and noting the social criticism characteristic of its fourth and final part. In the chapter entitled “The Long Quietus,” Weaver focuses on Melville’s later years, those in which his absorption in metaphysics characterized his withdrawal from public life. Weaver calls himself *Clarel*’s second reader, but he fears “it would be over-optimistic to presume that there will soon be a third” (Weaver 357). Weaver does offer some wonderfully amusing assessments to characterize the negative reception of the poem. Unfortunately, some of his suspicions regarding the negligible future readership facing *Clarel* are not too far from accurate. The poem has challenged its third reader and many more beyond, but it is unlikely that there will ever be a readership for it as great as the other works in the Melville canon.

Lewis Mumford (1929) began two interpretive lines of investigation by evaluating the biographical connections between details of the poem and Melville’s life, as well as the

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3 While there are many viable options for these amusing anecdotes from many different critics, two by Weaver stand out. Quoting a letter written by Melville’s wife Elizabeth to her mother, Weaver notes her concern for discretion: “Herman has taken to writing poetry. You need not tell any one, for you know how such things get around.” Mrs. Melville was too optimistic: her husband’s indiscreet practice is still pretty much a secret to the world at large. And *Clarel*, his longest and most important poem, is practically impossible to come by” (360). Even while making comments like the above, Weaver recognizes the fate to come for the poem, lamenting: “We should blush for our neglect of a not unworthy representative . . . for the poetical stirrings of the deeper theological waters which marked the age of Matthew Arnold, Clough, Tennyson, and Browning” (365).
social criticism previously observed by Weaver. Though Mumford echoes earlier critics and reviewers when noting the poem’s tedious length, he cannot help but find a connection between the efforts the reader must make and the ambiguous Epilogue offered as the poem’s conclusion. For all of the obstacles Clarel faces over the course of the poem; for his inability to reach satisfactory conclusions regarding how he should live his life; Mumford finds hope and relief, concluding Clarel learns to live. This suggests neither positive nor negative connotations, as Bezanson stresses. Making a biographical connection between Melville and his hero, Mumford notes “an undogmatic acknowledgment that life is ‘not good or bad, malicious or forbearing, true or false,’ but simply ‘livable’” (Clarel 547).

Though something of an accomplishment, certainly, such meager concessions seem more disheartening than triumphant. However, Mumford anticipates the criticism to come regarding the tragic sense of life Clarel comes to understand. By stoically accepting his own powerlessness, Clarel, according to Mumford, displays the heroic capacities Melville applauds in his other heroes. However distressed by the limitations of the verse, Mumford praises Melville’s own concerns for society—the inevitable failings of a culture driven by industrial development and scientific advancement—as exhibited throughout the poem in the debates among the pilgrims. Mumford also notes the social commentary of Clarel to be well ahead of its time. Kenny feels strongly enough about Mumford’s contributions to call them “the first genuine treatment [of Clarel] in any comprehensive form” (Kenny 59).
The 1930s

The American critic Willard Thorp (1938) found the poem an insurmountable challenge to any reader not overly familiar with Melville’s “primary images, themes, and allusions” (Clarel 548). While noting the poem held invaluable evidence for any reader interested in Melville’s later thought, Thorp withheld hope that many readers would find the patience to decipher the poem’s cryptic length. Kenny interprets Thorp as does Bezanson, as “a final statement or a resolution of the earlier works” of Melville’s career (Kenny 59). For all of the insight offered in this regard, however, Kenny understands Thorp to lament that “Melville sacrificed the ‘poetry’ of the work” (59).

Both Bezanson and Kenny applaud the French critic Jean Simon’s Herman Melville: Marin, Metaphysicien, et Poete (1939) as the single-most enthusiastic consideration of the poem at its time. From the perspective of a Romantic critic, Simon challenges the reader to read the poem. Bezanson summarizes Simon’s laudatory position as “an extraordinary revelation of a tormented soul, [offering] valuable commentary on the major religions, a fine picture of a complex age, and, occasionally, astonishing poetic flashes” (Clarel 548). Only when Simon speculates regarding the dates of composition for the two volumes of the poem do Bezanson and Kenny offer skepticism. Because Simon reads the two volumes as exhibiting distinctly different spiritual states in Melville’s life, he chooses to read the pessimistic position of the first volume and the far more resigned, though not optimistic, position of the second volume as an indication that Melville resigned himself to life’s inscrutability. Bezanson notes this conclusion to be a “speculative plunge” (Clarel 548) while Kenny calls this conclusion a “shrewd but unfounded guess” (Kenny 59).
The 1940s

William Braswell's *Melville's Religious Thought: An Essay in Interpretation* (1943) briefly considers *Clarel* and its ability to offer the reader a detailed understanding of Melville's spiritual concerns for a society characterized by acquisitiveness. Braswell articulates Melville's critical views of science and progress as pursuits that fail to acknowledge the value of elements from the past, like legend and tradition. These cultural advances, Braswell speculates, made Melville more sympathetic to the Catholic Church, whose imperviousness to change does not always accept that advances in knowledge necessarily offer better alternatives to life. Braswell further characterizes Melville's post-1852 viewpoints as progressively more cynical. Braswell, according to Bezanson, calls "attention to doubts of God's benevolence, elements of the Gnostic heresy, increased appreciation of Catholicism, and the continuing influence of Christ's doctrine of love" (*Clarel* 549).

Henry Wells (1943) published an enthusiastic essay on the poem in the vein of Simon. While offering no great substantive reading of the poem, Wells offers encouragement to future readers, noting that past readers overstress the shortcomings without attempting to find the noteworthy and admirable. Wells offers little in-depth analysis, but offers hope that future readers will be as patient with the poem as he claims himself to be. For this to be the case, though, Wells notes readers must also accept the challenges of poets like Dickinson, Emerson, and Dante. In a lengthier study of American poetry also published in 1943, however, Wells discusses Melville's work with regard to "style, symbolism, and intellectual temper" along the lines of "a definably native tradition rooted in Emerson, Thoreau, and some of Whittier, and flowering in
Dickinson and Robinson” (Clarel 549). Wells notes how the “typical force and restlessness of an American temperament in the prosody and themes, and in certain characters” (549) of the poem provide the reader with further evidence that Melville’s strides to achieve grandeur in his work provided “‘the most enlivening consequences for his art’” (549).

William Ellery Sedgwick’s Herman Melville: The Tragedy of Mind (1945) addresses Clarel in terms of character analysis and speculates regarding Melville’s reasoning for his form choices. Sedgwick praises the form as an example of Melville’s “counter-revolution in his consciousness” (Sedgwick 203), a change brought about by social and ideological developments. Sedgwick argues that the “tragedy of mind” from his work’s subtitle addresses an “unchecked idealism” (215) whereby the mind becomes arid, and the heart incapable of love, at the realization that the ideal lies beyond reach. He notes Clarel to be Melville’s acceptance of realism, rather than idealistic romanticism, and as evidence of the important adaptation on the poet’s part. Sedgwick points to Melville’s Catholic sympathies as evidence of this change. Equally important, Sedgwick notes Melville’s horror at the ramifications of the Civil War as contributing to this spiritual development.5

Van Wyck Brooks briefly speculates regarding Clarel in his lengthy consideration of American poets in The Times of Melville and Whitman (1947). Brooks believes the poem to be no great work, though he applauds Melville’s ambition for it, speculating that

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4 The 1945 Harvard UP edition was republished in 1962 by Russell & Russell, Inc. The latter serves as the source for the present study.

5 For a thorough rendering of the Civil War’s impact on Melville’s artistic, intellectual, and emotional conscience, see Stanton Garner, The Civil War World of Herman Melville (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1993).

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Melville’s inability to continue writing prose led to his switch to writing verse. Melville’s late start in writing verse, Brooks concludes, limited his capacities in these efforts. Reading the poem biographically, Brooks notes Melville’s distrust and fears for the growing mechanized world. Though the faith-doubt debate permeates the poem, Brooks believes *Clarel’s* “wooden rhetoric and refractory thought,” along with “its jogtrot metre and its characters vaguely drifting in and out” (Brooks 249) undermine the ambitious hopes any reader may have.

Geoffrey Stone’s biography *Melville* (1949) offers criticism of the poem from a Catholic perspective and finds *Clarel* to be Melville’s “resolute grappling” (Stone 281) with faith. As a whole, Stone finds the “tortured syntax, the rhythmic monotony . . . make *Clarel* a second-rate piece of work, in the kindest judgment” (277-8), but one that he quickly qualifies to be the work of a first-rate mind. Throughout his character study, Stone finds there to be “no dramatic impact of character” (294). As Stone sees endurance to be the most important theme in the poem, he argues that any “justification of life is [to be] found on the subrational level in what might be called our mere animal persistence” (296). All that man can understand is his day-to-day suffering. This conclusion reinforces Mumford’s earlier reading of the poem as a testament to stoicism.

Richard Chase (1949) argues the poem to be Clarel’s process of learning. Chase argues that the other pilgrims in the poem serve as potential educators for Clarel where he must observe and distill a manner of living from the competing extreme examples. Chase calls Clarel’s pursuit, his learning process, the search for an “intelligent point of view” (Chase 243), one not limited by dogmatic insistence from a position of belief or disbelief. Chase argues that Rolfe is the most complete teacher for Clarel. Because Chase notes
Dante to be an influence for Melville’s poem of return, he links Rolfe to the role of Virgil, leading Clarel into the depths of Hell before a return to Paradise. Chase further discusses the prominent symbols of the poem—aridness, blindness, the sterility of modern life—as reinforcing Melville’s career-long hope for what Kenny calls a “conducive culture” (Kenny 63), one in which man need not toil fruitlessly.

The 1950s

Newton Arvin’s biography *Herman Melville* (1950) focuses its criticism of *Clarel* on the stature of the work as a poem, but also character analysis. The poem’s prosaic qualities, Arvin argues, come from Melville’s mastery of language as he seamlessly weaves the familiar and the unfamiliar, the contemporary and the archaic. Though Arvin tempers his enthusiasm with a critique of the poem’s length and form, he does note *Clarel*’s singularity with regard to its capacity for displaying Melville’s intellectual concerns in the latter part of his life. Arvin notes: “[W]hat counts is not the action—there is the least possible of that—but the drama of thought and argument[.]” (Arvin 270). He concludes Clarel to be too poorly conceived as a character and Rolfe to be the poem’s great triumph. While Arvin may overstate the case when he calls Melville the most interesting writer of verse following the Civil War, excluding Whitman, he believes the poem a storehouse of “clues . . . to the ‘philosophy’ that, unsystematic and intuitive as of course it was, became the spiritual home of Melville’s declining years” (277-8). To understand Melville, Arvin contends, one needs to read *Clarel*.

Ronald Mason’s *The Spirit Above the Dust* (1951) takes its title from *Clarel*, but spends comparatively little time with the poem. He does, however, attempt to give form

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6 Mason’s work was republished in 1972 and this, not the 1951 edition, stands as the source for the present study.
to the poem's formlessness and lavishes extensive praise on the work. Mason offers a
forthright plot summary, character analysis, and assessment of Melville's interests in the
Catholic Church. In conclusion, Mason offers that an act of faith alone, regardless of the
improbable resolution of doubt as its result, works more toward easing internal conflict.
Pointing to the Epilogue, Mason recognizes Melville's triumph, not Clare's. Where
many critics see the conflicting philosophical positions of the poem as evidence of the
futility of resolution, Mason notes *Clarel* always offers a "compensating element"
(Mason 244) through which the tragic is made bearable, even comforting.

Leon Howard's *Herman Melville* (1951) assesses Melville's career contributions.
Mediating his discussion of *Clarel* through the "Customhouse" period of Melville's life,
Howard makes some helpful observations regarding the influence of Arnold's essays on
Melville and the absurdity of the writer's task. He reads the poem as a continuation of
the *Mardi* design—"a young man's quest for happiness, in company with a group of
talkative characters representing distinctly different points of view" (Howard 298)—and
points towards Melville's psychological interests in the relationship between pilgrims to
supercede the importance of reaching any specific philosophical conclusions. Melville
explores, according to Howard, how a character might "indulge doubt without falling into
complacency" (305). Because of this focus, Howard accepts the failings of the poem's
philosophical inquiries without ever stating explicitly that the inquiry itself contains its
own failings. Howard prefers not to judge the poem on its successes or failures of task.
He notes the Epilogue offers an "emotional satisfaction" (307) rather than any Platonic
conception of Truth. Like Mason, Howard seems to suggest the emotional satisfaction to
be Melville's, not Clare's, by the end of the poem because there is very little that can
satisfy Clarel by his return to Jerusalem. If despair at the impossibility of resolving questions of faith and doubt led Melville to write *Clarel*, Howard notes Melville’s emotional satisfaction to be contained in the poem’s publication as it “resolved the major conflicts in Melville’s mind and made him a whole man who could face uncertainty without despair” (309).

Milton Stern contemplates the collision of the ideal and real in a brief consideration of *Clarel* in *The Fine Hammered Steel of Herman Melville* (1957). Stern argues that Clarel, another of Melville’s idealistic characters, makes a “philosophical voyage, which is symbolized by a physical journey” (Stern 10). Calling Clarel’s quest a journey for paradise lost, Stern argues a similarity between pilgrims like Rolfe, Vine, Mortmain, and Ungar insofar as each pursues an idealistic faith. But Stern also criticizes this pursuit as a kind of philosophical naiveté, one that reveals the self-limiting nature of the pursuit. For Stern, *Clarel* exists as another example of Melville’s naturalism. Stern’s viewpoint here helps the reader to appreciate that tragedies like *Clarel* stand as evidence of Melville’s belief that western ideological positions no longer held their veracity; and worse, they were crumbling. But, Stern does allow the possibility that Clarel learns the inherent flaws of his idealism by the end of the poem without suggesting Clarel does anything with this new knowledge. If, as Stern notes, “absolute Vice and Virtue are two shadows cast by the same nothing” (11); and this is the realization Clarel reaches by the end of the poem; Clarel possesses the ability to “reconcile the disparities between his own history and the assumptions which a pilgrimage to the Holy Land requires” (10).
The 1960s

Merlin Bowen’s character analysis in *The Long Encounter* (1960) focuses on Clarel, Nehemiah, Rolfe, Vine, Mortmain, Ungar, and Derwent, arguing each searches “for a life-sustaining balance—a vision adequate to the needs of both heart and head”—(Bowen 253). Discovering the “essential nature” (266) of these major characters to be linked to their respective meditations on the Mar Saba Palm, Bowen draws a distinction between public and private confession. He further argues a connection between the individual pilgrim’s physical proximity to the palm and his respective proximity to “truth” (274). Ultimately, he reinforces the theme of endurance to be Melville’s greatest concern. Bowen takes Clarel’s words as his own to lament that future readers will only acknowledge this claim in relatively small numbers: “. . . that which shall not be / It ought to be!” (4.30.117-8).

Richard Fogle (1960) extends the discussion of the competing dualities of doubt and belief throughout the poem. Fogle, interested in what Clarel actually learns over the course of the poem, chiefly concerns himself with the dichotomous relationship between word and action. Though he claims there is much “talk,” Fogle sees little “action.” Because there is so little action, Fogle argues, Clarel cannot translate the process of learning, his intellectual intercourse, into the means of enacting it. He concludes that it remains unclear whether Clarel is better off by the poem’s end than prior to its beginnings. Fogle also focuses on character analysis (Clarel, Derwent, Rolfe, Vine, Mortmain, and Ungar). Reserving the second half of his discussion for the Epilogue, Fogle calls the final canto Melville’s “own summary of his argument” (Fogle 109) throughout the poem. Fogle notes the clash between the natural and the supernatural
worlds, the realms of man and God, respectively, to be forever separate and distinct. Only the human heart capable of hope, Fogle argues, can span the gap satisfactorily. But, Fogle acknowledges the improbability in the end: "God and man are always the same, and an honest reading of history permits of accurate prediction of the inevitable disaster" (116).

John Bernstein considers Clarel another example of Melville’s fascination with rebellious characters in Pacifism and Rebellion in the Writings of Herman Melville (1964), further claiming Melville’s poetry “ranks with the very best verse ever produced in America” (Bernstein 183). Bernstein sees pacifism and rebellion, not belief and disbelief, to be the competing polarities in the poem. He draws the boundaries between these two groups, focusing on specific characters: pacifists, like Nehemiah and Derwent; rebels, like Celio, Mortmain, and Ungar. Bernstein notes how the primary battle lies between Derwent and Ungar with Clarel, ultimately, siding with the rebels. In considering the resolve of the rebels, Bernstein briefly considers the importance of an absurd reading of the poem. Here, Bernstein seems to anticipate Camus’s own understanding of the absurd.

The 1970s

John Seeyle’s Melville: The Ironic Diagram (1970) argues “the extinguishing of [Clarel’s] faith” (Seeyle 131) by the poem’s conclusion, but he reinforces the cyclical nature of the pilgrimage. Seeyle notes Melville’s predecessors on form to be Chaucer, Spenser, Milton, Wordsworth, and Tennyson; but he also acknowledges the constricted tetrameter serves well the tensions of the poem’s overall mood. However, he claims the optimism of the Epilogue to be too easy in light of the somber nature of the rest of the
poem. Derwent and Mortmain are Seeyle’s primary concerns during his character
analysis as representatives of opposite ends of a spectrum, but like so many other critics,
he champions Rolfe as the “most admirable pilgrim” (144). For Seeyle, the pilgrimage of
note remains internal, not external. He argues that the external pilgrimage produces “no
final goal, no destination: the voyage out is a complete circle, a static configuration, and
the surviving travelers return unchanged” (144).

In *Tortured Synthesis* (1971), Joseph Knapp discusses *Clarel* with a comprehensive
clarity that makes this work, like that of Bezanson and Kenny, an essential resource for
any interested reader. Knapp argues the historical context of the poem, the work as
poetry, and a continuation of Melville’s use of endurance as a heroic ideal. The major
focus of Knapp’s work, however, is character analysis. He dedicates three chapters to
delineating the character groupings according to their capacities as guides for Clarel. The
minor guides—Nehemiah, Derwent, and Margoth—or “yea-sayers” offer reductive,
simplistic views regarding the world. As such, they offer Clarel little guidance for coping
with ideas that question presupposed truths. Knapp calls Nehemiah Melville’s lampoon
of fundamentalism’s scriptural literalism, millennialism, and inability to reconcile the self
with God. Derwent’s easy optimism is equally dogmatic when compared to Nehemiah’s
literalism and Knapp calls Derwent no more than a tourist, spiritually as well as
intellectually. Margoth, like Derwent, reveals a dogmatic acceptance of science’s
capacity to reveal hidden truth, only after rejecting his own Judaism for its dogmatism.
Knapp concludes the minor guides to be particularly naïve. Knapp’s major guides fall
into two categories of “nay-sayers.” He notes Mortmain and Ungar to exhibit an

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7 For an earlier article used within the book, see Joseph G. Knapp, “Melville’s *Clarel*: Dynamic
existential alienation that laments contemporary society's capacity to dispossess man's hopeful optimism. Knapp suggests Mortmain's hesitation at the Mar Saba Palm reveals his spiritual failure because he cannot make the required leap of faith. Similarly, Ungar refuses to compromise between an atheism that brings with it incomprehensible dread and Christianity as practiced and revered during the Middle Ages. Knapp calls this refusal to compromise an indication of Ungar's authenticity. Knapp sees the Catholic pragmatism of Rolfe and the Dominican monk as evidence of Melville's sympathetic admiration for the Church's capacity to endure through time.

Knapp summarizes his position on endurance by highlighting its symbolic presence within the poem. The "eclipse imagery" throughout the poem underscores the difficult position of the faithful penitent. Though God cannot be experienced physically (seen or heard, for example), one must believe He exists. Knapp cites Melville's eclipse imagery (and the death scenes that close all four parts of the poem) to highlight this point. Though the sun cannot be seen during an eclipse, it still exists. It endures. From this example in nature, Knapp argues, man must draw his spiritual inspiration. While suffering stands as life's only certainty, the individual must accept his own powerlessness in order to endure. Knapp concludes that Melville's career leads to Clare's statement of endurance. Hope exists in continuing the struggle when there seems no reason to do so.

Stanley Brodwin (1971) discusses the poem as typifying the dilemma of the modern man. No matter where he looks, Brodwin argues, man cannot find the solace he seeks in the meager offerings of society: religion, philosophy, economic/industrial/scientific progress. Brodwin continues an examination of the readily acknowledged presence of the faith-doubt problem, but suggests the possibility of connecting these existentialist
notions to Camus’s notions of the absurd. Because Brodwin sees endurance to be the crucial characteristic of any pilgrim wishing to find peace, he intuitively suggests embracing the absurd in all its absurdity. Only by releasing his insistence for knowledge can man truly be free.

Kenny’s *Herman Melville’s Clarel: A Spiritual Autobiography* (1973) claims the poem to be a contemplation of morality. Kenny starts his analysis from Melville’s belief in “individual responsibility as a prerequisite for ethics” (Kenny 10). From this sense, Kenny discusses the greater pattern at work in all of Melville’s work: quester seeks identification with something greater than himself; quester realizes no such identification is possible; quester accepts or rejects the enigmatic world. Kenny addresses the poem’s symbology and Melville’s relationship to Catholicism before focusing the largest part of the book on the eight modes of living offered to Clarel through the example of his fellow pilgrims: orthodox religion, modernity’s advancement, hedonism, romantic love, misanthropy, resignation, eclecticism, and endurance/stoicism. Kenny claims Clarel must experience each mode of living before he comes to a decision. Clarel’s choice of the endurance/stoicism position highlights for Kenny the fact that Clarel must exist in solitude as relationships with things and others do not diminish the anxiety faced by the insolvability of metaphysical questions (212). Kenny summarizes: “Loneliness in calamity marks . . . and signifies the true human condition” (214).

Nina Baym (1974) discusses eroticism and the ambiguous sexuality of many characters in the poem by contrasting the supposed ends of the spiritual and physical pursuits of Clarel. She calls the pursuit of religious idealism masculine, acknowledging the self-negating vow of celibacy. The pursuit of carnal love stands as the feminine
counterpart and, though spiritually isolating and blasphemous, holds the prospect for Clarel’s salvation. By claiming Melville’s construction of Christianity depends upon love for one’s mother, Baym notes Clarel’s isolation as an orphan to foreshadow the failure to consummate his love for Ruth. Without a love for his mother, Clarel, Baym argues, cannot hope to love Ruth. The action of the poem for Baym revolves around “Clarel’s meeting with, rejection of and final — futile— return to Ruth” (Baym, “The Erotic Motif” 318). She further sees the pilgrimage itself as Clarel’s “desire to escape” (322) which she equates with celibacy and as a link to his homosexuality. The argument towards celibacy becomes a retraction from life cycles, the representative physical corollary to the purity of spiritual, religious union. It is self-negation.

Franklin Walker (1974) offers a biographical and geographical reading of Clarel that owes much to the previous work of Melville’s early biographers, among them Weaver, Mumford, Chase, Arvin, and Mason. Walker superimposes Melville’s journals from his trip to the Holy Land while documenting specific time and place references for the pilgrims. He offers an extensive plot/place summary without much interpretation. One of the more interesting contributions, however, is the rendering of the significant overlap between the days of Clarel’s journey and their theological significance in the Christian calendar. Walker’s work does not focus entirely on Melville and this may explain the limitations of the study. He discusses pilgrimage in the Holy Land through the works of Browne and Twain as well.

Agnes Cannon (1975 and 1976) published two works addressing Clarel as a confirmation of Melville’s literary and philosophical influences. By studying Melville’s marginalia in his copies of Emerson’s “The Poet” and The Conduct of Life; Arnold’s
essays on Heinrich Heine and Maurice de Guerin from *Essays in Criticism*; Madame de Stael’s essay “Of Poetry” from *Germany*; Richard Hooper’s Preface to Chapman’s Homer; Shelley’s “A Defense of Poetry;” and Schiller’s *Poems and Ballads*; Cannon argues the genesis of Melville’s rationale for *Clarel’s* form and its intention. Cannon postulates that a detailed consideration of Melville’s understanding of art, particularly his literary and philosophical influences, contributes to his recognition of the profound effects of poetry on man’s capacity for self-awareness. This ephemeral sense of knowledge, however, still represents the often-discussed Middle Way between the contradictory pulls of the head and heart. In a subsequent article, Cannon re-focuses these energies directly on Melville’s marginalia from Arnold’s *Essays in Criticism* in order to trace what she believes to be Melville’s final reasoning for selecting *Clarel’s* form. Cannon notes Arnold’s influence on Melville to come from the former’s lengthy essays on Homer, Milton, Shakespeare, Pope, Chapman, and Cowpers. From these poets, Melville comes to appreciate that the “quality of thought,” as noted by Arnold, contributes to the poem’s nobility and that the quality of thought is attributable to the “individual personality of the artist” (Cannon, “On Translating Clarel” 177). Like the kinder reviewers, Cannon believes Melville’s efforts to achieve Arnold’s “grand style” more than compensate for the prosodic lapses. Cannon closes the essay on a laudatory note: “His achievement in *Clarel* is impressive . . . On the whole, *Clarel* is plain; *Clarel* is natural; *Clarel* is rapid, and above all, *Clarel* is noble. If it does not quite maintain a grand style, it does achieve a definite grandeur of its own reflecting credit upon its author” (Cannon, “On Translating Clarel” 177). Many readers may choose to take issue

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8 For one of many discussions of the Middle Way, see William B. Dillingham, “'Neither Believer Nor Infidel': Themes of Melville’s Poetry,” *The Personalist* 46 (1965): 501-16.
with the claim to "definite grandeur," but Cannon concludes the aspirations for *Clarel*, if nothing else, warrant the reader's admiration.  

Bernard Rosenthal (1979) argues *Clarel* to be Melville's continuation of the search for religious clarity begun by *Typee*, *Mardi*, *Moby-Dick*, and *Pierre*. He claims that Melville's exploration of the Wandering Jew theme in *Clarel* "emerged almost ineluctably from his long confrontations with the ambiguities of Christianity" (Rosenthal 167). Rosenthal's primary interest is character analysis (Nathan, Nehemiah, Derwent, Rolfe, Ungar, Vine, the Lyonese) and the impact each of these pilgrims ultimately has on Clarel. Though he interprets the pilgrims as many variations of the Wandering Jew, Rosenthal observes, "Melville's religious analysis most importantly centers on a theological drama casting Protestantism and Catholicism as the central characters acting in a wasteland setting" (176-7). Rosenthal includes Judaism in the "theological drama" and argues that Clarel explores the possibilities offered by each pilgrim before he comes to the conclusion that faith fails for him. When faith fails, Rosenthal continues, Clarel substitutes human love in the place of divine love, but simply substituting one kind of theology for another does not serve well. When Clarel discovers Ruth dead, he realizes, according to Rosenthal, his own wandering must continue. When Rosenthal turns towards an examination of the Epilogue as enlightening Clarel's condition, he offers the possibility of hope. Though the narrator offers no guarantees regarding Clarel's future, Rosenthal offers optimism to be valuable. The Epilogue "seems to affirm that while the

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9 For further readings on Melville's literary and philosophical influences, see Bryan C. Short, "Form as Vision in Herman Melville's *Clarel*," *American Literature* 50 (January 1979): 553-69; and Shirley M. Dettlaff, "Ionian Form and Esau’s Waste: Melville’s View of Art in *Clarel*," *American Literature* 54 (May 1982): 212-28.

Messiah of the wandering Jews may never have come, since we must wander, we do well to hope” (189).

The 1980s

Basem Ra’ad (1981) discusses Melville’s use of death as an educational device for Clarel. In the step-by-step acquisition of knowledge concerning death, Ra’ad claims Clarel moves toward an enlightened form of isolation. The “constructive kind of bereavement” Clarel experiences moves him closer to the goals of “consciousness, self-reliance, and balanced survival” (Ra’ad 15). Ra’ad constructs three groupings for the six deaths: 1) Celio and Mortmain die so that Clarel understands the importance of his own psychological development as part of his consciousness; 2) Nathan and Nehemiah die so that Clarel understands unproductive illusions produce spiritual stasis; and Melville makes their deaths “dramatically physical and external” (16) to emphasize this point; 3) Agar and Ruth die to synthesize the internal qualities of the former and external qualities of the latter. Ra’ad claims these deaths help Clarel to “unlearn” his theological training and that it brings him to a point of enlightened isolation by the poem’s conclusion.

Joseph Flibbert (1981) focuses his discussion on the function of dreams, noting Clarel and Nehemiah to account for the majority of the references to dreaming throughout the poem. Arguing from a Catholic perspective, Flibbert reworks many ideas addressed by past critics regarding the pilgrims as vehicles for ideas rather than individuated creations. However, Flibbert stresses the importance of the process of questioning. Though the pilgrims ask many questions throughout the course of the pilgrimage, very few answers are found. Flibbert’s argument establishes the following analogical relationship: question is to answer as imagination is to fact. His analogy stresses the necessary
relationship between the two, but reinforces the need for the pilgrims in the poem to focus their energies on the first of the two terms. Because many pilgrims seem to have an “answer” to any question in any situation, it appears that most answers depend upon previous considerations without being particularly receptive to re-evaluation. Flibbert argues that many of the pilgrims are short-sighted in this regard, but he implies that clear sight serves the individual no better than deluded or deranged sight harms (Flibbert 134).

Warren Rosenberg (1984) examines Melville’s thematic use of the erotic as a means of exhibiting the more mature artist. Rosenberg speculates that Melville’s switch from prose to poetry indicates his maturation as a writer and draws a parallel between Melville’s search and Clarel’s, claiming each pursues the erotic as a means conquering the self. Rosenberg makes his case by detailing the sublimation of sexuality in Mardi and Pierre where the “epistemological quest and the transcendental quest for love and belief are constantly sullied by the erotic” (Rosenberg 71). In Clarel, however, Melville no longer feels the “guilt and confusion which marred his prose works” (72). When Melville accepted the existence of the erotic in art and life, he allowed himself to place Clarel before the same dilemma. Simultaneous to his spiritual/intellectual pursuits, Clarel, Rosenberg claims, considers an erotic physical existence from multiple perspectives: “celibacy, homosexuality, hedonism, and heterosexuality” (74). The erotic pursuits address Clarel’s anxieties more clearly than the metaphysical pursuits, though each is linked to the other as an epistemological “knowing.” Rosenberg claims Clarel needs to accept his sexuality before he can integrate himself socially. From such an acceptance comes maturity and Rosenberg offers this to be Melville’s recognition as well. The Melville/Clarel pursuit of the erotic becomes an attempt, and ultimately, a
successful one, at conquering the self. Rosenberg concludes the erotic, those physical, earthly, passions and desires, is fused with the spiritual, those metaphysical/religious passions and desires, and linked by a common quest to produce a complete whole.

Hershel Parker (1986) challenges Bezanson's characterization of Vine's moral strength. Parker's assessment qualifies four points made by Bezanson: 1) Vine's unique genius (Parker claims this genius is deteriorating, if not gone entirely); 2) Vine's aesthetic sensibility (Parker argues no such sensibility exists, or at best as dying embers); 3) Vine's speeches as revelatory (Parker claims the revelation to be unflattering); and 4) Vine's moral sense (Parker draws a distinction between Vine's desire to be moralizing and his moral sense). Parker's reading of Vine considers his descriptions by the narrator, his gestures and brief speeches, as well as his long speeches. When Parker turns towards the biographical relationship between Melville and Hawthorne, he concludes Melville's portrait of Vine to be a reconsideration of the validity of the claims to Hawthorne's genius (Parker, "The Character of Vine" 112-3). If the critical position regarding the Vine/Hawthorne connection seems beyond disruption, Parker observes the contradictory actions of Vine in regard to his words and his actions as being, at the very least, Melville's kindest treatment of a relationship full of ambiguity and sadness. Parker concludes: "For Vine's deeds often reveal an erratic staginess and contempt for himself and others, and his words, however prettily melancholy they are, reflect the shallowness and discontinuity of his mind" (113).

The 1990s

James Duban and William J. Scheick (1990) discuss the significance of Melville's narrative voices, the *dramatis personae*, as comparable to those employed by Robert
Browning in his poetry and signal a critical shift towards consideration of the narrator in *Clarel*. Though the discussion deals primarily with Browning’s “Pictor Ignotis” and Melville’s *Billy Budd*, the observations apply equally to *Clarel*. Duban and Scheick offer “narrative indirection” as Melville’s primary artistic device with three specific characteristics: 1) asymmetry, or a fragmentation of the narrative either by a nonlinear inclusion of information or disjointed syntax; 2) hesitation, as a means of undermining the reader’s confidence in the narrator’s authority; and 3) verbal traces, or encoded clues provided by the author hinting at the narrator’s unreliability (Duban and Scheick 221-30). The purpose of the study is discovery, to find a means of discerning between Melville and his narrator, a distinction many critics fail to acknowledge or refuse to make. Duban and Scheick limit the discussion of Melville’s influences for narrative indirection to include Irving, Hawthorne, and Browning, but note the existence of the “poetic historian” (233) as a means of suggesting the unreliability of the narrator comes from the difficulty of his self-imposed task.

The single-most influential contributor to the study of the poem, Bezanson supplements The Northwestern-Newberry Edition of *Clarel* (1991) with his Historical and Critical Note, a revised form of the Introduction to his own Hendricks House edition of *Clarel* (1960). Bezanson outlines the poem’s biographical basis, the composition and publication histories, the critical reception (to 1960), provides an extensive character analysis, investigates Melville’s sources, discusses the prosody of the poem, as well as offering an interpretive analysis. A culmination of the work started with his doctoral dissertation from Yale University (1943), Bezanson’s supplement establishes a comprehensive foundation from which all subsequent investigation necessarily begins.
Shizuo Suyama (1993) traces the patterns of death throughout the poem, noting the presence of the “death-moth” near the end of the “Jerusalem” part of the poem to be the portent for the four deaths concluding each part of the poem. Suyama argues these four deaths provide the poem with a structuring device and foreshadow the tragedy that must befall Clarel by the end of the poem. Suyama also notes a pattern for these four deaths: non-pilgrim woman (the Armenian bride whose memory haunts Clarel throughout the poem), pilgrim man (Nehemiah), pilgrim man (Mortmain), non-pilgrim woman (Ruth). Noting death to conclude each part of the poem; Suyama argues that the pilgrims must constantly consider death and its proximity. Wandering amongst a dead land; wandering with their fears of dying faith; the pilgrims cannot possibly forget the proximity of death—it permeates their existence. Suyama, however, does not discuss the significance of the pattern between non-pilgrim woman and pilgrim man except to acknowledge the apparent rhyme scheme for these four parts: “[D]oes Clarel rhyme nonpilgrim female, pilgrim male, pilgrim male, nonpilgrim female? Or does it rhyme Via Dolorosa, wilderness, wilderness, Via Dolorosa? Or Valley of Kedron, Dead Sea, Dead Sea, Valley of Kedron?” (Suyama 164-5). When coupled with Ra’ad’s contribution, the reader may conclude understanding the significance of these patterns to be an extension of Clarel’s educational process.

In Melville’s Protest Theism: The Hidden and Silent God in Clarel (1993), Stan Goldman extends the observations from his 1989 publication addressing Melville’s use of four distinctive narrative voices in Clarel. Goldman’s notions of protest theism suggest the entirety of Clarel deserves to be read as a response to the always hidden and silent

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God. The pilgrim must turn away (protest) from God as a statement of disbelief before the return can make a statement of true faith. Goldman’s return ensures that faith is honest and heroic, rather than common and easy. The return to God comes with the recognition that God’s imminence rests within the human heart where the human notions of faith, reverence, and charity triumph. As such, Goldman reads the poem’s Epilogue as an optimistic summation of the four narrative voices, not as an unbalanced and confusing addition. Hope becomes the final sum that stresses the internal, individual divinity of Clarel and the means to salvation.

Like Flibbert, Goldman assigns a great deal of importance to the pilgrim’s ability to ask questions without regard to finding particular answers. Goldman believes the “quest for God is our ability to ask questions” because “Questions unasked . . . are far worse than questions unanswered” (Goldman, Melville’s Protest Theism 71). Goldman further posits that salvation comes from asking questions. The pilgrims incapable or unwilling to ask questions are doomed. All the rest, to varying degrees, remove the necessity of any revelation by God as to His motives for creating man’s inscrutable existence. The question itself comes as close to the answer as man is capable (69-72). Goldman’s assessment depends upon faith, but he believes this to be the only solace for man’s condition because faith maintains ethical control over man’s actions (131-5). For Goldman, faith becomes a way of ordering the individual’s life because faith necessitates an appreciation of the unknown and the mysterious (137). In essence, faith necessitates reverence. Only the faithful characters in Clarel will be free from the constant pursuit of knowledge as a means, though always unsuccessful, of understanding God.
Zephrya Porat (1994) provides an interpretation of *Clarel* that challenges the critical position that Melville by the end of his life came to accept life's unknowable mysteries and unavoidable annihilation, as suggested by *Billy Budd*. Porat argues that Melville's Romantic revolt never ceased and that *Clarel* provides the evidence for this position. By inverting most conventional readings of the poem's heroes, Porat argues the heroes are the pilgrims willing to undertake the Promethean revolt against God, those willing to reaffirm the claims of the Gnostic heresy (Porat 31). Between the believers (Christodolus, the Dominican monk, Derwent, and Nehemiah) and the infidels (Margoth, Celio, Mortmain, Rolfe, and Ungar), Porat chooses Margoth as exemplary of the revolt because his willingness to revolt affords him the opportunity of discovering the "Promethean Ledge" (37). Porat further claims Melville's "Judaism" is constructed as a means of charging "God with responsibility for the source of evil; it also deems man himself the source of salvation [sic] and redress" (39). Margoth, in his willingness to be responsible for his own "answers," assumes the responsibility of salvation to the extent that it is possible. It is this "audacity" (40) that Porat finds most noteworthy: "'Judaism,' then, has become a metaphor for replacing the reign of God with the rule of man—meaning, the rule of those who, like Margoth, walk by sight, not by faith, and eat of 'the bread of wisdom'" (41). Another infidel, Rolfe, too, turns traditional "Christian oracles (allegories) on their head" (42) by insisting on man's divinity through reason. Porat claims that Clarel prefers these heretical positions because of "their condemnations of the fool to praises of redemption grounded in the folly of the cross" (34). Porat's character analysis, read through the Cainite tactics of scriptural inversion (36-7), offers the freshest perspective to challenge the assumptions of previous critics.
Clark Davis’s *After the Whale: Melville in the Wake of Moby-Dick* (1995) offers an interpretation of *Clarel* that, like Porat, uses character analysis to champion pilgrims previously given little consideration. As regards the poem as a whole, Davis sees Clarel’s search to have two specific goals: the “divine body” of Christ, as well as a realization of his own “physical body,” of which Clarel seems “virginal” at best (Clark 129). Davis calls these competing searches part of the “problematic relationship between mental and physical fulfillment,” (125) noting the differences between an idealized existence, textual or theological, and the reality upon which either is based, the physical Holy Land (129). Davis groups Clarel’s fellow pilgrims according to the value they place on the experiences of the body. He sees three kinds of pilgrims: 1) ascetics, either religious or philosophical; 2) Dionysians, meaning hedonists; and 3) seekers, those desiring synthesis of the previous two (139). Davis believes the seekers to be the more balanced pilgrims because their search tends towards moderation. Djalea and Agath refuse categorization by opting for the Middle Way between the two (143). Neither Rolfe nor Vine champions one particular vision and finds solace in the same Middle Way.

Davis echoes Baym when he suggests Clarel struggles to accept the pulls of masculine spirituality and feminine physicality; he is caught “between an intellectually poor but physically rich relationship with Ruth and an intellectually rich but physically impossible union with Vine” (138). By considering the created “body” of text (148),

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12 A point of critical contention, Clarel’s desire for a union with Vine stems from the canto “Vine and Clarel” (2.27) that follows the encounter with the Dominican monk (to be discussed in Chapter Five). Clarel desires a brotherly union with Vine because he imagines Vine’s reserve to be indicative of hidden genius. It is understandable that Clarel would be drawn to such a character, but his interpretation of Vine’s silence doesn’t fit. Because he wants to find a guide, Clarel looks at many options. The language of the canto certainly can be understood to contain sexual connotations.
Davis claims *Clarel* becomes an experience of language and this highlights the “possibility of fulfillment despite the apparent failure of the search” (150). Davis observes Clarel achieves neither physical nor mental fulfillment, but his recognition of endurance stands as his primary accomplishment. When Clarel “Vanishes in the obscurer town” (4.34.56) along the Via Crucis, he willingly condemns himself to questing, all the while understanding that no objects stand as the goal of this quest. He walks on; he endures.

Biographer Laurie Robertson-Lorant’s *Melville* (1996) argues Clarel’s search to be for “an inclusive community where male and female, Jew and Gentile, Old World and New, can come together” (Robertson-Lorant 545). He seeks to synthesize the conflicting internal and external pulls that haunt him in order that he may become a more complete individual. At Nathan’s death, when Clarel desires to be with Ruth most, Talmudic law prevents his presence. To pass the mourning period, Clarel chooses to join the pilgrim group where he meets individuals from many different backgrounds. Robertson-Lorant comments that the debates during the pilgrimage, in seeking to find common intellectual and spiritual ground, reveal Melville’s dramatized Hegelian triadism—the thesis and antithesis arguments, again, attempt to yield synthesis (547). Robertson-Lorant praises Rolfe as a model for successful synthesis. He balances the extremes of personality that seem to haunt and destroy other pilgrims. Rolfe’s intellect, his “brain austere” is balanced by his emotion, “his genial heart.” Robertson-Lorant argues the “insincere” (552) Epilogue too tidily concludes the 149 cantos that precede it and the switch from iambic tetrameter to “end-stopped, metronomically regular lines of iambic pentameter” (552) reads as too platitudinous in regards to the requests for “deep-diving” that
characterize the rest of the poem. After briefly acknowledging the poem’s British and American reviews, Robertson-Lorant concludes, “Clarel is little read because of its length and complexity, its abstruse references, tortured syntax, and often stilted style. Yet it is a marvelously ambitious poem, indisputably great in its own way” (553).

Douglas Robillard discusses Melville’s interests in painting, architecture, and reliquaries as made evident through his consistent references to these art forms. *Melville and the Visual Arts* (1997) addresses the subject as an investigative means of exploring Melville’s career. One chapter specifically deals with *Clarel*. Here Robillard discusses Melville’s use of visual art, particularly Renaissance works and legends, in his construction of symbols. Robillard notes Melville’s personal travels coupled with his extensive reading of the travel literature of the time helped him to produce a work rich in landscape as well as “inscapes,” the “literary portraiture[s]” given to each pilgrim (Robillard, *Melville and the Visual Arts* 129). Melville’s artistic impressions had to compete with the physical realities he encountered in his Holy Land trip. When the two did not align, Robillard argues, Melville substituted his knowledge and appreciation for art to compensate for the lack. Robillard notes Melville’s extensive reliance on his knowledge of painting to assist the construction of the pilgrims, “often associating them with artworks” (129). Robillard discusses many of the poem’s characters, but spends the bulk of his time with Vine and Rolfe, the two most “artistic” characters. Robillard moves from the discussion of painting to architectural phenomena, noting Melville’s use of the major structures of Palestine to drive both plot and symbolic associations. Finally, Robillard notes Melville’s use of reliquaries: the Medusa shield, the medallion at Mar
Saba, Piranezi’s prints, and the pilgrims on the Via Crucis appearing “As ‘twere a frieze” (4.29.26).

Brett Zimmerman includes his 1994 publication addressing Melville’s use of star imagery into the larger *Herman Melville: Stargazer* (1998). The early article serves as Zimmerman’s preface, concerning celestial references in Melville. The focus for the analysis of Melville’s star imagery is a dual concern. Zimmerman sees Melville’s use of the stars as a nostalgic reverence for the past, a time when natural theology expressed God’s presence by virtue of Nature’s existence. As the poem concludes, however, Zimmerman notes Melville’s condemnation of science and its myth-destroying capacities. Though Ungar and Derwent become the primary proponents for natural theology (with Margoth the obvious opponent), their viewpoint suffers as scientific discovery advances. Zimmerman points to “The Inscription” (2.31) canto and its ode to the Southern Cross as typifying the collision. Margoth’s counter-ode stresses the prominent place of science in society. For the pilgrims, pagan mythology and humanity seem threatened by the rational advances of astronomy. Zimmerman notes astronomy to be an ambiguous blessing, at once capable of supporting and destroying faith.

In *Melville’s Folk Roots* (1999), Kevin Hayes discusses Melville’s use of Christian legend and tradition not as any means of articulating his own beliefs and faith; rather, as a significant statement regarding an appreciation for the aesthetic beauty both in the legends and their traditional values. Hayes notes Melville’s interests in ancient cultures by citing his brief career as a lecturer where Melville draws attention to similarities between Polynesia and Greece, noting how the former manages to maintain the purity lost by the latter. By citing Melville’s reconstruction of the Greek tale of Eteocles and
Polynices in *Mardi*, Hayes argues Melville’s reverence for ancient cultures as a transition point for his reverence for Christian legend. In spite of Melville’s personal doubts, *Clarel* acknowledges many of Christianity’s familiar legends: the Wandering Jew, Hugh of Lincoln, the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, and Simon Magus. Melville uses the legends from the past as a means of offering interpretive insight into the present (Hayes 100), as well as showing how legends become part of tradition, regardless of personal belief (101). Hayes notes Melville to have understood this relationship with legend and tradition and that *Clarel*’s pilgrimage structure afforded him the means to have his pilgrims recall and discuss the legends as significant to particular sites along the route. Though Hayes speculates regarding Melville’s trust for these legends, he seems willing to accept that Melville must have felt the legends exhibited a great deal of aesthetic beauty, and this aesthetic appreciation is the more significant recognition. Like Derwent’s comments regarding the Dominican monk, Melville must have felt, according to Hayes, the legends still possessed enough beauty to inspire a new generation of poets.

**2000 and Beyond**

Douglas Robillard’s edition of *The Poems of Herman Melville* (2000) excerpts only a handful of cantos from three of the four parts of *Clarel*, but the Introduction addresses the poem as a challenge worthy of any reader. Robillard briefly accounts for the poem’s biographical and historical significance in the Melville canon. While he restates many of the accepted positions regarding the poem’s origins and influences, Robillard argues that any comprehensive study, therefore, understanding, of the poem “would have to be a longer book than the poem itself” (Robillard, *The Poems of Herman Melville* 21). The excerpted cantos limn the pilgrims Vine, Rolfe, Ungar, Mortmain, and Derwent; exhibit
the differing degrees of belief between characters like Rolfe and Margoth; introduce the philosophical and religious discussions undertaken at the Dead Sea; and suggest the internal struggles of Clarel as the poem nears its conclusion. Taken out of the greater context, these cantos, though momentarily revealing, do not possess the strength that comes from being a part of the larger meditation. The three complete collections, *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of War, John Marr and Other Sailors,* and *Timoleon, Etc.*, reprinted here reveal an exceptional variety of Melville’s verse from 1866 until 1891. *Clarel*’s length prevents its inclusion, but Robillard’s choice to include the limited selections is noteworthy.

Hershel Parker’s second volume (2002) of his two-volume biography *Melville* summarizes *Clarel*’s history in as comprehensive a fashion as exists today. He addresses the poem through Melville’s biography with particular attention given to the stresses the poem produced not only for Melville, but for all the members of his immediate and extended family. This two-volume biography stands as the most comprehensive study of Melville’s life to date and, in spite of the many biographies preceding it, shows that more work can be done.

Though this brief history in no way intends to be a complete bibliography of the criticism of *Clarel*, it introduces a cross-section of the available material. Though the volume of criticism does not compare to *Moby-Dick*, for example, the continuing interest in this difficult work suggests that contemporary readers are more patient with the poem than many of their predecessors. Yet again, Bezanson shows the timeless value of his insight: readers are beginning to read the poem instead of dismissing it at the first signs of difficulty. With many levels of assistance such as the works cited above, the
contemporary reader holds a great advantage over earlier readers. The reader must brave the poem himself, but these critical works serve as exceptionally helpful reference points during the exploration. Though reading *Clarel* is not a destination, a task simply to be completed, the contemporary reader can appreciate the assistance offered wherever his own pilgrimage takes him.
CHAPTER THREE

THE REVERENT PILGRIM-READERS

OF THE PILGRIMAGE

As noted by critics like Clark Davis, reading is the principle activity of *Clarel*. The observation certainly applies as much to the external reader of the poem as to the internal readers. The narrator describes many of the poem’s minor characters, not just the pilgrims, participating in the activity of reading. In order to determine the greater function of this reading, the external reader must note who reads; what is being read; where and when the reading takes place; as well as determining why the character reads. Almost without exception, the characters within the poem read texts related to issues of faith. Depending on the faith of the reader in question, the texts vary in origin—some are Christian and Hebrew in origin; some are Latin and Greek in origin; some are Islamic in origin. Regardless of the text’s origin, the reader intends to reinforce his or her reverence for the legends upon which a particular faith exists. To read stories based upon legendary (or mythologized) events of the past presumes interest, curiosity, and a series of values on the part of the reader, all connected to the reader’s valuation of text as a historical record of a tradition. Obviously, and of great significance, the internal reader values text, the foundation of the reading process. The internal reader further values the past, as insight into contemporary human history, as maintained within these texts. Finally, the internal
reader values text as a means of preserving history, of connecting the past to the present, and of offering the opportunity to interpret the individual's place within this constructed tradition. The internal reader is an active participant in the process of connecting legend to tradition through imagination (Flibbert 135) as a means of understanding.

The process of reading serves many different ends within the poem. The pilgrim-readers read for the purpose of entertainment (passive reading), as well as for the purposes of education and enlightenment (active reading). Though essentially the same activity, the ends sought by these two manners of reading differ greatly. Reading for entertainment focuses the reader's attention and interests on the content of the material at hand (character, setting, and plot, for example) without regard for further application. For the purposes of passing time, this kind of reading suffices. The reader approaches the material, absorbs from the tale what he needs, and moves forward. Reading for education and enlightenment must begin from the same point as reading for entertainment. The reader accounts for content as a starting point. However, the reader's task becomes far more complicated when the reader contemplates assigning value to the tale. To begin this investigative and speculative process, the reader needs to establish a familiarity with the tale beyond the level of content. To establish a level of familiarity, the reader needs to read the text more than once. Multiple, on-going readings allow the reader to understand the text at a level of sophistication that exists beyond content, assuming interest persists. Because the content will be familiar, the reader can seek to discover a rationale for the reasons behind the relationships between characters, the relationship of character to setting, or the relationship between meaning and plot. The search for significance represents a crucial interpretive transition in the manner of reading. When
interest in the tale extends to include the consideration of the tale’s meaning in relation to the reader’s interpretation, and the significance of this relationship, the reader learns to value the tale as something greater than an enjoyable mental diversion. The tale potentially teaches the reader something about himself. When the reader recognizes this, the text becomes an object of reverence.

Clarel’s presence in Jerusalem at the poem’s opening suggests his immersion in reading. But his presence in Jerusalem also draws attention to the fact that Clarel’s reading lacks something. Perhaps he cannot find the significance he seeks. Perhaps, and more frustrating for Clarel, he cannot find proof for his previous beliefs within the texts themselves. Because he does not understand what he should know; because he does not know what is important; he comes to Jerusalem to find tangible evidence for current metaphysical and spiritual dilemmas. The opening lines of the poem’s first canto suggest that Clarel wrongly concludes Jerusalem to contain the answers he seeks and the narrator uses the first two cantos to establish the connectedness of Clarel’s past and present readings. If his past readings account for his education to this point in his life, the narrator offers Clarel’s presence in Jerusalem as a process of “unlearning” (1.1.80) before the re-education can begin.13

The narrator establishes the contrasts between Clarel’s ideal for Jerusalem, those images reinforced by his previous education through past readings, and the real images and scenes he encounters. Clarel’s first statement draws attention to the discrepancy between the two. After briefly limning the specifics of Clarel’s physical position within

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13 The narrator later notes Clarel observing Vine: “Vine, o’ercast, / Estranged rode in thought’s hid repast. / Clarel, receptive, saw and heard, / Learning, unlearning, word by word” (2.14.49-52). The process of unlearning the knowledge of the past is essential before the new learning can take place. In the present study, however, it will not be the focus of extended discussion until Chapter Six.
the hostel room, as well as his disposition, the narrator recedes, and the “student” (1.1.6) speaks: “‘Other cheer / Than that anticipated here, / By me the learner, now I find. / Theology, art thou so blind?’” (1.1.19-22). Clarel’s expectations for Jerusalem do not prepare him for the difficulties he encounters on his way from the Jaffa port. Understanding no other option, Clarel addresses his disappointment to his past theological training. From his previous studies, Clarel expects to find the physical places filled with physical beauty comparable to Scripture’s metaphors. Instead, Clarel resorts to questioning the validity of his past readings. If the readings cannot offer an accurate account, theology’s claims to insight must be overstated, if not entirely misdirected. Clarel only can inquire rhetorically as to theology’s degree of inaccurate claims to truth. The student’s frustrations develop from his first experiences in the Holy Land.

The journey from Jaffa to Jerusalem demystifies Clarel’s romantic ideals. Developing a new kind of sight, Clarel sees Jerusalem in its barrenness, not with its expected divine glory. But Clarel quickly qualifies his romantic tendencies, claiming he “‘knew / Salem to be no Samarcand; / ‘Twas scarce surprise; and yet first view / Brings this eclipse’” (1.1.63-6). The first use of the eclipse imagery stresses that truth may be hidden, but it does exist (Knapp 35-8). Clarel, too, understands this, but only as a means of seeing an appropriate course of action to come. To see the truth behind the eclipse, Clarel speculates that he must remove the impediments to clear sight. Because of his most recent disappointing experiences, the contrast between his hopes for Jerusalem and his actual understanding, Clarel imagines his theological training, in essence, all of his past readings, to be the impediment. He needs to confirm the truth behind the readings or dispense with their polluting effects. He continues: “‘Needs be my soul, / Purged by the
desert’s subtle air / From bookish vapors, now is heir / To nature’s influx of control; [. . .]
/ Yes, I am young, but Asia old. / The books, the books not all have told”” (1.1.66-83).
Though these recent experiences bring him to a more enlightened perspective, the self-
reliant optimism with which he concludes the above suggests that Clarel, in his
exuberance, simply replaces one form of pollution with another. Though he does note the
necessity of this process of unlearning before he relearns, his statements regarding the
limitations of books underscores his own attachment still. His travels to Jerusalem have
forced Clarel to confront the differences between an idealized version of theology—one
finely wrought through metaphor—and the physical basis for the ideal. The experience
for Clarel, as he suggests, reinforces the limitations of man’s knowledge. The unseen
difficulties, those equally masked by eclipse of a different kind, when ultimately
confronted, necessitate reconsideration. For Clarel to imagine, however, that books are to
blame reveals his interpretive shortcomings. The books themselves do not fail to possess
the requisite knowledge. The books contain only what they contain. Be the subject
history, philosophy, or theology; the books serve as texts to be interpreted. Clarel’s
misinterpretation, his unrefined reading ability, seems the more likely candidate for
blame, but Clarel doesn’t yet know this. As an unrefined reader, he would have the
books remain responsible. He youthfully wishes for ideals to be real, and this blinds him
to the need for critical reading. Clarel exists as his own greatest impediment; he is the
eclipse he seeks to look behind. Not only must Clarel clear his mind of the content of the
past readings; he must clear his mind of the former approach, the process, to content.

Clarel realizes this as he replays an encounter from Jaffa with a fellow American
traveler. The “‘grave one’” (1.1.86), ambiguously suggesting either age or disposition,
reveals to Clarel the importance of careful, precise, and evaluative reading. Only when Clarel actively “re-reads” the conversation can he interpret correctly. The intention of the American traveler’s message becomes clear and particularly applicable to the student’s predicament. But, when Clarel reads passively, the hope for accurate interpretation is limited. Amusingly enough, the lesson offered by the American traveler reinforces the limitations of American readers: “Our New World’s worldly wit so shrewd / Lacks the Semitic reverent mood, / Unwordly—hardly may confer / Fitness for just interpreter of Palestine. Forego the state / Of local minds inveterate, / Tied to one poor casual form. / To avoid the deep saves not from the storm” (1.1.92-9). According to the grave American, those from the New World lack the particular reverence, say, of the Hebrew, a notable individual from the Old World. Without this particular reverence, the New Worlder can neither read the landscape of Palestine, its people, nor himself accurately. Unfamiliar with the locale and unaccustomed to active reading, the same New Worlder more often skims when he should dive deep. The grave American stresses the proper manner of reading. When Clarel confesses to his “cultivated narrowness” (1.1.103), he reveals his recognition of the limitations of his past reading efforts. If Clarel approached past reading passively, the results of these readings produced the bookish vapors from which he wishes now to purge himself. The books have not revealed all to Clarel because he has not read thoroughly. Though trained as a theology student, Clarel reveals his tendencies to be, just as the grave American suggests, towards skimming, not diving. Clarel may understand the distinction between the two kinds of reading, but his capacity to remain diligent represents the challenge before him. The challenge before the reader becomes his ability to track Clarel’s progress.
The narrator notes this transformation by citing the characteristics of Clarel’s education. Amongst books alone, Clarel has been sequestered—"long confined / Apart like Vesta in a grove / Collegiate" (1.1.107-9)—incapable of developing experiences that would force his acquired knowledge to be tested or applied. When the time for this release comes, Clarel’s doubts, as noted by the canto’s opening lines, instill fear in him. For all his theological training, Clarel has no true experiences in the world beyond his collegiate environment. His meditations on faith depend upon his mental capacities for recreating tests whereby his previous conclusions reveal their particular validity. In short, as the narrator observes, Clarel has lived a dream and his imagination only provides for the challenges he actually faces now. Regardless of his “fancy’s spiritual grace” (1.1.115), Clarel is ill-prepared for these challenges. Childlike, he confronts the world before him with an innocence that can only be crushed. But, it is of singular importance to acknowledge Clarel’s imagination as the one asset he holds. Though his imagination seems to be more of a hindrance, at least as regards his capacity for interaction with his fellow man, it is important to accept that imagination acts as the connective material between reading and reverence. Through active reading, Clarel can experience the legends and project his own experiences onto the legends as a means of interpreting the lessons within. The more frequently he participates in these processes, the more familiar the material becomes. Of course, the whole process depends upon reading as a starting point. While the narrator only briefly alludes to this process in the poem’s first two cantos, he later makes the suggestion more explicit.

When Clarel recalls the experience with the grave American, he asks a pertinent question: If he does not consistently interact with God through prayer, will his faith
diminish? The act of prayer suggests the participating individual possesses reverence for God and the repetition of prayer reveals that individual faith endures. Even if the individual in question uses prayer as a means of confession—for example, the individual reveals himself to be incapable of sustaining himself through the trials of life—the activity remains invaluable. Clarel has been negligent in his prayers as revealed by his pressing doubts. If Clarel begins to doubt the validity of God, prayer becomes a hypocritical activity allowing Clarel to straddle, to his advantage, both sides of the issue. If Clarel doubts God's existence and fails to pray as a result and God does exist, Clarel is doomed. If Clarel doubts God's existence and prays anyway, he seems to be covering his spiritual bases. When the narrator notes Clarel to genuflect as a gesture of penitence, as preparatory to prayer; the reader expects a question of the "why?" variety to follow. Clarel's question would reveal his recognition of powerlessness and his confession would reveal a desire for his faith to return. But this is not the case. The narrator notes Clarel's failure to pray: "His lips he parted; but the word / Against the utterance demurred / And failed him" (1.1.122-4).

At this failure, Clarel begins the first in a series of ascensions and descensions symbolically representing his struggles with faith. Most simply stated, the narrator constructs these tasks for Clarel to exhibit his quest for spiritual power. Clarel climbs in order to clarify his perspective—he desires to see things rightly. Leaving his room, Clarel climbs to the roof of the hostel in order to grant himself an overview of the landscape. He sees, in Jerusalem's desolate barrenness, a physical representation of his own spiritual barrenness. The landscape becomes transformed "inscape" as Clarel projects his spiritual longings upon the waste land before him. Appropriately at
sundown, as the light diminishes to enclose the city in darkness, Clarel ironically “sees,” with one exception, only the things that do not exist: “No play / Of life; no smoke went up, no sound / Except low hum, and that half drowned” (1.1.143-5). In exception to this lifelessness, Clarel sees the ascending tower of Mt. Olivet. Contrasting the town, Olivet rises in grandeur. As the site of Christ’s ascension to heaven, Olivet possesses much symbolic significance for Clarel. The mountain’s physical transcendence above the lifeless Jerusalem offers Clarel hope that such transcendence, physically as well as spiritually, remains possible for him. Clarel’s momentary physical ascension to the hostel rooftop offers insight in this vein, but Clarel is not yet astute enough to make this connection himself. Though a great chasm exists between Clarel’s physical climbing and Christ’s spiritual ascension, Clarel needs to appreciate that his physical ascension is a necessary first step. He cannot hope for his crisis of faith to be solved so easily. But his ascension does reveal the desire for new sight. Clarel, as he suggests earlier in the canto, must unlearn what his theological training has taught him. Viewing his physical ascension as a starting point, Clarel recognizes the discrepancy between the physical and spiritual. Where Jerusalem physically lacks, Olivet spiritually possesses. Throughout the poem, Clarel uses comparison as a means of navigation.

Returning his gaze to the city itself, Clarel immediately takes note of the Pool of Hezekiah. The image contains a great deal of symbolic significance for Clarel’s spiritual state. As with the majority of the canto, the narrator’s voice, not Clarel’s, dominates the

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14 It seems significant that Clarel stands on the stone roof made warm by the day’s sunlight: “Set of sun: / His feet upon the yet warm stone, / He, Clarel, by the coping leant, / In silent gaze” (1.1.125-8). While Clarel’s faith in the Christian God diminishes, paralleling the setting of the sun, the narrator alludes to the possibility that the warmth of the sun’s rays provides physical solace for a spiritual crisis. Whether this suggests solace to be found in Apollo deserves more consideration. If so, this would allow insight into the poem along previously developed themes of pilgrims looking to the past. Clarel’s search would include Greek myth as substitute for Christian myth.
remainder of the meditation. A microcosmic example of the greater silence in Jerusalem, the “sunken court / Where silence and seclusion rule” (1.1.147-8) contributes to Clarel’s feelings of isolation and claustrophobia. The cityscape as a whole, but more significantly, the hostel, towers over the pool. Though Clarel momentarily escapes these feelings of claustrophobia in his ascent to the hostel roof, the narrator draws attention to the lifelessness within what should be a living town. Physically, this sunken court recedes into the earth, highlighting the narrator’s description that “this dead pool / In town where living creatures rule” (1.1.170-1) inverts Clarel’s expectations. His journey to the source of Christianity’s greatest legends communicates Clarel’s desire to find substantial physical validation for his waning spiritual beliefs. But there is no such proof, no living physical evidence that leads Clarel to believe his journey, ultimately, will be fruitful. The narrator’s descriptions of Clarel’s hostel room typify the symbolic lifelessness found throughout Jerusalem. He describes the Pool of Hezekiah with the same metaphors of lifelessness. Through the physical proximity of the hostel and the pool, the narrator affords Clarel the opportunity to connect the significance of the two previously considered images with his own spiritual condition. The dead pool may exist in a town of living creatures, but Clarel sees no such evidence. He only observes the “Blind arches,” the “sealed windows, portals masoned fast,” and the “parapets all dumb” (1.1.163-6). All the evidence before Clarel suggests that his previous sight was not particularly impaired. The significance of the ascension, however, remains.

Clarel’s brief sense of serenity and solace must be delayed: “Not here the spell might he undo; / The strangeness haunted him and grew” (1.1.172-3). The narrator’s choice of “here” contains at least two interpretive lines: Jerusalem and the hostel roof. Clarel
desires the "spell," notably his crisis of faith, to dissipate within Jerusalem, but his expectations seem unreasonable. If Clarel continues to imagine that Jerusalem possesses the power to instantaneously rejuvenate his spirituality even after he notes the city's barrenness and disenchanting capacities, he deludes himself. Equally unreasonable, Clarel imagines that one brief and relatively simple trial—the ascension—will compensate for his loss. The trial provides evidence that reinforces his reasons for doubt, not any reasons for renewed belief. The "strangeness" of the discrepancy between his idealized vision and his real experience must continue to haunt Clarel. His faith has not yet been tasked significantly. If Clarel wishes to find substantial ground for his beliefs, he must endure much greater hardships than merely observing contrasts. The hardships must be equally emotional, intellectual, and spiritual. Only then will Clarel understand the value of faith or the necessity of doubt. He must descend from the roof in order to begin his trials again.

"Abdon," the second canto, provides Clarel with his next trial. This trial, more specifically, deals with reading. Coming to the inner court of the hostel, Clarel finds Abdon, the hostel's Jewish proprietor, meditating "Perchance upon some line late scanned / In leathern scroll that drooped from hand" (1.2.16-7). Already having encountered the Hebrew mezuzah on the door-post as he enters the court, Clarel confronts another text that he cannot read. He knows neither the mezuzah's "Talmudic text" (1.2.6) known to the narrator; nor the "Indian Pentateuch" (1.2.43), presumably the Torah from which Abdon reads. Clarel's sense of isolation amidst a land he interprets as silent and dead allows him to disturb Abdon's reading. "Longing for solacement of mate" (1.2.12), Clarel draws Abdon into revealing his past. In his tale, Abdon reports his
Indian origins, his travels to Lisbon with a Jewish merchant, and his settling in Amsterdam. Some unspecified loss turns Abdon’s thoughts to Judah. Like Clarel who too feels loss, Abdon believes Judah to be capable of providing solace for this loss. After all, Judah is his spiritual home. He returns so that he might “end at home” (1.2.73), and be buried “Under Moriah” (1.2.69) at the site of Solomon’s Temple (Clarel 713). Abdon even shows Clarel the headstone carved “with Hebrew ciphers” (1.2.68). Abdon’s reference to his own death brings silence to the canto that reminds Clarel of the previous silence atop the hostel. At night, in silence though with another individual, Clarel reads the physical features of Abdon. Clarel concludes, even though this information has already been suggested to him, that the evidence of Abdon’s physical features coupled with the Torah, the mezuzah, and an amulet Abdon wears on his robe reveal his Judaism. Clarel’s reading, in this case, is accurate. But the challenge before him does not seem that great.

Clarel returns to his hostel room in hopes that unpacking his travel trunk will calm his thoughts, both those brought by his perception of Mt. Olivet and the Pool of Hezekiah and his interaction with Abdon and his concern for death. The previously experienced “spell” returns to haunt Clarel. He becomes distracted from these thoughts, just as he hoped, during the unpacking. But the distraction does not come from the banality of the activity. Rather, Clarel makes a poetic discovery through a “chanceful skim” (1.2.100) of the travel trunk’s interior. There he finds a poem entitled “Judæa.” This discovery is Clarel’s first encounter with an actual text. The “Judæa” poem runs only fourteen lines,

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15 The narrator notes Clarel to be “vexed” by the Hebrew visible on the mezuzah. Further, the narrator draws attention to the fact that the “leathern scroll” from which Abdon reads, in all likelihood, is the Torah (though the narrator never calls the scroll by this specific name). There is no evidence that this is known to Clarel, though it is almost impossible to imagine that a theology student would not possess this knowledge.
but takes the form of a dialogue between two characters: the World and the Palmer. Briefly summarizing, the World inquires of the Palmer: what gifts have you brought from the Holy Land? More specifically, the World asks about the “‘Sychem grapes,’” the “‘Tabor . . . garlands,’” and the “rose” of Sharon (1.2.110-5). The Palmer replies that he returns with nothing but palms and the dust of travel. Clare’s interpretation of the poem is brief. He responds to the reading with three brief statements and a question. The statements are ambiguous, at best; and the question is short-sighted. But, the “Judæa” poem and Clare’s responses foreshadow his trials to come as the debate between the World and the Palmer condenses Clare’s pursuit throughout his travels.

The World’s questions of the Palmer depend upon an idealized perception of the Holy Land, one where the fertile fruits (grapes, garlands, roses) are physical representations of the spiritual purity of the place. Any palmer, so the World assumes, who travels to the Holy Land cannot possibly return without such evidence of the journey. The fertile fruits have many connotations. They are signs of the Holy Land’s fertility. They are also signifiers of an individual’s faith. To possess such signs, so believes the World, reinforces one of many idealized understandings, one of many legends, regarding the Holy Land. Through his questions, the World attempts to reinforce the Palmer’s reverence and he takes an imperative tone. The World “‘demands / Something cheery at thy [the Palmer’s] hand’” (1.2.112-3), but the demand seems contextually inappropriate in its forcefulness. Either the World’s eagerness overwhelms and the demand escapes as uncharacteristic; or the demand attempts to limit or silence any response from the Palmer capable of contradicting or refuting the idealized vision. The World continues: “‘Come, if Solomon’s Song thou singest, / Haply Sharon’s rose thou bringest’” (1.2.114-5). The
World may realize the improbability of the Palmer returning with such gifts. “Haply,” by chance, the World seems to inquire, do you return with these gifts? The World fails to hold its beliefs in the idealized vision in this one instance. By suggesting the possibility exists that chance alone contributes to the Palmer finding such evidence, the World allows doubt to enter into the realm of legend, tradition, and reverence.

The Palmer’s experience demystifies his own idealized vision of the Holy Land, presumably the same held by the World. He finds no fertile fruits, nothing cheery, and cannot reveal any gifts the World requests. Instead, “These palms I bring—from dust not free / Since dust and ashes both were trod by me” (1.2.121-2). The real experience of the Palmer describes only movement and the environs of “Christ’s tomb” (1.2.120). The palm gifts differ from the grapes, garlands, and roses, as noted earlier, insofar as they, like the Palmer, are covered in the dust of Judea. The Palmer’s experience begins a transformation with regards to his spiritual awareness. If the legends about Judea with which the Palmer would be familiar do not match his experiences, it is unlikely that the previous faith with which he travels to Judea remains untarnished. Like the palms he offers the World, the Palmer’s faith is dusted. These two competing perspectives of the “Judæa” poem reveal the two competing perspectives of Clarel. The spiritual position of the World in the poem exists as Clarel’s spiritual position prior to his journey to the Holy Land; the spiritual position of the Palmer by the end of the “Judæa” poem becomes Clarel’s spiritual position as the poem progresses. The experiences of both raise questions that ultimately lead to doubt; or if not doubt entirely, the experiences give rationalizations for doubt. Clarel’s commentary on the poem reveals his precarious spiritual condition. If he intuits beyond his capacities, he would understand his position
relative to the competing pulls of faith and doubt to be only slightly different from that of
the Palmer. But Clare’s interpretive capacities in this instance are limited by his limited
experiences in Jerusalem (and potentially by the late hour in which he makes this
discovery).

Clarel’s interpretation of the poem yields three brief statements and one question.
The first statement acknowledges the appropriateness of the Palmer’s observation, as well
as his offering: “O’er true thy gift” (1.2.123). But the appropriateness of the observation
is limited by the ambiguity of the response. Clarel deems the gift to be appropriate if he
believes a Palmer would rightfully bring a palm as evidence of his travels. He also may
deem the gift appropriate if, in his brief experiences of travel in Jerusalem, he is able to
note the extent to which dust blankets all things within the Holy Land and that the
Palmer’s observations here are true. Prior to his discovery of the poem, Clarel removes
the dust from his own travel trunk. The Palmer’s truth and its applicability to Clarel do
not occur to the student. He concedes, as a qualifying point to his first statement: “Well /
Scare might the world accept, ‘twould seem” (1.2.123-4). Clarel’s nonchalance in
making this remark suggests he is unaware of the extent to which the statement addresses
the rigidity of the position of faith. The World may not be able to accept the truths as
noted by the Palmer because this recognition would force the World to address the
limitations of its own faith. But, the “Judæa” poem ends before the World replies. And
yet, if Clarel notes the improbability of the World acknowledging the Palmer’s point, he
ought to be able to “accept” this same collision between idealized and real visions of
Jerusalem—and thus, faith—when his own experiences reveal to him just how prophetic
these remarks have been.
Clarel stumbles upon this realization, but by articulating it in the form of a question, a
gulf remains between Clarel’s own idealizations and the experiences which afford him
“real” insight. He hopes his journey to Jerusalem, unlike the Palmer’s, will give him
reason to renew his faith. He hopes that his journeys around the environs of Christ’s
tomb and to the sites of Christian legend will provide the physical evidence upon which
metaphysical considerations may be debated. His question, however, undermines such
hopes. Clarel’s question reveals his willingness to maintain his faith even when
confronted by experiences that suggest he should consider alternate conclusions. With
regard to faith, this, of course, is not a bad thing. Clarel asks: “But I, shall I my feet
impel / Through road like thine and naught redeem?” (1.2.125-6). Clarel’s conscious
transition from literary interpretation (the position of the Palmer) to personal
contemplation suggests the value he subscribes to texts. Though he knows the poem to
be a literary creation (just as he knows the stories of Christian legend to be metaphorical
spiritual renderings), he accepts the dramatized dilemma within the poem to be real.
Clarel understands the poem posits two theological positions more likely than it does two
distinct characters. The names of the characters alone suggest the poem’s dependence on
allegory, a form with which Clarel, as a theology student, would be exceedingly
comfortable. Faith, essentially, asks a faithful adherent about his experiences in the Holy
Land. The faithful adherent, because of his experiences, acknowledges the gap between
the idealized, theological position and the real, physically-experienced position. When
Clarel notes the dilemma to be his own represented in microcosm, he considers the
possibility that the Palmer’s conclusion may become his own. If this is the case, he asks,
will he force himself through such pilgrimage without receiving some spiritual
compensation for the effort. He answers his own question affirmatively. He acknowledges the isolation he already feels when offering the difficulty of the quest before him: “Rather thro’ brakes, lone brakes, I wind: / As I advance they close behind.” (1.2.127-8). Clarel’s choice of words here, “brakes,” suggests an archaic leaning appropriately related to his place, at least with regards to time, in Jerusalem. If by brakes, Clarel refers to an overgrown area of bushes, shrubs, brambles, or ferns, he acknowledges his search to be relentlessly challenging. With every advance he makes, he finds himself equally isolated and confined as the brakes simply close behind him.

Clarel finds such considerations unbearable, either because he recognizes the limitations of these mental activities or his physical exhaustion gets the better of him. He retires to the couch in his room, but before he tries to fall asleep, he looks into the night sky one more time. His gaze moves to Mt. Olivet for the second time in consecutive stanzas and Clarel extrapolates his interpretation of the “Judæa” poem to consider his own position of faith. Mt. Olivet presents Clarel with a “double mystery” (1.2.137) in the form of two questions that appear more correctly to be two parts of the same question. Clarel asks: “Olivet, Olivet do I see? / The ideal upland, trod by Thee?” (1.2.138-9). The student addresses the mountain in anthropomorphic terms. The first question asks the mountain to reveal to Clarel the disparate meanings behind the double implication. The simplest fuses the two questions into one—Clarel asks the mountain to confirm whether he stands before the mountain upon which, according to legend, Christ ascended to heaven. Clarel’s question, as illogically motivated as it seems, perhaps deserves to be read from the position of his previous faith. A long-time adherent to faith, Clarel is overwhelmed by the proximity of the mountain. His physical presence in Jerusalem
confirms the physical existence of the legendary mountain. Clare's disbelief, or uncertainty, at the reality of the situation confirms the fervor of his previous beliefs. He wants confirmation from the mountain that he is not dreaming. The more challenging implication stresses Clare's capacities for faith. In questioning his capacities for sight, Clarel asks the mountain whether he understands the complexity of the situation in which he finds himself. He asks whether he can accept the insoluble dilemma presented by the mutually destructive collision between idealized (legendary) interpretations and real (based upon experience) interpretations. To ask this question, Clarel risks his position of dependence upon legend. Clarel knows the significance of the mountain from past readings. Clarel's confrontation of the mountain from "The Hostel" canto suggests he manages to maintain his reverence by allowing his imagination to connect events of the past and those of the present. Yet in the present canto, Clarel undermines the extent of his imagination, unless the question, in its anthropomorphic address, intends an imaginative dialogue not dissimilar from the allegory of the "Judæa" poem. The ambiguity is unsettling. Both possibilities enforce the external reader's interpretative link to the pilgrim-reader's interpretations of text.

The narrator provides the clearest insight into the relationship between legend, tradition, reverence, and imagination in "The Sepulchre," the poem's third canto. He uses the canto to provide a historical frame of reference in order to construct the equation most clearly by describing the physical appearance of the sepulcher, as well as the actions of the monks and penitent visitors to this holy site. Though the actions of the monks with regard to the sepulcher take the form of maintenance, the actions themselves are not without meaning. Simply removing the accumulated dust from "the Tomb / And places
of the Passion’s moan” (1.3.82-3), notably a daily activity, allows the caretaking monks to participate in a tradition based upon the legends which state the precise locations where Christ suffered under the scourge; where he was crucified; where the specific bystanders stood. These are the sites cared for by the monks and these custodial actions reinforce their reverence for the stories. The narrator’s equation takes the following form: tradition equals repeated reverent actions over time that presupposes the truth-value of legends. The statement, “Where now thro’ influence of years / And spells by many a legend lent, / A sort of nature reappears—” (1.3.32-4) summarizes the aforementioned equation. These spells keep the legends alive, but they produce no deleterious effects upon the individual. Faith, in this instance, is akin to this spell. The word choice is curious, but the narrator is not passing judgment with this usage. Rather, as Wyn Kelley suggests, the narrator offers a conception of tradition that stresses reverence for the idea inherent in the place (Kelley 16-7). The keepers of the Sepulcher revere truth-value as opposed to truth because there is no means beyond faith by which the individual actually knows the historical validity of these sites. The idea contains power once the monks and penitent visitors accept the truth-value of legends. Because these individuals want to believe they stand at a site once walked by Christ, the truth of the matter becomes inconsequential. Throughout time, the simple repetition of the pilgrimage brings countless numbers to enact the same ritual—to stand at Christ’s Tomb and become a part of living history. The history need not be correct or even accurate, so

16 The narrator notes this point with regard to the validity of legend by focusing on Celio, who at this point has cast himself out of Jerusalem for the night. When he encounters his fellow monks from Terra Santa, he chooses to follow their procession across the Kedron. The narrator recalls the connection between the Kedron and the Holy Sepulchre: “Kedron they cross. Much so might move— / If legend hold, which none may prove,— / The remnant of the Twelve which bore / Down thro’ this glen in funeral plight / The Mother of our Lord by night / To sepulcher” (1.14.65-70). Though none may prove the legend to be right or wrong, accurately or factually based, this does not discredit the value of the story upon which the legend rests.
says the narrator: “. . . such ties, so deep / Endear the spot, or false or true / As an historic site” (1.3.112-4). The presence and faith of the pilgrim keep the legend alive and contribute to the tradition. Truth is unnecessary and equally unknowable; truth-value establishes the standard.\footnote{Much later in the pilgrimage, in the “Of Deserts” canto (2.11), the narrator notes one of many connective issues between science and faith. Using the example of Darwin, the narrator offers the difficulties of establishing truth: “Darwin quotes / From Shelley, that forever floats / Over all desert places known, / Mysterious doubt—an awful one. / He quotes, adopts it. Is it true? / Let instinct vouch; let poetry / Science and instinct here agree, / For truth requires strong retinue” (2.11.12-9). Truth may require the “strong retinue” of proof; truth-value requires only individual faith, though this should not suggest faith to be particularly easy. Clarel, further along in the pilgrimage, reveals his status as apprentice quester in his desire to find one specific truth through which he can see all things (3.20.32-42). During the “In Confidence” (3.21) canto, Clarel and Derwent discuss the source of “truth” and its relationship to the individual’s willingness to search for it.}

Ultimately for the narrator, individual imagination and “fancy” represent the means for connecting the legends of the past to the continued construction of tradition in the present. The participant must imagine, once he arrives at the legendary site, for example, that he can “see,” meaning experience, the events of the past which create his faith and reverence in the present. The capacity of the imagination distinguishes the child-like glee of the reverent from the adult-like gloom of the irreverent. For the latter group, Christ’s Tomb is only a tomb, a marker. For the former group, Christ’s Tomb gives tangible form to legends that previously exist only as intellectual and spiritual constructions in the mind. Imagination, the narrator says, can bring those doubters to a position of reverence, those doubters who equally fear a world bereft of Christ’s compassion. In a time removed from the stories of the past, imagination serve as a bridge for the gap. The narrator notes: “So fancy deals, a light achiever: / Imagination, earnest ever, / Recalls the Friday far away, / Re-lives the crucifixion day— / The passion and its sequel proves, / Sharing the three pale Marys’ frame; / Thro’ the eclipse with these she moves / Back to the house from which they came / To Golgotha” (1.3.181-9). Though in such a scene...
imagination allows the pilgrim to experience the horrors of Christ's passions, the narrator notes, ending the canto with a question, how solace and joy may come from horror. Christ's crucifixion, of course, yields the resurrection; and the Easter celebration offers emotions that are inversely proportional. How one can imagine this transition from horror to joy stresses the power of human imagination; it further stresses its importance in the process of reverence.

The pilgrim-readers in the poem use their imaginations when reading in order to participate in the traditions of the present, themselves dependent upon the legendary events of the past. To determine the extent of reverence in the individual pilgrim-readers, the external reader must track the instances of reading and evaluate them along the lines proposed at the beginning of this chapter. It is necessary to limit the definition of reading as it applies to the pilgrim-readers. Though the Biblical knowledge of the pilgrims is dependent upon past readings, it is impractical to note the many suggestions concerning these episodes. Past readings include the Old and New Testaments and the accompanying commentary. Philosophical and political treatises, as well as historical texts, contribute to the wide body of knowledge these pilgrim-readers possess. The pilgrim-readers are not simply familiar with these texts, though; the external reader acknowledges their familiarity extends to include proficiency and expertise in order to sustain the debates that characterize the entirety of Clarel. Present readings, however, are significantly more interesting to the current investigation. Present readings can include text and character; the satellite poems presented as songs; and landscape. The capacity of the pilgrim-reader, his fluency, determines his reverence, regardless of any perceived
perspective he champions individually. The way a pilgrim-reader reads, more often than not, determines the nature of his character.  

The significant pilgrim-readers deserve the most attention. After all, it is the pilgrimage itself that affords a context for the reading. Within the context of the pilgrimage, the pilgrims define themselves as searchers in the physical sense. Each comes to a specific, physical location in order to find reasons to believe in God. This activity, as noted previously, allows the individual pilgrims to become part of tradition. Some of the characters, not pilgrims exactly, of Clarel read without contributing to the development of the poem’s plot, at least in terms of the development of the title character. This does not mean that the reading does not note reverence on the part of the reader. Previously considered, Abdon reads from the Torah when Clarel discovers him in the poem’s second canto. Certainly his action must be considered one of reverence. Abdon reads the Torah as a means of participating in a tradition. Like his Jewish ancestors before him, Abdon reads the Torah to feel connected to the history of Moses and the Jews. Abdon uses his imagination to connect that which is theologically historical to that which he knows to be contemporary. Abdon’s ritualistic adherence to reading the Torah reveals his understanding of his role in the maintenance of the tradition. Agar, like Abdon, also maintains Jewish tradition through ritualistic reading. Though the narrator translates the Hebrew inscription on her “damask cloth” (1.27.59) as “‘IF I FORGET THEE, O JERUSALEM!’” (1.27.62), the sentiment suggests Agar’s feelings

18 Though the ability to interpret one’s fellow pilgrims contributes to the list of reading examples throughout the poem, the present chapter will deal primarily with physical texts, except in the case of Clarel. When the pilgrim-readers attempt to decipher one another through an interpretation of physical features, more often than not, the effort yields immeasurable results. The reader notes the effort on the part of the pilgrim, but the effort stands as the most significant achievement. Either the pilgrim fails to discover anything, or the text itself, another pilgrim, proves too hidden. As the title pilgrim, however, Clarel’s efforts at reading character will be considered. Unfortunately, Clarel’s enterprises in this matter suffer.
about her role in the greater tradition. Agar notes the exclamation to be far more powerful prior to her return with Nathan to Zion. Jerusalem represents an ideal hope for all Jews: “But ah, the dream to test by deed, / To seek to handle the ideal / And make a sentiment serve need: / To try to realize the unreal!” (1.27.67-70). The narrator notes these to be Agar’s feelings, as distinct from her thoughts. Though the prospect of leaving the United States for Jerusalem terrifies Agar, her loyalty to Nathan, as well as the sentiment woven into the damask cloth, persuades her. Nathan, as the last of the “insignificant” readers within the poem, reads Paine’s _The Age of Reason_ and discovers a reverence for the pagan mythologies of ancient Greece. Paine’s text further provides encouragement for his doubt. But it is Agar, finally, who affords Nathan the solace he needs. He, too, looks to the tradition of the Hebrews and realizes that his fading faith, if turned towards the ancient beliefs of the Hebrews, may find more solid ground for belief: “‘tis adamant” (1.17.218), he thinks. The most significant pilgrim-readers of the poem, those who will be given the greatest attention from the present study, are Clarel, Derwent, Rolfe and Nehemiah. These pilgrim-readers will be considered with regard to the number of times each is involved in the process of reading and the actual physical texts considered.

**Clarel**

Clarel’s reading is the most significant, both in quality and quantity. His reading, if his search for reasons to renew his faith is to be valid, must reveal his involvement in the

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19 Many other pilgrims read, but the instances are too limited from which to draw specific conclusions. Like the aforementioned Abdon, Agar, and Nathan, Margoth, Mortmain, and Vine also read. Margoth reads and writes his own contribution to the Ode to the Southern Cross (2.31.99-100). Mortmain, as revealed to the reader by the Lesbian’s comments, reads books in the Mar Saba library (2.27.64-72) from which the Lesbian inquires whether much reading has made Mortmain mad. Vine, with Rolfe and Derwent, reads and sings the Latin text of the _Ave maris Stella_ (2.24.30-53). The Mar Saba monks read as part of a chanting ceremony (3.17.12-4) that the pilgrims overhear.
process. The majority of Clarel’s reading takes place in the poem’s opening part. While in and around Jerusalem, Clarel discovers many opportunities. The first, his discovery of the “Judæa” poem, has been previously discussed, but this discovery represents the thematic standard through which Clarel continues to read, whether he understands this to be the case. He confronts the limitations of the ideal through comparison with the real. The discoveries that come from reading force Clarel to consider the extent of his reverence. He comes to Jerusalem, though wracked with doubt, as one of the more reverent characters in the poem. His grasp of the Bible and his ability to debate its theological and moral implications are not in question. His reading of the “Judæa” poem reveals his willingness to defer, when in doubt, to his position of reverence. His imagination may allow him to connect the events of the past with those of the present, and this may reinforce his reverence for the legends; however, his imagination does not limit his obligation to interpreting the implications of the reading. Clarel must read to confront, not simply reinforce, the theological challenges before him. Again, the “Judæa” poem represents this first difficult confrontation.

Discerning Clarel’s level of success (or more correctly, the level of participation) at his next opportunity for reading text is problematic. When Clarel again encounters Abdon, he disturbs the Jew’s prayerful meditations. Having recently heard the tale of Nathan from Nehemiah, Clarel returns to the hostel where, awakened from sleep by dreams of Celio, he ascends to the rooftop. Clarel hopes the ascension will allow him to think clearly. When Clarel sees Abdon, he notes the humble man in prayer, but also notes Abdon’s talith, “old, / Of India stuff, with braid of gold / In cipher” (1.18.72-4). The narrator further qualifies the cipher as the “broidered text that mystic flows”
(1.18.79) as Abdon walks under the starry skies. The significance of the encounter comes from the information Clarel discovers regarding Celio. After admitting to be haunted by an unknown shadow, Clarel hears the wailings that he learns are for Celio. Though the encounter with the Hebrew text prevents Clarel's comprehension, the ascension provides prefatory information for the revelation to come from reading Celio's journal.

Though the narrator glosses his reading, Clarel discovers a fraternal relationship with Celio, particularly regarding Celio's struggles with faith. To discover more regarding the presumed "spiritual tie" (1.19.3) between himself and Celio, Clarel rummages through the possessions of the dead young man. In his effort to "get at items of the dead" (1.19.21), Clarel discovers Celio's journals. He reads the journals, and the narrator summarizes: "A second self... he found / But stronger—with the heart to brave / All questions on that primal ground / Laid bare by faith's receding wave" (1.19.26-9). Clarel feels that Celio's writings communicate his own doubts and fears clearly enough that he constructs an imaginative "twinning" as an easy means of articulating his own concerns. As sympathetic as one may be to Clarel's position, it is difficult to understand his assumptions and projections. While he evaluates the likelihood that spiritual sympathies and connections between individuals transcend any social interaction; Clarel simply compensates here. He fears the outcome of the search to which Celio willingly sacrifices himself. For Celio, the potential discoveries from such a search far outweigh the obvious hazards. Clarel, unfortunately, sees the position from the opposite perspective. He desperately desires to find some form of solace in his life because he would be able to relieve himself of the constant anxiety he faces by oscillating between positions of faith
and doubt. By seeing Celio as a second self, as his own twin, Clarel attempts to simplify his own search. By accepting Celio’s discoveries as his own, Clarel basically cheats himself out of the experience. Granted, these experiences potentially produce unpleasant discoveries. However, Clarel cannot avoid his responsibility to self in this regard. By reading Celio’s journals and concluding the dead monk to be an undiscovered self; Clarel searches vicariously, hazarding none of the risks and reaping all of the gain. Clarel must understand this to be blasphemous on some level. He denies his own willingness to suffer in order to find true peace. But more distressing, particularly to an individual of faith, he denies his own spiritual capacities, his faith in God and himself, to make these discoveries on his own. Celio becomes another guide for Clarel. These statements should not suggest that Clarel lacks the fortitude necessary for the search. His presence in Jerusalem indicates he possesses all that he needs. However, Clarel is not willing at this point in the poem to take risks. Celio risks his life, making the greatest sacrifice possible so that he might dive deep enough to retrieve answers worth having. Clarel could dive as deeply. However, his fears for a life without faith—perhaps the unavoidable outcome of his search—restrict his efforts at inquiry. As long as Clarel accepts as fact the need to model himself after the teachings of another human guide (Christ, of course, is an acceptable model), he cannot move toward the more coherent position of understanding he seeks. He must make these discoveries independently.

Clarel’s thoughts beyond the journal entries, however, suggest his movements in a more autonomous direction. He thinks more for himself when he questions the legitimacy of divine providence in regards to Celio’s death. Clarel’s thoughts come from the promptings of Celio’s journals, but they are Clarel’s nonetheless. Though Clarel still
sees Celio as a twin, he judges Celio’s life to be incomplete. Because Celio’s died at such a young age, Clarel speculates regarding what was left undone: “Who young dies, leaves life’s tale half told” (1.19.34). This realization leads Clarel to the only kind of searching possible before him. He cannot search in the manner of Celio. But his own search does extend from Celio’s discoveries. Clarel asks six questions, each pertaining to man’s terrestrial destiny and the role of death. These questions do force Clarel to consider his own position of faith, but they also resemble Job’s effrontery. Clarel stops short of questioning God directly.

Celio’s death cannot be the will of God, Clarel concludes. He asks his six questions with no specific belief that they will be answered. Answers would provide an easy resolution to the proposed dilemma. Unanswered, the questions remain as meditative focal points for Clarel to consider in the future: 1) How does the individual understand death? 2) Is death the end of man’s journey? 3) Is there an afterlife? 4) If so, what power does death hold? 5) How does death release the individual into everlasting life? 6) Will death continue to perplex? Though he cannot answer any of these questions, Clarel’s conclusion regarding death reinforces his faith in God’s benevolence and omniscience. Though man cannot understand the ways of God, Clarel believes, Celio’s early death cannot be the result of any divine tinkering: “For howsoe’er in words of man / The word and will of God be feigned, / No incompletion’s heaven ordained” (1.19.40-2). Man does not always understand God’s will; and, from time to time, his limited capacities pervert the intentions. Clarel concludes man, not God, to be responsible. Celio’s “incompletion,” his youthful death, cannot be intended. Though Clarel’s conclusion reaffirms his position of faith, he argues himself into a theological corner.
from which there is no satisfying escape. Because he wishes to suggest that man, not God, is responsible for tragedies like Celio’s death, he inadvertently diminishes God’s omniscience and omnipotence even though he imagines his conclusions articulate a particular position of faith. If man is responsible for Celio’s death, then God must be powerless on some level to prevent such tragedies. Man acts as he chooses. Perhaps this suggests man’s free will, but if Clarel is correct, and youthful death cannot be “ordained” by heaven, then man seems capable, through the free will granted him by God, of undermining God’s will. Man, in this scenario, becomes as powerful as God. If God is responsible for Celio’s death, Clarel’s assumptions about benevolence are misguided. If Celio represents an example of God’s whim, He is vengeful and petty. It is not enough to inflict physical deformity on the young man. God, for no understandable reason, inflicts intellectual traumas as well, all before taking the young man’s life. If Clarel’s arguments allow dilemmas of these sorts, the rebuttal remains Clarel’s: Man feigns the word and will of God. In his search for comprehension, man assumes too much. Because he cannot understand his own plight, he condemns the grandeur of God. As stated previously, Clarel’s unanswered questions, because they remain unanswered, serve as points for future consideration. Clarel must meditate on his questions and conclusions. He cannot simply dismiss these considerations through a summary affirmation of faith. Unfortunately in this situation, his conclusion comes too easily for the understanding to be meaningful. Clarel understands this to be the case as the poem continues. He cannot satisfy himself completely regarding death and Celio’s death is the first of many he must experience, either firsthand or by association, over the course of his pilgrimage.
Clarel next reads a Scriptural passage, Lamentations 2.15, prompted by Nehemiah’s previous reading and realization that Margoth’s words outside the dung gate parallel the passage greatly (Clarel 738). Walking outside the city wall, Nehemiah and Clarel twice ignore the hails of Margoth, whom the two pilgrims meet now for the first time. He calls to them from near the dung gate, a legendary site glossed by the narrator prior to mediating the one-way discussion that takes place. The description of both the gate and its use is particularly foul, as noted in the Scriptures, but so is the narrator’s attempt to draw a parallel between the character of Margoth and this dung-gate. The gate still functions as the means for removing refuse from the city; and the narrator transparently associates this rubbish with Margoth. Though the narrator briefly describes Margoth’s physical appearance,20 his physical location under the dung-gate with regard to Christian legend reveals the narrator’s feelings toward him. The narrator notes the dung-gate to be the site where, in an effort to avoid any confrontation with Christ’s early supporters, “By torch the tipstaves Jesus led, / And so thro’ back-street hustling sped / To Pilate” (1.24.16-8). According to the narrator, the dung-gate serves in Christian legend as the means by which the Pharisee leaders secretly moved Christ into Jerusalem to bring him before Pontius Pilate for sentencing, ultimately, to crucifixion. By placing Margoth near the dung-gate, both as a site for refuse and as an important part in the martyring of Christ, the narrator treads dangerously close to anti-Semitic associations. Margoth, an apostate Jew, suffers by religious association. Though his Judaism is unknown to Nehemiah and

20 “Down there into the place unclean / They peer, they see the man therein, / An iron-gray, short, rugged one, / Round shouldered, and of knotty bone; / A hammer swinging in his hand, / And pouch at side, by the ill door” (1.24.34-9). The physical description itself provides little information beyond Margoth’s relative unpleasantness. The hammer and pouch, those objects with which Margoth is most identifiable, come to represent Margoth’s single-mindedness with regard to science. Though his questions to Nehemiah and Clarel appear harmless enough, certainly not deserving of rude dismissal without response, one imagines he stops only briefly from some gathering of geological “evidence” he intends to use for disproving the validity of theology.
Clarel at this point, the narrator knows. He describes Margoth as a “dirty Jew,” reeking from both the dung that stands around him, as well as from the blood of Christ wrongfully assessed upon the hands of all the Jews.

Nehemiah recalls the similarity between Margoth’s words and the Scriptural passage in Lamentations. Ever the literalist, Nehemiah seeks confirmation that Scripture is not simply a text—it is testament to the once and future king. Finding the familiar passage in the “chapter second, fifteenth verse” (1.24.60), Nehemiah, after reading the passage aloud, presses Clarel to read for himself.\(^\text{21}\) Clarel’s reading, though it affords no verbal response, indicates that Clarel begins to extrapolate from Nehemiah’s literalist perspective. His silence communicates consent. This is an important realization for Clarel because it represents the first consideration of the improbability of physical objects providing a substantial basis for metaphysical or spiritual belief.\(^\text{22}\) Though he notes Nehemiah to treat the two considerably different matters as one, Clarel does not feel the ease with which Nehemiah assumes a relationship necessarily makes it so. Nehemiah’s strong sense of faith, Clarel further muses, may be related to the very destruction it seeks to forestall, especially with regard to physical objects. Clarel has been to many such sites and seen many objects his past theological training tells him he should revere: the Sepulcher, the Pools of Gihon, the *Ecce Homo* Arch, and the Wailing Wall. At this moment, following his reading of the Lamentations passage, Clarel does not fully comprehend the validity of such an association. He notes that any physical object, when

\(^{21}\) The actual passage from Lamentation 2.15 reads as follows: “All who pass along the way / clap their hands at you; / they hiss and wag their heads / at the daughter of Jerusalem; / ‘Is this the city which was called / the perfection of beauty, / the joy of all the earth?’”

\(^{22}\) The relationship between physical objects and metaphysical/spiritual beliefs is addressed by Clark Davis in Chapter Seven of *After the Whale: Melville in the Wake of Moby-Dick*. Davis calls this relationship the most basic question of the pilgrimage. Clarel’s early realization, however, does not make discerning this relationship any easier.
it becomes the focal point for the maintenance of faith, provides the means for its own disintegration. The passage of time transforms all things—physical monuments, regardless of dimension, crumble. Clarel sees spirituality related to this physical phenomena: “If faith confideth overmuch / That here’s a monument in Zion: / Its substance ebbs—see, day and night / The sands subsiding from the height; / In time, absorbed, these grains may help / To form new sea-bed, slug and kelp” (1.24.71-6). Not only does Clarel’s analogy suggest an appreciation for the cyclical patterns of nature; it also suggests sophisticated thought, even though his words do not always match. Clarel uses allegorical language and metaphor to make his point, one that must be unnerving on many levels given his past adherence to faith. The cyclical patterns of nature serve as an appropriate symbol for Clarel. No matter the grandeur of the monument, in scope or representational meaning (and Clarel may have any number of monuments in mind, though he specifies none); the same monument is subject to disintegration to depths of equal proportion; from high in the sky to beneath the sea. But, the sophistication of Clarel’s analogy is multi-faceted. Though great monuments may crumble into obscurity, Clarel notes these same monuments, in forming the “sea-bed, slug and kelp,” become foundational elements. If not held in such grand esteem, the metaphysical and spiritual beliefs for which the physical objects were constructed remain part of the greater fabric of the natural world. However minutely considered, spirituality remains an essential part of human life. As the canto ends, Clarel notes the pervasiveness of nature, particularly the desert. It remains with him at all times. It does not depart as Clarel travels, “but silently, / Even like a leopard by our side, / It seems to enter in with us— / At home amid men’s homes would glide” (1.24.82-5). If the desert serves as the example of nature’s
omnipresence for Clarel, spirituality’s tie to man seems equally prevalent. Faith, too, creeps along with him, no matter where he turns. For Clarel, this is an astounding realization. If he accepts that spirituality, like nature, has its ebb and flow, he conquers on some level the anxiety caused by his crisis of faith. Clarel’s doubt is but the ebb of faith. Over time, Clarel seems to realize, faith again must flow.

Clarel’s visit to Celio’s grave mound affords him an encounter with Rolfe that reinforces a point made by the narrator regarding Celio—and also an opportunity to read “Job’s text in wreath” (1.40.47)—but it is a point that Clarel cannot know.23 The narrator comments on the events surrounding Celio’s death and burial. Though Celio had lost his faith, the narrator notes how the friars, when Celio was too near death to object, “Had held to unprotesting lips / In mistimed zeal the crucifix; / [And . . .] / Life’s flickering hour they made command / Faith’s candle in Doubt’s dying hand” (1.40.12-18). The narrator summarizes this account of the events, but passes no judgment on the actions of the friars, actions not particularly in accord with Catholic standards. Though Celio’s “confession” secures his burial in hallowed ground, it is unclear why the friars would make such a concession. Perhaps the friars sympathize with Celio, the young man many had known from the time he came to the Terra Santa monastery as a child, and his struggles with doubt. When the narrator focuses his attention on the nature of this account, he draws attention to the ritualistic importance of the Last Rites.24

23 Rolfe also reads the text, but the interpretation at this point will serve both the present purpose and the focus on Rolfe to come.
Clarel feels his connection to Celio at the grave. It contributes to the spiritual synthesis he intuits from the earlier encounter, but more importantly to Clarel's coming meditation regarding death (1.40.23-34). When Clarel spots Rolfe, also communing at the site of the dead, he joins him and listens. Rolfe notes the individual to be an acquaintance from the past, but one whose beliefs do not necessarily match the text on the wreath commemorating his grave. Rolfe draws Clarel's attention to the wreath so that he may read the text prior to Rolfe's explanation. The text he attributes to Job reads: "'I KNOW THAT MY REDEEMER LIVETH.'" (1.40.48). Rolfe's concerns for his friend Ethelward are linked to the narrator's retelling of Celio's final hours. Like Celio, Ethelward was a man of "'small hope'" (1.40.50). Rolfe deems it unlikely that the sentiment displayed by the wreath would be that of his friend. Like the sacrament granted to Celio, Ethelward's wreath, ritualistically considered, gives peace to the survivors as much as to the dead. For Rolfe, the issue typifies one of modern man's spiritual dilemmas. Because doubt characterizes modern man as much as faith, death becomes sorrowful. This statement does not suggest that death, prior to the advances of science and technology, was joyful. For the dying individual as well as the survivors, death previously represented an end to terrestrial suffering and the means for reunion with God. The ultimate joy made real by death more than compensated for its sorrows.

24 Though the narrator does not articulate the event as such, the tale regarding Celio seems to concern itself with the Viaticum, the final reception of Communion in preparation for death. The narrator alludes to the tale being rumor, but the description suggests that Celio took his final Communion either against his will, because he was too weak to resist, or unknowingly. Whether this nullifies the legitimacy of the Viaticum is not an issue for present discussion. However, the narrator does suggest that granting these Last Rites to Celio seems blasphemous. Celio, wracked by doubt until his last days, now rests with "Rome's legitimate dead" (1.40.15), presumably those deserving burial in hallowed ground. By comparison, Celio was "Not saved through faith, nor Papal Rome's true son" (1.40.16). The suggestion made above regarding the ritualistic importance of the Last Rites will be more fully developed following Rolfe's similar observation regarding the wreath upon his friend Ethelward's grave, a wreath containing text that both Rolfe and Clarel read.
This contributes to an argument that claims there can be no Christian tragedy if all suffering remains transient. But modern man, according to Rolfe, has no such faith—death is characterized by indifferent acceptance. Perhaps this stoic stance comforts the dying individual and the family left behind, but Rolfe recognizes this equation to be empty and false.

A connection exists between the narrator's account of Celio and Rolfe's account of Ethelward. Each account concerns itself with a ritual whose application doesn't fit the situation: Celio's doubt should prevent the friars from performing the Last Rites; equally, Ethelward's small hope would be incapable of the profound statement of faith on the wreath. The responsibility for these actions certainly falls on the shoulders of the survivors, but it is difficult to assess the rationale behind these actions. If the friars chose to offer Celio the solace of Last Rites that he could not find in faith, the action seems to have moral implications; but, this action undermines the importance of faith for the remaining faithful, not to mention appearing disrespectful towards those long dead whose faith sustained them. If the friars chose to offer Celio the solace of the Last Rites because he was a fellow monk, regardless of his doubts, the action seems to have political importance. Little evangelical good comes from a faithless monk. Finally, if the friars chose to offer Celio the solace of Last Rites for the sake of the community at large, the action seems to have social importance (though definitely linked to the political importance previously mentioned). For Ethelward, the same moral, political, and social considerations seem plausible, particularly given Rolfe's concerns for modern man. If such public statements of faith, as Ethelward's wreath (and for that matter, the rumor surrounding Celio), ease the drear feelings Rolfe characterizes as endemic to modern
man, the good to come seems to outweigh the harm. If modern man acquiesces to pain, suffering, and death without as much as an objection, what, truly, can be the harm? In the case of Celio and Ethelward, these actions are recognizably fraudulent and for this deserve a degree of censure. But, as long as the value placed upon the maintenance of faith does not exceed the importance of the individual’s struggle with doubt as a component of the return to faith,\textsuperscript{25} the aforementioned concerns become academic. Clarel cannot understand these concerns to be at stake following Rolfe’s assessment of the wreath, nor can he know of the friars’ actions at Celio’s death. He understands faith simply on an individual level, as his own spiritual dilemma, without regarding the greater structural significance.

Later the same evening, Clarel retires to his room to read, but neither the Old nor the New Testament can distract him from his doubts. The texts are from an earlier time, a simpler time, so Clarel believes, and the narrator assesses the complication: “Both time and tone so far away / From him the modern” (1.41.84-5). This failure further disturbs Clarel as he spent time before this atop the wall near the Jaffa Gate (\textit{Clarel 757}) observing the reverent pilgrims on their way to the city. As Clarel paces the floor of his room, he discovers beneath the chipping lime on the walls “a rhyme / Pale penciled” (1.41.93-4). The narrator gives particular attention to the fact that the rhyme, no matter the layers of lime painted upon it, still manages to break through the surface. No manner of construction can conceal the rhyme—it demands to be read. Though the author’s identity is briefly suggested in textbooks later discovered, the narrator considers the rhyme the scribbling of a traveler whose mood impressed upon him the text Clarel reads.

\textsuperscript{25} For a thorough discussion, see Stan Goldman, \textit{Melville’s Protest Theism} (DeKalb: Norther Illinois UP, 1993).
Thematically, the poem addresses the differences between the past and the present and represents the speaker’s statement of faith and reverence. Such a discovery seems applicable to Clarel whose condition appears similar to that of the speaker. Confused, disturbed, and lost in the present, a time notably dominated by images of the “‘Atheists and Vitriolists of doom’” (1.41.112), the speaker laments the disintegration of faith in general that accompanies the changing times. Without making specific reference to any force he deems destructive, the speaker alludes to the advances made by rationalists, like the aforementioned atheists and vitriolists, whose discoveries are called triumphs and whose renouncing of God is called intellectual progress. Though the speaker begins his consideration with these destructive elements, his sympathies and his “‘unwearied thoughts . . . stream’” (1.41.111) towards God. Amidst the changes of modern times, the speaker finds solace in faith, not knowledge. The former makes the most humble conditions pleasant while the unencumbered pursuit of the latter “‘shame[s] the winning side—’” (1.41.107). The speaker claims to seek solace in the past, in simpler times, and for this resembles Clarel, Rolfe, Vine, Mortmain, and Ungar. The final three lines of the poem suggest his reverence for the past most clearly, as the speaker politely condemns the atheists and vitriolists for noting, “‘Faith’s gathering night with rockets red illume— / So much the more in pathos I adore / The low lamps flickering in Syria’s Tomb’”—“ (1.41.113-5).

Clarel discovers the speaker’s identity, B. L., whose final inscription notes the time of his composition to follow his trip to the Holy Sepulcher. Clarel inquires of Abdon the next day whether he knows anything about this individual. Abdon reveals only the textbooks the traveler left behind. Abdon notes the individual to be English and produces
the books within which Clarel finds the student's name and address: “Annexed, / In either book was penciled small: / ‘B. L.: Oxford: St. Mary's Hall’” (1.41.141-3). The books themselves hold much more information, at least in regards to the reading style of B. L. In each book, Clarel finds marginal notes, evidence that B. L. reads actively. In the first book, a text whose sentiment parallels the poem of B. L., the narrator notes how the book's author “deplored / That rubric old was not restored” (1.41.128-9). Like B. L.'s poem, there is a longing for tradition, a lamentation that change has negatively affected the practices of the Anglican Church. Though B. L. makes no particular claim to Anglicanism, his poem longs for more reverence for the legends upon which tradition is based. The narrator confirms this when noting Clarel discovers, “But under Finis there was writ / A comment that made grief of it” (1.41.130-1). On some level, B. L. notes he agrees with the book's authorial position. He equally feels grief that there is no reverence for the traditional application of sacrament.

In the second book, Clarel discovers B. L.'s investigations in Greek mythology, as connected to the mythical considerations of Christ from David Friedrich Strauss and Ernest Renan. As Clarel reads further, he discovers, again, the “random jottings in the marge” (1.41.138) indicating B. L.'s active participation in dialogue with the text. The comments in this text differ from the previous text insofar as the narrator provides more information regarding B. L.'s marginalia. Where the commentary from the previous text simply noted the grief accompanying the sentiments that parallel those of the author; the commentary from the second text is called “fervid,” yet qualified as “More dole than e'en dissent” (1.41.140; 1.41.141). While B. L.'s comments remain heated and impassioned,

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26 For more thorough commentary on these two authors and their texts, as well as Pierre Joseph Proudhon, see Bezanson's notes (Clarel 758).
he tends to grieve, as he does when reading the first text, when he notes the deterioration of traditional religious thought. Where writers like Strauss, Renan, and Proudhon reflect the contemporary modes of thought enlivened by movements like the higher criticism and philosophic anarchy, B. L. reads these texts not because these philosophies appeal to him. Rather, as a conscientious student, B. L. considers the position of his opponents in order to understand his own more clearly. By virtue of the existence of such conflicting modes of thought, B. L. recognizes that despite his wishes to the contrary, or the wishes of any church figures, the intellectual developments of modern times are difficult to impede.

Tradition for one party reeks of outdated simplemindedness to another. Though the timeline is fractured, it seems probable that, like Clarel, B. L.'s readings in the past, be the texts theological or philosophical, prompt his present concerns and travels to Jerusalem. Like Clarel, B. L. has read material that facilitates a crisis of faith. Like Clarel, his presence in Jerusalem brings him no closer to resolving the crisis. However, B. L. takes it upon himself to investigate texts; to travel to the sites of legend and tradition; and to reflect upon the synthesis of all of these experiences. The poem, though it reveals no solution to the dilemma, represents this point of synthesis. The problems of modern life remain, but B. L. chooses a life of reverence and faith.

Clarel should understand B. L.'s dilemma to be his own. However, the manner in which he considers B. L.'s texts might suggest a reason these conclusions escape him. In order to assist his interpretation of the poem, Clarel looks to the texts of B. L., hoping the

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27 It seems worthwhile to consider why B. L. leaves these texts behind. Abdon comments that this happens "by chance" (1.41.125), and there is no reason to suspect the incident is other than accidental. However, the symbolic meaning merits consideration. Does B. L. leave the texts behind because he has gained all that he can from them? Does he leave the texts behind as a gesture of frustration at the insoluble collision raised by the conflicting positions? Does the poem he writes in response to the texts represent his own satisfactory synthesis? The above argument asserts the synthesis position, but does not consider the abandonment of the texts.

85
texts will “supply a clew / Better enabling to construe / The lines their owner left on wall” (1.41.146-8). The activity becomes intertextual, one leaning towards autobiographical discovery. Clarel wants to find some details about B. L. that might help him understand the person. The books themselves offer clear insight into B. L.’s courses of study, at least on a personal level if not a formal one. The commentary he finds in response to these texts further focuses Clarel’s search for clues. B. L.’s marginalia represents an opportunity for Clarel to access another reader’s intellectual assessment of the material at hand. These two pieces of information when coupled with the individual text created by B. L. as a response to a specific journey to the Sepulcher give Clarel as much insight as he needs. However, the narrator notes Clarel’s manner of “reading” to be an impediment. Clarel didn’t read the material; he “scanned” (1.41.144) it. At best, Clarel’s scan briefly familiarizes him with the texts and commentary at hand. He does not minutely scrutinize the material, a necessity for comprehension; he hastily considers it. Most generously assessed, Clarel’s scan serves as a necessary first step. The subsequent readings will provide him with the necessary comprehension. Unfortunately, there are no such subsequent readings. Clarel should understand his crisis of faith to be similar to B. L.’s. Their educational backgrounds are similar; they each have come to Jerusalem for guidance; they have traveled to the same legendary sites. Yet, Clarel gives the matter no more thought. At the Sepulcher, Clarel’s reverence is equally stirred. His series of dream-visions considers the complex passion, the historical, psychological, and

28 The present study argues “scanning” to be a far less insightful manner of approaching text. However, to “scan” may also suggest a careful perusal. In the present context, Clarel, as well as other pilgrims, fail to penetrate surface features of texts when they scan. Scanning can be a helpful enterprise in other contexts; in *Clarel*, scanning reveals a superficial investigation.
theological implications of the Sepulcher, stirred internally for all pilgrims. Clarel and B. L. have much in common, but Clarel's hasty scan prevents this recognition.

Another instance of Clarel's scanning occurs during the "Mar Saba" part of the poem. Clarel asks a celibate monk whether the domestic or celibate life is the more virtuous. The Celibate does not answer, but offers Clarel a book containing, "Rhyme, old hermit-rhyme / Composed in Decius' cruel age / By Christian of Thebean clime" (3.30.106-8). The narrator summarizes the text, a Biblical consideration of reasons for celibacy. Bezanson calls the rhyme an "ascetic tract on woman-as-trouble" (Clarel 818) from which Clarel recognizes the misogynist tendencies. The remaining "lustral hymns and prayers" (3.30.115), according to the narrator, lament the weakness of the flesh and instruct man's constant, vigilant efforts to curb such temptations. Nothing short of the "vowed life austere" (3.30.123) can protect man from these weaknesses. The very next line of the poem suggests Clarel is not swayed by the text; after all, "The given page the student scanned: / Started—reviewed, nor might withstand" (3.30.124-5). Though another hasty assessment of the material, particularly confusing because Clarel seeks guidance from the Celibate when he asks this pressing question; Clarel apparently reviews the text twice. But the answers Clarel seeks do not come from written text. His question to the Celibate suggests he wants a human response, not a Scriptural one. The Celibate, through his own example, can reveal to Clarel the hazards and rewards of the vowed life austere. Though the Celibate's example necessitates Clarel interpreting—reading—the image correctly, the student seems far more prepared to read the Celibate. The text, by contrast, is lifeless. Though revealing the hazards and temptations of the flesh, it gives no tangible picture Clarel may evaluate. Its lifelessness causes Clarel to
scan. But after fulfilling this textual obligation, Clarel turns to the Celibate, but the monk has departed. Perhaps looking for clarification; perhaps looking for the human response; Clarel is alone again, without answers to the questions he seeks. Clarel may ask questions of others, but he must find the answers himself. In this regard, Clarel appears to reach the same conclusion as B. L. when he rejects the lessons of the Vitriolists and Atheists, preferring instead the quiet, solitary meditation afforded him by the flickering lamps in Syria’s tombs. B. L. may ask questions of others, but he realizes the importance of finding the answers on his own terms.

Clarel’s final encounter with a written text he must read comes during the poem’s fourth and final part, “Bethlehem.” The pilgrims, having acquired Salvaterra as guide, tour the site of the Nativity. Salvaterra brings the pilgrims to a spot he holds as traditionally claiming Christ’s birthplace. The spot is marked by a Latin text which the narrator translates as, “THE VIRGIN HERE BROUGHT FORTH THE SUN” (4.13.193). The narrator does not mention that the pilgrims read Latin; neither does he claim any pilgrim fails to understand the text at hand. Considering the company, it is possible, even probable, that the pilgrims would read and understand Latin. Aside from Salvaterra’s statement of faith and obvious reverence for the site, no other mention is made of the inscription.

As a reader of character, Clarel is far less accomplished, but this is understandable when one considers the “text” at hand tends to be less revealing. Clarel attempts

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29 Bezanson offers the original Latin text: HIC DE VIRGINE MARIA JESUS CHRISTUS NATUS EST (Clarel 830). When the narrator translates the text, he qualifies the translation as uncertain or conditional: the Latin “thus may run” (4.13.192; emphasis added). Because no further mention is made of this episode, one simply concludes this to be an instance of the narrator’s limited omniscience. Though it seems all the other pilgrims present read Latin, the narrator does not (or at the very least, his fluency is questionable). Though it is noted that all of the pilgrims read the text, the discussion of this episode will be limited to Clarel’s perspective.
interpretations of many of his fellow pilgrims: Nehemiah (1.22.106-12; 1.33.93-8; 1.37.119-21), Rolfe (1.31.13-4), Vine (1.33.69-77), Djalea and Belex (2.7), the Mar Saba revelers (3.14.98-120), Derwent (3.21), and Don Hannibal (4.19.5-21). This is not a complete list, but it seeks to introduce the challenge for Clarel. There are few instances where his attempts to read his fellows are successful. Many times, Clarel skims or scans the faces of the pilgrims, either following statements each has made or in response to statements made by others. In these instances, Clarel is typically reserved, silently searching for insight into the various perspectives of his fellow pilgrims. Though Clarel gains little of value from these readings (he comes no closer to understanding the individuals because of these limited instances of evaluation), the practice itself holds the reader's interest. It further reinforces the prominence of reading throughout the poem.

Nehemiah holds the most interest for Clarel if the number of interpretive considerations offers sufficient evidence. The saint's meekness makes an impression on Clarel that lasts until Nehemiah's death. Because of Nehemiah's exceptionally strong faith, Clarel seeks to discover in Nehemiah the means to transform himself into an equally passionate believer. He looks to the saint's physical appearance as perhaps indicative of the less accessible spirituality each man holds to be exceptionally important. Clarel's first attempt to read Nehemiah comes when the two retire to Nehemiah's humble home. It is here that Clarel, following the episode at the Wailing Wall, encounters Ruth, whom Nehemiah calls "my bird" (1.22.39). Though her presence in the hermitage is brief, she makes an impression on Clarel strong enough so that the student asks Nehemiah to reveal her history. Discussing Ruth and Nathan, Nehemiah slowly dozes to sleep, leaving Clarel with thoughts of Ruth. Nehemiah's breathing, however, draws
Clarel from his reveries. The narrator comments on Nehemiah’s sleeping appearance, claiming, “The face / Though tranced, struck not like trance of death / All rigid; not a masque like that, / Iced o’er, which none may penetrate, / Conjecturing of aught below. / Death freezes, but sleep thaws” (1.22.101-6). Clarel understands the differences noted by the narrator, those between death and sleep. The former “freezes” the individual, but it also freezes interpretation. Nothing can be gained from the physical appearance of the dead. Sleep, however, thaws the rigid external appearance that can prevent or at least impede interpretation. Knowing this to be the case, Clarel attempts to read Nehemiah’s hidden interiors from “some lines revealed—” (1.22.107) on his face. The student does not succeed—the narrator notes, contrary to the possibility of the revelations apparent from sleep’s capacity to thaw, Nehemiah’s face, “Be it sealed” (1.22.109). Clarel’s efforts at interpretation fail. He cannot read the sealed text.

He tries again with Nehemiah, accompanied by Rolfe and Vine, when the group visits Mt. Olivet and the Garden of Gethsemane. Nehemiah’s speech in the “By the Stone” (1.33) canto refutes Rolfe’s earlier observations. Looking upon Jerusalem from Mt. Olivet, Rolfe notes the sites upon which the legends are based, yet he shows no reverence. The narrator notes how this bothers Clarel, but the student says nothing to challenge Rolfe. Nehemiah, however, paraphrases the words of Jesus and reveals a saintliness and willingness towards self-sacrifice that draws the attention of the other three (Clarel 751). To this point, Nehemiah remained separate from the group, but his return to the group represents a significant contribution to the discussion. By alluding to specific passages from the Bible, Nehemiah exhibits his steadfast adherence to the Scriptures that have been his guide for an unspecified number of years. His familiarity
and fluency allow him to draw quick comparisons and apply the appropriate text when necessary. Not so much confused, Clarel, Rolfe, and Vine look upon Nehemiah with awe, but awe colored by incredulity. The disbelief does not stem from an unwillingness to accept Nehemiah’s faithfulness; more correctly, its origins come from Nehemiah’s inability to note the tenuous relationship between ancient Scripture and contemporary realities. Nehemiah and his words are enigmas, seemingly out of place, not regarding location, but regarding time. His observations are appropriate for Jerusalem, but the group’s hesitancy comes from the challenges presented by contemporary change. Because of the gap between Nehemiah’s perception of reality and reality as perceived by Clarel, Rolfe, and Vine, the group finds interpreting Nehemiah difficult. “[H]im the seated audience scan” (1.33.93), but the conclusions only come as a simile—they see Nehemiah, “As he were the sole surviving man / Of tribe extinct or world” (1.33.94-5). Nehemiah’s message is unheard. The group can neither interpret his words nor his person, and the saint moves away.

Clarel’s final attempt at reading Nehemiah comes after Rolfe tells a tale regarding a mariner Rolfe claims to be as meek as Nehemiah. After a lengthy rendering of the two tragedies that befall the mariner, Rolfe draws the attention of Clarel and Vine to Nehemiah. The group again scans Nehemiah, but concludes little about the “wannish man” (1.37.118) except that he appears ghost-like and out of place. For the second time, the narrator makes it clear that Nehemiah’s mannerisms make him an oddity that the

30 Rolfe’s tale of the mariner is a reworking of the tragic mishaps that befall Captain George Pollard of the whale-ship Essex. Though Rolfe reorders Pollard’s two tragedies at sea when he considers his own mariner, the details remain essentially the same. Bezanson summarizes the story well, noting Melville’s use of the history in Moby-Dick (Clarel 755). The most thorough and entertaining rendering of the history comes from Nathaniel Pembrick, In the Heart of the Sea: The Tragedy of the Whaleship Essex (New York: Viking, 2000).
group cannot decipher. Both his language and his demeanor reflect his internal struggle to reconcile the teachings of Scripture, that Christ’s return is imminent; and the lack of Christian sentiment in the world of man that Nehemiah must experience each day. The struggle takes its toll on Nehemiah. He lives as much in a world constructed by and dependent on ancient texts, as he does his contemporary reality. Though he seems perfectly capable of navigating social dynamics on an individual level (the earlier cantos with Clarel, for example), navigating the group dynamic evades him. The greater his discomfort becomes; the greater his tendency towards silence and self-isolation. Because of these characteristics, the group finds him indecipherable. Clarel’s attempts to understand Nehemiah yield few results.

Clarel succeeds in reading the character of Rolfe, but, as the narrator notes, so do others. Concerning Rolfe, “One read his superscription clear— / A genial heart, a brain austere— / [ . . . ] / Sensitive still and frankly kind— / Too frank, too unreserved, may be, / And discreet in honesty” (1.31.13-25). Though much of Rolfe confuses Clarel, he finds he can relate to the wandering mariner because he represents, as Bezanson notes, “an ideal UNION OF HEAD AND HEART” (Clarel 631). For Clarel, this balance prevents Rolfe from succumbing to extremes of judgment, either through haste or indifference. Because Clarel hopes Rolfe to be his guide, he refuses to acknowledge what he ultimately sees as Rolfe’s lone shortcoming. As with Rolfe, Clarel hopes that Vine may fill the role of guide. In this situation, Clarel looks to Vine in order to understand an appropriate response to Rolfe’s previous statements noting his familiarity with legend, but his lack of reverence in spite of it. Feeling Rolfe’s statements are best understood when mediated

31 The present study intends to examine Rolfe’s balance in Chapter Five. From time to time, the reader will note how even the most self-aware individuals lapse. Clarel, ultimately, loses faith in Rolfe’s “Manysidedness” (3.16.264), noting its equal susceptibility to delusion and misjudgment.
through Vine, Clarel “skimmed Vine’s countenance” (1.33.70), but finds Vine as enigmatic as Nehemiah and Rolfe. His reserve makes intimacy difficult; his inherent distrust of man’s ability to achieve happiness results in an emotional, intellectual, and physical asceticism demanding that “His virgin soul communed with men / But thro’ the wicket” (1.29.44-5).32

When Clarel and the rest of the pilgrim group “scan” (2.7.13) Djalea and Belex, the narrator provides the essential physical description of the two men and their horses. Contrary to previous instances, the simple scan here provides accurate information. Other than Djalea’s rumored status as nobility, all other information seems understandably solid. In a brief scan, Clarel manages to look to the essence of Djalea’s character, noting his stoic self-control. Equally important to understanding Djalea, the narrator articulates the qualities of Zar, Djalea’s majestic steed. Though unaccustomed to luxurious treatment, Zar, like her rider, exudes a controlled intensity that makes the two particularly well-suited for one another. In combination, Djalea and Zar manage all duties and challenges with confidence. Belex and his horse Solomon equally exhibit fluent capacities for the task of guiding and protecting the pilgrims. Though Belex’s gray beard and physically disheveled appearance might lead an inattentive observer to false conclusions; his physical features confirm he is a “Type of the pure Osmanli breed” (2.7.96). Solomon, though equally aged, competes competently with the other horses. Without commentary to confirm Clarel’s recognition, one assumes that the physical

32 The narrator’s figurative language becomes literal language when Clarel attempts to engage Vine in conversation following the episode with the Dominican monk. The canto “Vine and Clarel” (2.27) shows the two pilgrims communicating “through a leafy screen / Luxurious there in umbrage thrown” (2.27.12-3). The literal barrier between Clarel and Vine represents the emotional, intellectual, and physical barriers Vine constructs about him as a means of self-protection and isolation.
presence of the two guides and their horses effectively communicates to the pilgrims the conclusions drawn by the narrator.

Concerning Derwent, Clarel uses his most personal interaction with the Anglican priest, the “In Confidence” (3.21) canto during the poem’s “Mar Saba” section, to conclude his understanding. Though the narrator provides much information leading to this interaction, Derwent’s consistently optimistic position does not afford Clarel the means to grasp the interiors beneath Derwent’s easy, cordial manner. From the initial description of Derwent, Clarel understands his mannerisms to be something of a peacekeeping tactic. Not wanting to offend or contradict, Derwent malleably adjusts himself so that he consistently supports the “MELIORIST VIEW OF MAN AND SOCIETY” (Clarel 619). However, when the social stakes diminish, and Derwent and Clarel find themselves alone, Derwent’s character seems more forceful. Clarel, having sought to understand as many of his fellow travelers as possible,\(^{33}\) turns a critical eye towards Derwent. In one of the lengthier individual cantos, Clarel inquires of Derwent how he might investigate the tie between faith and doubt. Though the narrator notes Clarel’s investigation to be a scan, he qualifies the search by suggesting Clarel takes the task with more attention than previous scans. Thus, Clarel observes carefully as Derwent makes six specific points: 1) the nature of truth; 2) the false claims for the security to come from knowledge; 3) man’s hope that his condition matters to God; 4) the immortality of spirit; 5) the inability to appease rational and emotional anxieties simultaneously; and 6) brooding solves nothing.

\(^{33}\)The narrator provides this information in a lengthy preface as rationale for Clarel’s interests in Derwent: “The Arnaunt, and the man of glee — / The Lesbian, and the calm grave Druze, / And Belex; yes, and in degree / Even Rolfe; Vine too. Less he who trim / Beside him stood, eludes his doubt — / Derwent himself, whose easy skim / Never had satisfied throughout. / He now, if not deemed less devout / Through wassail and late hint of him, / Was keener scanned” (3.21.53-62). The present study does not account for Clarel’s attempts to read the characters of the Arnaunt or the Lesbian because they are not part of the primary pilgrim group. Clarel, like the rest of the pilgrim group, later scans Don Hannibal, but the present study does not consider him for the same reasons.
(3.21.90-265). Derwent’s summary position, like Rolfe’s “Manysidedness,” stresses moderation in searching, both in goal and manner: “‘Be not extreme. Midway is best. / Herein ‘tis never as by Nile— / From waste to garden but a stile. / Betwixt rejection and belief, / Shadings there are—degrees, in brief’” (3.21.277-82). For Clarel, these conclusions are unsatisfying. His insistent questioning forces Derwent to recognize that Clarel does not understand his second point. Could Derwent provide Clarel with the answers he seeks, Clarel would not be any more satisfied with the resolution. Another dilemma would present itself before the student and he would commit himself to pursuing the answer with equal fervor. When Derwent laments that Clarel dives too deeply, he confesses to Clarel what the student has yet to acknowledge. Though he wishes to have a guide, Clarel wrongfully concludes that his journey through life might be eased because of the guide’s assistance. In spite of his best efforts through the six specific points, Derwent knows that his advice ultimately must fall on the proverbial deaf ears. Clarel cannot take Derwent’s conclusions as his own because he must reach his own conclusions on his own terms. Derwent’s conclusions satisfy Derwent’s worldview—they cannot satisfy Clarel’s. Nor can Rolfe’s, Vine’s, Nehemiah’s, or any of the other prospective guides. Having “keenlier scanned” (3.21.62) Derwent, Clarel finally comes to a position where he may recognize the need to dispense with guides and seek his own answers. Clarel’s series of unanswered questions, ostensibly addressed to Nehemiah at the conclusion of the canto, represent one important step in his development. Though the step is not large, Clarel begins to move away from dependence on others. He may address Nehemiah, but Clarel knows Nehemiah to be dead. He cannot answer Clarel any more than Derwent. Clarel’s questions remain his own burden.
He may choose occasionally to share these with others through discussion and debate. But the burden cannot be eased simply through this temporary social investigation. From the social aspect, Clarel may gain confidence in realizing he is not alone in his search. Many may search for similar solutions, but each searches alone. The discussion with Derwent reinforces this point. Though Clarel and Derwent debate the significance of man's pursuit of spiritual satisfaction through rational means, Clarel comes no closer to resolving his own dilemmas because of the discussion. He may more clearly understand the direction of the pursuit; he may more clearly recognize the complexity of the task; he may even realize the limitations, as Derwent suggests, inherent in the search. But he will not bring his searching to any end. When Clarel realizes the infinite nature of the search (or finite with regard to Clarel's lifespan); his eagerness must wane in favor of wisdom gained through past failings.

In summary, Clarel reads texts throughout the poem as a means of approaching his crisis of faith from varying perspectives. Each text affords Clarel the opportunity for self-discovery. He must appreciate his condition of doubt neither to be unique nor any greater than that experienced by another. The "Judæa" poem, Celio's journals, and B. L.'s poem reveal this most clearly. Though Clarel cannot read the Hebrew associated with Abdon's mezuzah and talith, he may deduce the struggle with faith links many religions together. The text on the wreath of Ethelward's grave and the Latin text engraved in the floor at the Church of the Nativity represent concise statements of faith, indications for Clarel that faith is a self-sustaining and self-actualizing entity. Its repetition creates its value. Clarel reads character as a means of contextualizing the written texts. His interpretation of character depends upon both personal statement and
appearance; but more significantly, his ability to synthesize his own spiritual dilemmas, as qualified by textual interaction, and the positions of others. If Clarel understands Derwent's point that truth exists as a distillation of many voices, not as one clear authoritative voice, he must learn to read character as effectively as he reads text. The two processes, though different, are inseparably linked as essential components of one comprehensive endeavor.

Derwent

Derwent reads for reasons differing from Clarel. Not suffering from the same crisis of faith, Derwent primarily reads as a leisure activity, but one he values for reasons greater than simply passing time. The narrator notes Derwent's book, an unnamed text, to be consistently by his side. The presence of the book speaks to its importance for Derwent. No other pilgrim with the exception of Nehemiah carries a book with him throughout the pilgrimage, but the narrator's tone regarding Derwent suggests he believes Derwent's book to be particularly vapid. The narrator's concern with the book centers on its guiding moralistic viewpoint: one need look to the bright side of life. Though perhaps platitudinous, the perspective in and of itself does not merit outright dismissal. For Derwent, the text contains value in much the same way that the Bible contains value for Nehemiah. Each contains stories and accounts that serve as guides for manners of living. Simply because Derwent's text does not embrace suffering in the way of Nehemiah's, the narrator need not assume a standard of value lacked by the former, but possessed by the latter. Perhaps the narrator's critique stems from a belief in the inappropriateness of Derwent's views relative to his position as an Anglican priest. If Derwent's optimistic filter colors his impression of the world and man's place in it, the
narrator’s disapproving tone may be valid. The language used by the narrator to describe this book, whether it is the intention, reveals a bias. He feels the book reinforces Derwent’s social graces to the detriment of the responsibilities the narrator assumes of an Anglican priest. The narrator critiques the book because, as a representative of social propriety, it contradicts what Derwent should understand about the world in order to pass along such understanding to his parishioners. Things are not always for the best, contrary to what clichés of this ilk suggest one ought to believe. The narrator feels that Derwent’s easeful confrontation of grave matters does not suit his position, and his book provides justification for these inappropriate modes of thought: “At saddle-bow a book was laid / Convenient—tinted in the page / Which did urbanely disengage / Sadness and doubt from all things sad / And dubious deemed” (2.1.46-50). The optimist incapable of seeing evil, Derwent, according to the narrator, confronts the world with a self-imposed blindness. In all fairness, Derwent’s adherence to his own book, as earlier noted, is no different in degree than Nehemiah’s attachment. Each finds value in a text that supports an individual point-of-view. While Nehemiah’s text seems more concerned with tradition, Derwent’s seems more concerned with contemporary developments. Whether one agrees with the narrator on the point regarding the appropriateness of Derwent’s adherence to meliorist politics, it seems insincere to devalue Derwent’s text simply because it represents “Thought’s last adopted style” (2.1.35). Because the narrator does not more clearly reveal the text in question, one must be satisfied with limited assessments of the book. The fact that Derwent keeps the book with him during the pilgrimage differentiates him from most of the group. Derwent values reading because it allows a kind of communication with the past, as well as with one’s fellow man. Whatever the
subject (and this seems the greater concern for the narrator), books afford readers opportunities to experience the thoughts of past ages. Derwent reveals this information, his most pointed assessment of reading, later on the shores of the Dead Sea. Here, he clearly articulates what he understands to be at stake.

Prior to that incident, along the route to the Dead Sea, Derwent and the other pilgrims encounter the Ode to the Southern Cross scrawled into the Petra rock. Derwent climbs to a vantage point and serves as the primary reader and interpreter for the pilgrim group. The discovery excites the group, but Derwent suggests deliberation. When solicited, Derwent reads the first couplet inscribed above the image of the Southern Cross: "’By one who wails the loss, / This altar to the Slanting Cross" (2.31.43-4). Clarel first suggests the image on the rock resembles the Southern Cross, and Rolfe, the experienced mariner, validates Clare’s observation, claiming a similarity between the present image and one he remembers when sailing southward towards Peru. But Derwent hesitates to make such an assumption, rather believing the need to evaluate the text as a separate entity. Unexamined assumptions and hasty conclusions yield nothing valuable, according to Derwent. He notes the order of business to be the same in the present situation as for other textual enterprises. Though the group wants immediate interpretation—"’Decipher, quick! We’re waiting all” (2.31.46)—Derwent realizes the necessity of preceding with caution. Rather than concede to the group pressures, Derwent advises: "’Patience: for ere one try rehearse, / ’Twere well to make it out. ‘Tis verse’” (2.31.47-8). In this couplet, Derwent advises the group on how they should read the present text, as well as how reading deserves to be approached as a future activity. As such, Derwent offers an interpretive standard by which other readers must be evaluated. Though twice the
pilgrim group eagerly demands Derwent “read” (2.31.42; 2.31.49) the text, his reluctance to “rehearse,” to account for, the poem’s contents prior to conscientious deliberation suggests he values the reading process. The function of these written words transcends their status as signifiers. Certainly the words possess meaning when linked together in sequence. However, the meaning of the sequence—a notable matter of interpretation that reveals itself through deliberate investigation—stands as one level of interpretation. The words also represent the intellectual and spiritual processes of the author. Because of these distinct, though linked, characteristics, Derwent understands interpretation to yield two distinct, though linked, sets of conclusions: 1) the “meaning” of the poem and 2) insight into the character of the author. Derwent realizes the first set of conclusions to be the product of the second. For Derwent, reading requires patience—it is an activity that yields few rewards when approached with too much zeal. Noting the form of the text to be “verse,” as distinct from prose, Derwent realizes, rather quickly considering his investigation of the material has not truly started, the challenge to be complicated by the “mystical” (2.31.49) quality of the contents.

Derwent assesses the theme of the verse (2.31.50-70) to be a crisis of faith. Taking the Southern Cross to be the primary symbol, the speaker of the poem regards past meanings and implications, as well as speculations for future meanings. The past meanings and implications are understood to contrast with the speaker’s present considerations. Though the speaker makes no specific, concise statements regarding the past, the reader concludes his use of specific adjectives when describing the Cross (“bleak,” “remote,” “Dim,” “vain,” “frigid”) represent stark contrasts to feelings of the past, when faith is not in question. The speaker conveys ambivalence towards the
progress characteristic of his age. Though these advances make life simpler, they also
tend to render life less meaningful. If science possesses the capacity to transform
symbols of the benign gods, like the Southern Cross, into meaningless “heraldries”
(2.31.56), the speaker doubts the ability of future nations and generations to revere such
symbols. But the speaker’s manner of conveying this distress comes from asking
questions for which he knows no answers exist. Over the course of the poem’s twenty-
one lines, the speaker makes only one statement, an exclamation actually, that contrasts
the Cross’s past fecundity with its present state (2.31.58-61).

An internal interrogation as much as of the world at large, the speaker asks seven
questions, all designed to reveal, however dimly, his hope that faith remains possible. If
the Cross has “withdrawn” (2.31.53), the speaker hopes the gods responsible for the
celestial image still exist though they remain unseen. If the Cross and the speaker are
“estranged” (2.31.57), the speaker hopes this to be a temporary condition. When his
concern moves beyond the personal and into the unknowable future, his speculations
consider the possibility that the absence of the gods ceases to be a temporary condition
and becomes permanent. In the absence of hope, the “‘planted nations yet to be’”
(2.31.63) will know nothing of the reverence with which past generations held the
Southern Cross. It will become merely a constellation, like “‘Orion’s sword’” (2.31.66),
symbolizing the dead beliefs of past cultures. And if this is the case, the speaker notes
his age’s responsibility, the “Fomentors” (2.31.70) whose thirst for advancement
destroyed the valuable elements of the past. While the present discussion suggests these
conclusions to be actual statements, the speaker of the poem leaves the conclusions
unspecified. Because the speaker refuses to provide answers for these questions, he
retains the hope that all he notes will be refuted. The conclusions of the present discussion exist only as logical implications. But these same logical implications refuse to acknowledge the hope the speaker retains. Without hope for the longevity of his faith, the speaker realizes the futility of the questions—without hope, the questions become foregone conclusions asked by a naïve simpleton. With hope, the reader notes the accuracy of Derwent’s “mystical” assessment of the poem. The speaker’s consideration of the spiritual symbolism of the Southern Cross suggests the presence of his own faith, however dim, and the constant struggle to believe.

Derwent’s interpretation of the poem addresses the character of the author more directly than the text itself. He calls the text, “Mad, mad enough” (2.31.71), but refuses to acknowledge the work to be Mortmain’s. Rolfe briefly debates Derwent on this position, claiming Mortmain’s temperament to be realized in the verse he has just heard. Derwent, in characteristic fashion, spins Rolfe’s argument so that he upholds the optimistic viewpoint expected by his fellow pilgrims. By conceding the work to be Mortmain’s, Derwent notes the text is evidence that nothing bad has happened to him during his nights alone in the desert. He suggests the text further indicates that Mortmain’s return to the group at the Dead Sea is imminent. Rolfe makes no objections, but neither does the narrator, in a scene that deserves commentary, if for no other reason than its oddity. By refusing to comment on the verse, Derwent implies that he understands the implications of the faith-doubt crisis outlined therein. Derwent may understand the competing viewpoints, but his refusal to comment suggests his discomfort with the subject matter. One expects commentary and analysis from which Derwent might rightly conclude the text to be an indication of the author’s mental instability.
Even if his lack of commentary indicates Derwent’s willingness to take the verse at face value, it is difficult to appreciate Derwent’s position. Either Derwent’s discomfort with the idea of dead faith disturbs him too greatly for comment or the structural form of the speaker’s argument, its rhetorical questions as constructed moments for reflection, freezes Derwent’s capacity for analysis. If the first condition is the case, it would seem that Derwent’s notion of faith is as tenuous as the speaker claims future faith to be. By focusing his assessment of faith on the meaning of one Christian symbol, the speaker meditates on reverence as an inherited system of belief. If future generations fail to understand the origins, the stories, behind the Cross symbol; because of this, if the timeline of inheritance is ruptured, the significance of the symbol dies, as well as the system which depends upon the Cross. The speaker in the verse promotes only a single viewpoint, but the speaker hopes the rhetorical questions make his viewpoint significant beyond this singular instance. As the product of an acquisitive age, the speaker suggests how easily the intangible, though invaluable, spiritual aspects of man may be forgotten. Though he struggles on a personal level, the speaker realizes much more is at stake than individual belief. He holds science, a broad forum for progress and the acquisition of knowledge, as one of the responsible parties for the change. But the speaker does not indict external, faceless, nameless elements. He notes, and this remains one of the focal points for the verse, his own fault as science begins its eclipse of faith. As much as his own generation deserves its status as forefathers, thus responsible for ensuring the continuation of tradition upon which reverence may be based; the speaker notes his own generation to instigate the fall. If Derwent understands the complexity of the verse on this level, he keeps the knowledge to himself.
If the structural form of the verse, its rhetorical questions, asks Derwent to reflect, it is possible that his lack of commentary may be construed as having too little time for deliberation. His immediate response following the conclusion of his reading suggests that the process of interpretation has been occurring simultaneously with his reading. The response regarding the author’s mental state further suggests that Derwent understands the verse, but dismisses its validity. It seems that Derwent has time for reflection, but he does not agree with the direction his reflection takes. Derwent’s optimism seems to be the stumbling block for his willingness to consider the verse more closely. If Derwent feels that all things unfold for the best; he cannot, as a priest, see the disintegration of faith as a part of any foreseen plan. Derwent depends upon a world oriented and controlled by a benevolent God, but no such God would construct a world where doubt bests faith. When Derwent’s thoughts lead him to conclusions of this kind, he turns away. Instead of continuing to struggle with the dilemma, Derwent reverts to his self-sustaining optimism. This position protects him from considerations that challenge his own assumptions. But if Derwent would consider his present company as any indication of the state of faith in the world, he would realize that the speaker in the poem does not speak from an unfounded fear or perspective. Clarel feels the terror of doubt; Rolfe feels human intellectual capacity to be characteristic of man’s divinity—while he does not dismiss outright, he does not exactly believe; Vine’s reserve shows no belief in a supreme being; Mortmain’s experiences disillusion him to the innate goodness of man; Margoth’s adherence to science as savior shows no reverence for spirituality; only Nehemiah stands as a truly faithful man, but whether this makes his life particularly better is debatable. Derwent shows no particular faith either. His easy faith, a product of
optimism, puts control of his destiny outside of himself. Though this is a necessary component of faith, Derwent does not hold himself accountable for any aspects. He simply believes what should happen, will happen; or what does happen will be fine in the long run. His faith is too easy and it relieves him of any real responsibility. Compared to the speaker of the verse who willingly holds himself as accountable for faith's demise as any external influence, Derwent sees no such need for self-examination. Yet, Derwent's failure to comment on the poem indicates his unwillingness to participate in the maintenance of his own faith. Derwent assumes the existence of his faith without actively testing its strengths. If individuals like Clarel and the speaker in the poem suffer through crises of faith, all the while appreciating their individual struggles, it seems that Derwent's easy faith serves as much to guide him as no faith at all. Because he refuses to address the role of faith during times of doubt, Derwent remains enigmatic. He doesn't truly believe; he doesn't ever doubt; he spiritually coasts. It is little wonder that Derwent's commentary on the poem limits itself to dismissal. To do otherwise would require more from Derwent than he seems capable of offering.34

During the very next canto, Derwent reads from his treasured book and offers an interpretation of reading as an activity that potentially shakes the previous conclusions regarding his capacities as a reader. Encamped beside the Dead Sea, the pilgrims await

34 The canto ends with the narrator's comments regarding Margoth's addition to the Ode. Championing the position of science over religion, Margoth notes how the ebb of religious faith is tied to the flow of scientific knowledge. According to the narrator, Margoth "scores" (2.31.94) the following into the rock: "'I, Science, I whose gain's thy loss, / I slanted thee, thou Slanting Cross'" (2.31.99-100). This may be a petty addition in keeping with the general picture of Margoth's character. Of greater interest, however, are the narrator's comments in response to this couplet. He offers that natural elements will take their toll on Margoth's efforts: "But sun and rain, and wind, with grit / Driving, these haste to cancel it" (2.31.101-2). Though his comment here appears to focus on nature's capacity to destroy Margoth's words only, the narrator fails to consider that these same natural elements, driven by the same forces, will erode the Ode also. Whether the narrator intends the reader to conclude that nature remains a greater force than science or religion is uncertain.
the arrival of Mortmain. Except for Derwent, the pilgrims enjoy the natural scene afforded them. The priest chooses to sit aside from the group and read. Rolfe chastises Derwent for the activity, calling it inappropriate to the scene, but it is this objection that begins a debate between the two that assesses the value of knowledge learned from books and the value of knowledge learned from nature. Rolfe proposes that Derwent’s actions are misdirected, that he ought to learn from the experience of the scene. If nature is the true teacher, the student needs to be receptive to the lessons. Rolfe asserts: “’Pupils we be of wave and waste— / Not books; nay, nay!’” (2.32.57-8). Though Derwent does not disagree with Rolfe’s position entirely, he sees the necessity of incorporating books into the learning process. Derwent replies to Rolfe by asking whether familiarity with books, the “’Book-comment’” (2.32.59) in regards to nature, is a bad thing, thus drawing the competing perspectives from which the two argue the respective points. Rolfe continues his insistence that only nature creates. Man, by comparison, only comments on what he observes. For Rolfe, experience becomes the far greater teacher, and personal experience gives the individual an opportunity for unmediated interaction with the subject. The encampment at the Dead Sea provides Rolfe with an acceptable example. Here, Rolfe seems to suggest, the pilgrims need only observe. He speaks directly to Derwent when he articulates the point most clearly: “’Look round. Are not here met / Books and that truth no type shall set?’” (2.32.62-3). Rolfe’s imperative statement offers Derwent an alternative. Instead of looking within his book, Derwent should look to the grandeur of nature exhibited by the scene. Though the scene contains “wave and waste,” Rolfe feels it offers a clearer image, a more accurate picture, a truer sense than a

35 Derwent makes this same point regarding the need for books, particularly contemporary books and viewpoints, when he encounters the blind abbot Christodolus at Mar Saba (3.23.53-64).
description of the same scene from any book. The image, the picture, the sense: these cannot be encapsulated by the typeset of a printer’s press, no matter the writer’s capacity with language. Though another individual may view the scene, he only provides an interpretation of the scene that attempts to communicate an experience that needs further interpretation. The reader, Rolfe seems to suggest, is too far removed from the experience to gain all the scene has to offer. For Rolfe, no book provides an acceptable alternative to individual experience. His chastisement of Derwent’s reading, then, may be interpreted less as a critique of the activity as a whole, and more of Derwent’s unwillingness or inability to recognize the opportunity for individual experience before him.  

Derwent counters Rolfe’s argument. Books supplement Derwent’s experiences; they do not substitute for them. Because Derwent notes the inability of books to account for all experiences, he implements and discards them as necessary. In fact, Derwent claims to possess the skepticism necessary for sound interpretation: “‘Believe, / Though here I random page review, / Not books I let exclusive cleave / And sway’” (2.32.69-72). Books provide Derwent with a balanced perspective, but the books also afford Derwent an analogous focal point for an assessment of man’s divine qualities. To refute Rolfe’s

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36 Rolfe’s question to Derwent regarding the singularity of experience offered by the scene at the Dead Sea communicates Rolfe’s faith in an unexpected manner. This is equally singular in relation to Rolfe’s usual reserve on the matter. Though Rolfe’s balance seems to be his shining characteristic, he alludes to a personal system of belief that runs contrary to his other statements. In the “Of Rama” canto (1.32), the narrator discusses, among other things, the qualities of the divine within man. Critics like Joseph Knapp and Martin Pops read this canto as revealing the Rama-like qualities of Rolfe. Such statements of faith and reverence, like the one underlying his question to Derwent, complicate Rolfe’s persona. If nature reveals a divine plan and the grandeur of the designer, as Rolfe’s question implies, books, those creations of man, must pale in comparison. This is not a grand piece of insight. As Melville’s narrator in *The Confidence-Man* notes, consistency in character is not an essential quality. But it is interesting that Rolfe, a pilgrim who insists on standing as close to center as possible with regards to faith and doubt, leans towards one extreme here. For more detailed readings regarding Rolfe’s divinity, see, Joseph Knapp, *Tortured Synthesis: The Meaning of Melville’s Clarel* (New York: The Philosophical Library, Inc., 1971); and Martin Pops, *The Melville Archetype* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State UP, 1970).
claims to the primacy of experience, Derwent constructs a sophisticated syllogism that postulates man’s similitude to God. Books, far from misrepresenting nature, as Rolfe claims, are nature, or are at least natural. Reading books is as important, according to Derwent, as Rolfe’s claims to the direct, individual experience of nature. Derwent begins his analogy with a question from which he extrapolates along the lines of an affirmative response. After suggesting even Solomon’s wisdom would be tested by some of the sites of nature, Derwent asks: “‘Nevertheless, / Were it a paradox to confess / A book’s a man? / If this be so, / Books be but part of nature. / Oh, / ‘Tis studying nature, reading books: / And ‘tis through Nature each heart looks / Up to a God, or whatsoe’er / One images beyond our sphere’” (2.32.74-81). In six brief lines, Derwent constructs the following: man (A) is to book (B) as book (B) is to nature (C) as nature (C) is to God (D) as God (D) is to man (A): A=B, B=C, C=D; therefore, A=D. Postulating man’s divinity, and consequently God’s humanity, Derwent’s observations reveal the value he places on reading. He pleads with Rolfe to be allowed his liberty in the activity—“‘So, prithee, do not be severe, / But let me read’” (2.32.86-7)—to which Rolfe concedes an admiration for the priest’s point. “‘I like you’” (2.32.93), Rolfe admits, and the scene concludes with the narrator’s attention turned towards Clarel, again baffled by the complexity of man’s character, and further disheartened by the unlikelihood of developing “communion true” with his fellow man, let alone God. The lightheartedness with which this canto ends should not underscore the gravity of the point Derwent makes and Rolfe concedes. To agree with Derwent, one recognizes the prominence of the reading activity within Clarel. If Derwent intuits correctly, reading holds the possibility of accessing God to the extent that such an activity is possible or desirable. If, through books, man reads himself and
God in typeset, man must be a close reader and interpreter. God’s proximity depends upon the individual reader’s capacity as an interpreter. As noted throughout Clarel, the manner in which one reads determines the outcome of the reading. An active reader stands to comprehend the object of reading with much more frequency than the passive reader. Derwent’s words, in this instance, seem as directed to the external reader of Clarel as much as to Rolfe. If man, God, and nature are interconnected as Derwent suggests, reading becomes the most convenient means of accessing distant people, places, and modes of thought. Reverence becomes a textual matter dependent upon familiarity. Only those that read actively can truly be reverent in the context of Clarel. Passive readers by comparison simply are on the road to reverence.\(^{37}\)

It is not until the pilgrim group reaches Mar Saba that Derwent encounters another text that demands his reading. Wandering through the “monkish capital” (3.22.7) alone, Derwent discovers an inscription on a shield of marble. Though he first must read the picture detailed on the shield, Derwent reads the five stanzas of verse to understand the tale of the knight. Following the “In Confidence” (3.21) canto in which Derwent and Derwent’s claims for books hold more than a passing similarity to Emerson’s conclusions for the Man Thinking in his essay “The American Scholar.” To become the Man Thinking, that individual capable of the extreme form of self-reliance demanded by Emerson, one needs to avoid the pitfalls inherent in the system itself. Emerson’s “formula” for becoming the Man Thinking stresses three components: 1) the prominent place of Nature as teacher of cosmic and universal truths, 2) the importance of Books as communicators of contemporary modes of thought, and 3) the need for Action specifically inspired by Nature and the education afforded through reading. This brief summary oversimplifies the essay, but helps to highlight Derwent’s adherence to, and inversion of, some of Emerson’s tenets. To some extent, the reader may see Derwent as Melville’s parody of Emersonian transcendentalism. But, to superimpose Derwent’s observations with Emerson’s provides far more interesting reading. Though Derwent’s conclusions ring of individual transcendence as the goal, Derwent’s self-saturation with books misunderstands Emerson’s intentions. Derwent does not use the books as a guide from which individual thought and action ultimately spring. He becomes the dreaded “bookworm,” capable only of regurgitating the thoughts of other men. Derwent, by bringing and reading from a familiar book, simply repeats himself. He seems to have no interest in action inspired by the books. Derwent seems far more concerned with establishing reverence for the past, as opposed to action for the future. If Emerson sees reading as part of a process which values the end (one becomes the Man Thinking and this is most important), Melville uses Derwent to show reading as an activity valuable in and of itself (only the journey matters; resolution is irrelevant).

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Clarel discuss truth at length, the meditative silence of the majority of “The Medallion” (3.22) canto affords Derwent the opportunity for internal considerations. He reads the inscription on the marble shield in order to access the knight’s own reverence as indicated by the picture on the shield. Though the narrator interprets the knight’s “Uplifting reverent a crown / In invocation” (3.22.24-5), Derwent, too, notes the mood and impression made by the engraving. The image of the knight communicates a life of toil and struggle, but one whose struggle affixes glory to God, not himself. According to Derwent, the image of the knight reveals his reserve. The narrator describes the reserve in accordance with the earlier interpretation of the offering of the crown: “’Twas reverence, and naught beside / Unless it might that shadow claim / Which comes of trial” (3.22.34-6). For Derwent, the image alone provides the source of his meditative efforts. The knight’s image communicates Christian spirituality and faith. Though the knight suffers the physical toils of his terrestrial duties, he maintains fidelity to his beliefs that a benevolent God oversees all. No matter the extent of his physical suffering, the knight knows his spiritual rewards to be adequate compensation. His faith remains in God. With such divine guidance, the knight need not worry.

When Derwent begins to read the inscription, he learns the quality of the knight’s faith through the experiences noted in the verse. The speaker in the poem is the knight, recalling events from long ago. The first stanza presents this information matter-of-factly. The speaker, though unnamed in the first stanza, assumes the first-person pronoun “I” by the second stanza and tells his tale. Set during a “Foul battle against odds” (3.22.52), the speaker invokes Death as substitute for God’s mercy. As God’s messenger, Death will reunite the fallen knight with the Creator, or so he hopes: “Disarmed, I, fall’n
and trampled, prayed: Death, succor! / Come, Death: thy hand is God's" (3.22.53-4).

Though the knight's faith in God never falters, his prayers for swift death are not answered. Instead, "A pale hand noiseless" (3.22.55) returns the knight's strength, sword, and armor, "And waved me warring on" (3.22.58). The knight's successes on the battlefield do not compare, finally, to the reasons for those successes.

In stanza four, the speaker graces Love with the accolades of victory, dedicating the crown as a token of his gratitude for Love's assistance in his time of need. The speaker stresses the humility of the knight in the final stanza by restating the dedication of the crown. But the final two lines complicate interpretive matters. Though the speaker and the knight appear to be the same individual because of certain pronoun choices; the final two lines suggest a break in this consistency. Following the dedication of the crown to Love, the speaker notes: "His wound re-opens, and he goes to haven: / Spirit! befriend him there" (3.22.65-6). The wound temporarily healed on the battlefield re-opens and the knight must seek medical care. The speaker's last line again invokes Love to assist the knight in his recovery. But there is little clarification for this inversion. The speaker and the knight may be different voices. Structurally, this makes the first and fifth stanzas the work of the speaker, while the second, third, and fourth stanzas are the work of the speaker's knight. Assuming this to be the case, the speaker serves a summarizing and limiting function, providing a framework for the faithful invocations of the knight. The speaker becomes Derwent's guide by suggesting, through the knight's example, the rewards of faith. The first stanza serves as a tribute to the past. It reveals the value of such stories. If the "marvel of the story" (3.22.49) comes from the legendary nature of the actions detailed within, the speaker suggests that the events of the tale, while
important as capable of maintaining the fabulous nature of the tale, serve a secondary purpose. The fact that the knight overcomes his mortal wounds to conquer his foes serves a literary purpose, but the tale’s allegorical meaning supercedes its literal meaning. The knight, a Christian soldier, sees Love conquer Death. Though near death himself, the knight never succumbs to doubt; his faith never falters. The speaker uses the knight’s tale as an allegorical rendering of the challenges of faith. Beset by atrocities, spiritual or mortal, at all times, the true adherent to Christianity’s message of love never succumbs to anger or hatred. Rather, the true adherent puts his trust in God’s “fairest, friendliest, and ever holy—“ (3.22.59) love. The knight’s three stanzas exemplify these messages. He trusts; he has faith. When the speaker concludes the allegory in the final stanza, he hopes the Spirit will reciprocate the knight’s care. Though an imperative construction to care for the knight, the speaker’s words sound more hopeful. The speaker lacks the power to command the Spirit to do anything. But, the speaker assumes the knight will be rewarded for his faith, that the Spirit will befriend the faithful and loyal soldier.

Derwent’s interpretation of the inscription is limited. His initial reaction noted by the narrator suggests frustration that the knight does not exhibit the heroic capacities of Achilles: “A hero, and shall he repine? / ’Tis not Achilles’” (3.22.67-8). The remaining lines, however, imply a mystery about the origins of the inscription. His distress makes “the charm [of the tale] in sort decline” (3.22.69). But, Derwent does not trust his own interpretive capacities. Encountering a monk, Derwent asks for the meaning of the inscription to be made clear. The monk offers only limited assistance, as much legend as truth, to Derwent’s request. Repeating the legendary history, the monk notes the shield came to Mar Saba “long ago,” “long before I harbored here,” and “Long centuries
[ago], they say” (3.22.72-4). In fact, the monk realizes he can offer Derwent nothing beyond the oral tradition surrounding the shield. Commissioned by “A count turned monk” (3.22.76) who assumed the name Lazarus, the shield was donated to the Mar Saba monastery by Lazarus because he felt the richness of the work displaced the intended message. The monk notes these details to be hearsay only and subtly encourages Derwent to return to the text if he desires a more clear understanding: “Yon slab tells all or nothing, see” (3.22.80). It is unlikely that the monk’s suggestion intends anything other than for Derwent to appeal to sources greater than the monk himself. The shield, as the only surviving relic of Lazarus’s existence, holds all that can be known beyond the oral traditions. However, Derwent should recognize the greater significance of the monk’s statements with regard to reading and interpretation. Derwent must spend more time with the shield; he must read again and again if he wishes the text to reveal itself. Instead of revealing limitations in the tale, Derwent’s frustration reveals his own limitations as a reader. Yet, the message of faith found in the allegory should appeal to Derwent. Though his own faith lacks the quality of the knight’s, Derwent ought to recognize an inspirational example when he sees one. For a pilgrim supposedly adroit at Scriptural hermeneutics, the priest appears taxed and vexed when the text appears in an unfamiliar, literary form. Of course, Derwent only reads the verse one time. Even with his concerns for interpretive accuracy, Derwent is unlikely to return to the text. For every advance Derwent makes with regard to interpretation, he seems to retreat soon thereafter. He neither gains nor loses interpretive ground. He remains, perhaps more disastrously, static.
Derwent makes one final textual discovery at Mar Saba. While the Lesbian serves as Derwent’s guide through the monastery, the priest encounters Habbibi’s writings on the wall of his room and over his door. According to the Lesbian, Habbibi felt a divine call to write. Derwent discovers the fragments of what remains. Subject to time, the writings on the wall have become less and less legible. Derwent’s examination of the material is as fragmented as the texts, and his interpretations are equally brief. Derwent makes piecemeal discoveries—the texts of Habbibi have no cohesive unity beyond the impending doom felt by the writer. Because of this, Derwent limits his own interpretations of the material to sympathetic feelings for Habbibi. Whether Derwent understands Habbibi to be mad or monomaniacal seems beyond the point. By noting the juxtaposition of the sentiments of Habbibi and the Lesbian, however, Derwent affords himself the opportunity to compare the relative advantages of the two conflicting modes of living.

Derwent’s first impressions of the textual discoveries sound dismissive, if not insincere. He laments Habbibi’s suffering, but does not offer any constructive interpretation of the material. Derwent calls Habbibi a “Poor man!” (3.27.125); notes his perception of suffering to be a “Profound pit” (3.27.128); flippantly interprets Habbibi’s prophecies by calling him Nostradamus (3.27.133); and willfully misreads a Biblical reference to Samson that he would know (3.27.139). Before leaving the grotto, Derwent notes Habbibi’s final message scrawled above his door: “Ye here who enter

38 The collected writings of Habbibi account for less than thirty total lines within the canto (3.27.123-50), much of which is taken up by the commentary of Derwent and the Lesbian. However, Bezanson notes the sources for Habbibi’s writings, citing Paradise Lost, The Inferno, the Biblical account of Samson slaying a lion in Judges 14, and Melville’s self-referencing of his own poem “The American Aloe on Exhibition” (Clarel 817). Bezanson simplifies his interpretation of Habbibi by calling the dead monk another of Melville’s monomaniacs “obsessed by the terrors of life, the preying of man on man, and of man on himself” (624).
At the moment of interpretation, Derwent concerns himself with what the experience will mean for him in the future. He does not heed the warning of the dead monk. Though there seems to be nothing immediately at stake in Derwent’s unwillingness to listen to prophecy, the latter third of the canto reveals Derwent to be momentarily concerned with the isolation Habbibi suffered. Characteristically, Derwent does not let the issue concern him overmuch. Ever the optimist, Derwent cannot allow his thoughts to linger on insoluble dilemmas, either spiritual or emotional. The strength of these thoughts, however, parallels the phrasing of Clare’s earliest concerns for fraternity.

Returning from the tour of the monastery, Derwent and the Lesbian join Belex and the Arnaut for wine and leisure conversation. The scene cannot liberate Derwent completely, and the narrator offers Derwent’s thoughts: “We loiterers whom life can please / (Thought he) could we but find our mates / Ever! But no; before the gates / Of joy, lie some who carp and tease: / Collisions of men’s destinies” (3.27.175-9). These five lines reveal far more clearly Derwent’s interpretations of Habbibi’s writings than his earlier commentary. With the Lesbian, Derwent feels the need to maintain his optimistic persona. He shows neither concern nor dismay at what he discovers from the monk’s spiritual revelations. This does not resemble Derwent. Were any of his fellow pilgrims to voice the same concerns, Derwent would be quick to reproach the individual for his pessimism. Perhaps the difference is attributable to the fact that Habbibi is dead and therefore Derwent does not feel the need to counsel. The restrain he shows in Habbibi’s grotto, however, cannot overcome the need to “speak” now. Though the recognition comes internally, Derwent’s need to voice this concern shows just how similar he is to
Clarel on this point. Each seeks his mate, but finds the process full of challenges. Derwent’s lament, however, reveals a pessimism that Clarel does not yet feel.

Derwent suggests the ability to find companionship to be impossible even though the desire remains; and that the possibility of joy, however impeded by those that “carp and tease,” lures the individual to have faith that it exists. The collision to which Derwent refers is familiar: the collision of the ideal and the real. Though man may idealize the notions of companionship and joy, his experiences, according to Derwent, reveal the improbability of such discoveries. Derwent, of course, quickly distracts himself from such deep diving by returning his attention to his companions and telling a tale of his experience with the dervishes (3.27.184-92), a lighthearted account that concludes the canto as Derwent dances. Here, Derwent masks his fears with his levity. The priest’s unwillingness to confront his fears makes him one of the lesser pilgrims insofar as he intentionally avoids dealing with the trials of life. Because he cannot be honest with himself, Derwent cannot truly be honest with anyone else. A self-deluding priest makes a poor spiritual guide, and Derwent’s discovery comes too late in the poem for him to change. No matter the other conversations in which Derwent participates, the revelation he offers, triggered by his interpretation of Habbibi’s writings, stands as his most triumphant success, however briefly acknowledged. Though he cannot bring himself to realize or admit that his spiritual dilemmas and fears parallel those of Clarel, Mortmain, Vine, and Rolfe—as each seeks, to some extent, the lost innocence of the past—Derwent knows the emotional toll his dishonesty ultimately will take. His ability to extrapolate from Habbibi’s confessional writings reveals Derwent to be a sound reader and interpreter, but there seems little advantage of possessing such evaluative capacities.
without the strength to test the later discoveries. Derwent deserves sympathy in this regard. His somber confession amidst the revelry of the scene suggests the extent to which these troubles burden him. That Derwent so readily begins his tale of the dervishes reveals his greater fear of self-confession. Unless he risks this spiritual unmasking, Derwent will never discover what he already should know: the pervasiveness of his condition. The mates he seeks are all around him and they all share a common concern. Until Derwent allows his optimistic cloak to fall away, he will never be able to find the "communion true" with his fellow spiritual isolates.

In summary, Derwent reads the various texts throughout the poem for social and personal reasons, but all relate to his desire to confront only that which is familiar. Derwent does not feel comfortable dealing with the unknown, especially as regards his own spiritual fraudulence. The challenges to faith presented by the Ode to the Southern Cross and Habbibi’s writings afford Derwent opportunities for investigating the depths of his own spiritual understanding and commitment. Because each text presents Derwent with the realistic possibility that faith is deteriorating in contemporary times, the requisite course of action seems to be confrontation, not dismissal. In each of these cases, Derwent shows the extent of his competence as a reader because he understands the stakes of the texts. Derwent fails, however, to participate in the struggle. Other than his discomfort with the possibilities of faith being displaced (or the easy optimism he projects as foil to his discomfort), it is difficult to discern another viable reason for Derwent’s hesitancy. Yet, Derwent ought to recognize his hesitancy to indicate the need to interact in the implied debate. If spiritual leaders like Derwent cannot articulate the
relevance of faith, the claims made by the speaker in the Ode to the Southern Cross and by Habbibi seem all the more valid.

If Derwent understands faith to be an individual, private pursuit, not subject to social interpretations of its prominence, his willingness to read alone at the Dead Sea reflects this. Reading becomes the means by which the individual confronts the challenges to faith raised in a more social environment. Rolfe's interruption of Derwent's reading temporarily impedes the process, but Derwent needs to acknowledge the necessity of this kind of interruption. Unless Derwent's faith withstands the occasional challenge, he cannot possibly give much credence to its promises. If his faith serves no greater purpose than protecting him from the differing opinions of the larger world, Derwent does not deserve the security he draws. While Derwent's proficiency as a reader provides him with advantages, he does not use these interpretive capacities. The temporary solace afforded Derwent through his occasional return to his beloved books does not last. In his contemplation of the past, ostensibly the subject matter of his books whether addressing faith or otherwise, Derwent feels secure because he covers familiar ground. The texts he encounters during the pilgrimage force him to consider an unknowable future. This uncertainty causes Derwent distress and he reacts by turning away from the challenge. For all his analytical capacities, Derwent cannot face the conclusions he reaches. As the final text considered by Derwent, Habbibi's writings present an appropriate ending point. Derwent's thoughts reveal insight that he cannot articulate for the potential damage that such statements would inflict upon his optimistic persona. Derwent feels man's isolation from his fellow man. He understands the isolation to be self-imposed, but is powerless, because of his own fears, to do anything about this. Instead, he masks these concerns by
projecting an external sense of comfort and joy. At this instance, Derwent’s betrayal of self might be the most horrific failure throughout the poem.

Nehemiah

The humble saint, Nehemiah participates in the reading activity as much for distraction from the larger pilgrim group as a sign of reverence for the text at hand. Though his millenialist beliefs afford him the security that Christ’s return could occur at any time, he looks to his texts as much for confirmation as security. Though recognized for his humility, Nehemiah never appears comfortable with the pilgrim group at large. When he and Clarel travel, as guide and student, Nehemiah enthusiastically encourages Clarel, offering texts as evidence when his own words fail. The interpretation of the Lamentations text changes when considered from Nehemiah’s perspective. He recognizes, first, the overlap between the words of Margoth and those of the text. But Nehemiah, unlike Clarel, does not practice extensive deductive reasoning (or at least, the narrator does not provide the thoughts of Nehemiah regarding this reasoning). For Nehemiah, the words of Margoth signal the transformation of Scriptural text from metaphorical truth to literal truth. Margoth’s words, in a sense, contribute to Christ’s return by giving life to dead text. Though Margoth physically stands amongst the refuse at the dung-gate, Nehemiah interprets the coincidence as literal evidence. Exuberant at seeing the Scripture fulfilled, Nehemiah returns to his well-read text: “All that pass by clap their hands / At thee; they hiss, and wag the head, / Saying, Is this the city” (1.24.61-3). Nehemiah’s quick perusal of the text allows him to misread; or at the very least, Nehemiah overlooks the specific roles of the characters within the text when making his comparison to the scene unfolding with Margoth. Though Nehemiah seeks
the literalist’s perspective, he does not focus his attention on the details of Margoth’s words, Clarel’s actions, or his own actions. Considering the action of the scene, Nehemiah and Clarel pass by Margoth—in the Lamentations text, it is not specified whether the agent asking the question does the passing, or the individual passes the agent. Margoth does not clap his hands to get their attention; instead, according to the narrator, he hails them with a shout. He does not hiss; nor does he wag his head. The only similarity comes from Margoth’s words, but the words are not identical to those noted by Nehemiah. The question asked by the unspecified “all” from the Scriptural text, “Is this the city?” implies an informed perspective. The individual asking knows some details about the city, but not enough to judge whether the city from a past story and the present city are the same. Margoth’s question differs entirely. He knows nothing about Jerusalem, nor does he know the Scriptural significance of his chosen location from which to hail Nehemiah and Clarel. Twice he asks, “‘What city’s this?’” (1.24.29; 1.24.48). Twice he qualifies the question with an assessment of the city’s beauty as an attempt to ease any potential offense. Margoth possesses little knowledge of his whereabouts. His appeal to Nehemiah and Clarel is for information, not confirmation as is the case for the unnamed speakers in Nehemiah’s Scriptural passage.

Upon closer inspection, the two scenes have far fewer similarities than Nehemiah wants to believe. But Nehemiah’s true failure in this scene (as previously discussed, this is where Clarel succeeds) is his abandonment of the reading process. Beyond noting the similarity between the brief encounter with Margoth and the encounter he remembers from the Lamentations text, Nehemiah does not continue the interpretive process. In fact, it seems beyond Nehemiah’s capacity to correctly interpret the relationship between
Margoth’s words and the Lamentations text. The only legitimate connection, thus the only rationale for Clarel and Nehemiah’s abrupt refusal to acknowledge Margoth’s hails, may be Nehemiah’s interpretation of Margoth as one of the mocking hordes reveling in Jerusalem’s downfall. Though the context of the Lamentations text differs from the setting outside the dung-gate, Nehemiah equates the two. Margoth’s question echoes the Lamentations text closely enough so that Nehemiah draws an incorrect conclusion. Though the pilgrim group will understand Margoth’s irreverence in later cantos, it is impossible that Nehemiah could reach this conclusion from Margoth’s sparse statements. Nehemiah concludes that Margoth’s words mark him as a mocking infidel. The narrator’s summary of the rapid departure suggests that Clarel makes the same connection. But for such a character assessment to be valid, both Clarel and Nehemiah would have to recall the Lamentations text immediately. Only by remembering the text accurately; only by assessing Margoth’s status as infidel through the similarity between his words and those remembered from Scripture; can the departure be understood. Because Nehemiah recalls the text only after leaving Margoth behind, it seems improbable that the aforementioned speculations could be accurate. Nehemiah and Clarel simply act without charity. They do not bother themselves with addressing Margoth. Once Nehemiah considers the Lamentations text, his further examination of the text in question is minimal at best, if not non-existent. As Clarel’s guide, Nehemiah succeeds in leading him to and through the sites and environs of Jerusalem. But a physical guide serves a far less significant role than a spiritual guide, one capable of distilling the dissimilarity between the encounter with Margoth and its textual companion. At this
time, Clarel needs and wants a spiritual guide, but this first textual encounter does not reveal Nehemiah to be suited to the task.

Continuing the tour of Jerusalem’s significant sites, Nehemiah leads Clarel along with Vine, encountered two cantos earlier during the visit to the Sepulcher, to the Garden of Gethsemane. Understandably awed by the power of the legendary site, the three pilgrims view the scene silently, allowing the narrator to provide commentary on the location. Nehemiah pulls away from Clarel and Vine and “pensive sat him down / And turned the chapter in St. John” (1.30.34-5). Bezanson notes Nehemiah’s Biblical consideration to be John, chapter eighteen, verses one through fourteen (Clarel 746), appropriately the verses dealing with Judas’s betrayal of Jesus in Gethsemane. When Clarel’s thoughts regarding Judas and his betrayal overwhelm him—interestingly, his consideration happens separately, but simultaneous to Nehemiah’s—he asks Nehemiah to read aloud the text under consideration. But Nehemiah either cannot or will not comply. The kindest assessment of this silence would be Nehemiah’s feelings of awe at the site of such an important legend in Christian mythology. Sitting within Gethsemane, Nehemiah is overcome. Because of his silence, however, the narrator offers an interpretation that calls Nehemiah a passive reader. The narrator’s concern for Nehemiah’s passivity questions any previous concessions allowed to the saint because of his reading. Using an extended simile, the narrator compares Nehemiah to “Some shepherd old” (1.30.59) that reads merely for distraction and cannot account for the material he has been reading. The previously noted vacant look Nehemiah turns towards Clarel’s request for reading becomes a part of the narrator’s concern: “[H]e will turn a look / Which shows he knows not what he reads, / Or knowing, he but weary heeds, / Or scarce remembers; here much
so / With Nehemiah, dazed out and low” (1.30.63-7). Not knowing Nehemiah to be a literalist, one might momentarily grant that Clarel’s question merely catches the saint unaware, deeply immersed in his Scriptural consideration. But interpretation does not suit Nehemiah. He reads for familiarity in hopes of recognizing the prophetic fulfillment, as with Margoth, when it comes. Nehemiah certainly reveres the texts he reads; but the depth of his reverence deserves consideration. Nehemiah reveres the Scriptural passages by virtue of their being Scriptural passages. Because of his literalist tendencies, he does not actively participate, by implementing his imagination, in the maintenance of the legend because this participation requires, to some extent, the acceptance of the Christian legends as stories only, not fact, and the Scriptural passages as metaphorical, not literal, truth. Nehemiah is not willing to make this distinction because he is unpracticed in interpretive ventures. From the literalist perspective, Nehemiah accepts what he reads without questioning or evaluating. This makes him an unsuccessful reader. As the canto concludes, the narrator notes the presence of a tourist with his guidebook. Though the narrator, Clarel, and Vine are equally appalled by the juxtaposition of the tourist with the supposedly reverent Nehemiah, little differentiates the two. Nehemiah, in his failures to be inquisitive, is as much a tourist in Gethsemane as the “brisk dapper man” (1.30.107).

The final consideration comes from the story of the Good Samaritan that Nehemiah tries to pass to Djalea. Having recently read the story, Nehemiah offers Djalea a condensed version, one Djalea distractedly considers because his attention has been drawn to the potential marauders Belex investigates. To some degree, Nehemiah’s desire to tell the story at the present time suggests an awareness of the potential danger of the present scene. Noting Belex’s attentive response, Djalea remains equally concerned.
However, Nehemiah’s interpretation of the story does not come until he completes the telling. His concern rests not with the lesson of the Good Samaritan; rather, concerned with a literalist interpretation, Nehemiah faithfully believes: "Well, this day / Were some forlorn one here to bleed, / Aid would be meted to his need / By good soul traveling this way" (2.9.67-70). Nehemiah reveals his faith in his assessment of the tale, but also in his assessment of humanity. Though he does not suggest himself to be this “good soul,” Nehemiah feels confident that some reverent individual, equally versed in Scripture, will be worthy of the challenge before him. Nehemiah wants Djalea to respond to his questions concerning the tale’s validity, but the Druze refrains. The narrator notes Djalea’s refusal to be characteristic of an Oriental tradition that grants license to men deemed demented, but the narrator’s observation deserves no extended consideration. Nehemiah’s presumed dementia may more correctly be called his simplicity. He may not offer insightful, critical interpretations of text; he may not recognize the difference between metaphorical and literal language; but the saint certainly reveres all that he reads, at least with regard to Scripture. At worst, Nehemiah’s literalist outlook narrows his own perspective too greatly. He does not participate in argument or discussion because as far as Nehemiah is concerned, there is nothing to argue or discuss. The text is what it is. Whether this makes him sufficiently aware of the limitations of his literalist’s perspective is another question. At best, Nehemiah’s perspective exhibits an exceptional amount of faith. His duty is not to understand the ways of God, nor to question the authenticity of his experience. By viewing the world as the palette upon which Scriptural texts are painted, Nehemiah need only observe and account for the overlap between the two. In this manner, he assures himself of being prepared for the millennium he
desperately awaits. The story of the Good Samaritan reveals this. Though he does not specify that he would be the caring individual—not knowing, of course, where the challenge would present itself—Nehemiah knows someone will take responsibility for bringing Scripture to life. He does not need to make a greater statement of faith.

Nehemiah is not the most gifted reader of the pilgrim group. He cannot understand the Scriptures to function on any level other than the literal. For this reason alone, Nehemiah’s interpretations deserve critical attention before they are granted validity. Nehemiah may be an unsophisticated reader, but he reads for the same reasons that other pilgrims read. He desires to participate in the maintenance of tradition and legend by reading the stories upon which these legends are based. Though he fails as an interpreter, Nehemiah succeeds to a far greater extent when it comes to accessing the truth held by the legends and sites of Christendom.39

Rolfe

Though consistently regarded as the pilgrim characterized by his divinity, Rolfe does not participate in the activity of reading to any great extent. Rather, he relies on his own personal experiences from the past as a means of contemplating his associations with the divine. Through his memories and his storytelling, Rolfe offers the rest of the pilgrim group an opportunity to hear of his past, as well as his pessimism for the present. As much as Rolfe would like to find solace in the progress of the present times, he sees corruption through the dissemination of inferior values. Rolfe cannot put faith in man’s vision for future spiritual satisfaction. When the values of the contemporary world

39 Rolfe draws attention to this point during a conversation with Derwent. Lamenting the loss, yet again, of his Tahitian paradise, Rolfe notes how the Greeks managed to keep tradition alive by revering the old traditions, the “legends, relics, [and] sites” (4.18.86). Because Nehemiah would be capable of connecting many Scriptural references to the appropriate physical site, one may conclude Nehemiah’s efforts to be as great as any other pilgrim’s.
dictate that the present moment stands as the focal point for enterprise, be it economic, spiritual, intellectual, or emotional, Rolfe realizes the tenuous nature of such enterprise. In the present moment, when all social, economic, and intellectual factors contribute to the maintenance of the status quo, seemingly small shifts impact the whole system. As such, Rolfe, like his fellow pilgrims, understands the present moment to be nothing other than a continuous state of flux requiring constant adaptive adjustments. For Rolfe, these adaptations destroy any sense of security. He chooses to focus his attention and energies on past moments, past activities, because these moments, perhaps because they are inaccessible, are not subject to the same constants of flux. Through memory, Rolfe can return to his “gala days” (2.21.62), a time “’When life was innocent and free’” (2.21.59). Rolfe’s statement articulates the loss of such innocence and freedom; at the same time, he condemns the present as neither innocent nor free. Life experiences make remembered innocence an impossible intellectual conception; the lack of certitude regarding man’s place contradicts any notions of freedom.

When Rolfe reads, he exhibits fluency with languages unknown to any other pilgrim. He obviously reads English, but also Latin. More interestingly, though, as revealed during his visit to Mar Saba, Rolfe reads in Arabic, Turkish, and Greek, as well. These instances occur when Rolfe momentarily departs from the revelers in the Mar Saba hall to inspect the arms hanging on the wall. He first discovers, “Upon one serpent-curving blade / Love-motto beamed from Antar’s rhyme / In Arabic” (3.12.15-7). Rolfe’s next discovery, a Turkish scimitar, about which the narrator erroneously speculates “And

40 The Ave maris stella hymn sung by Rolfe, Vine, and Derwent prior to the encounter with the Dominican monk (2.24.23-34), as well as the Latin text inscribed in the floor at the site of the manger (4.13.193).

41 Bezanson notes the source for Melville’s reference: “Antarah ibn Shaddad was a sixth-century Arab warrior and war poet; he wrote The Romance of Antar” (Clarel 804).
likely, it had clove a skull” (3.12.19), bears the inscription translated by the narrator as “IN NAME OF GOD THE MERCIFUL!” (3.12.20). The third weapon, suspended at the highest position, bears a Greek inscription, again translated by the narrator, that reads “HAIL, MARY, FULL OF GRACE!” (3.12.24). Though the arrival of Agath, the timoneer, interrupts Rolfe before he provides any interpretive commentary regarding the weapons, one recognizes a common characteristic regarding two of the three swords. Both the Turkish and Greek weapons contain reverent inscriptions intended for the glorification of God. As odd as the juxtaposition seems, messages of mercy and grace on implements often used without mercy or grace, the holy warriors bearing these arms would feel no hesitancy in displaying their messages.

Recalling Derwent’s discovery of the knight’s inscription on the marble shield, warriors with a business of death and destruction were not excluded from reverent moods or feelings. These messages of reverence are no more or less surprising than the Arabic love poem inscribed on the other sword. Without translation, though, there is no means to connect thematically Rolfe’s first discovery with the other two; and without Rolfe’s interpretation, there is no means to speculate with any accuracy regarding the impact of these discoveries. The texts on the swords exist as affirmations, in all likelihood, for the bearers of the arms. No matter the atrocities the bearers witness or in which they participate; each realizes the far greater significance of maintaining his faith in spite of the egregious physical acts individually required. The inscriptions show reverence, but also suggest the hope that the actions undertaken in the name of God are forgivable. Justifiable and understandable as the murderous situations may be, the warriors count on God’s mercy and Mary’s grace in forgiving the unforgivable. Rolfe comments only on
the rarity of such weapons, but his observation contains multiple interpretative possibilities. He has not seen so far, nor will he see over the rest of the poem, weapons of this kind. The rarity also may extend to Rolfe’s understanding of the revered place within the Mar Saba monastery where these implements hang. On the wall of the main hall, the weapons will be seen by any visitors seeking the hospitality of the monks. The meaning for the prominent position within the monastery parallels the meaning for the inscription on the sword itself. Though implements of death and destruction may seem irreverent when housed in a monastery, the monks must accept that the faith exhibited by the inscriptions negates all else. Without devolving into a historical consideration of the divine justification for war, one recognizes the potential for abuse in the above reasoning. But, without commentary by Rolfe, there is no satisfying limitation for the inquiry. When Rolfe turns from the weapons to listen to Agath’s story, he ends his consideration.

Though Rolfe attempts to read his fellow pilgrims, he does not succeed to any greater degree. Considering Vine, Rolfe, along with Djalea, hastily equate Vine’s reserve with a hidden aristocracy. There is no evidence beyond Rolfe’s beliefs that “Orientals” possess an acute sense; but, he passes on the information to the pilgrim group. He functions much more successfully as a transmitter of stories, a vessel through which oral traditions are kept alive.42 Though there is no guarantee that his stories possess more truth than

42 Rolfe offers many second-hand histories of his fellow pilgrims: Nehemiah (1.37); Mortmain (2.4); Djalea (3.16). Though Rolfe’s intentions are sound in his retelling of tales he has heard or tales that are rumored, the words of the narrator resonate. When Agath completes the history of his tattoos, the narrator warns: “But, more of clearness to confer— / Less dimly to express the thing / Rude outlined by this marine, / License is claimed in rendering; / And tones he felt but scarce might give, / The verse essays to interweave” (4.2.229-34). Each reader must be attentive and careful in order to understand and interpret accurately. Regardless of capacity, the reader cannot bridge the gap between the “original” story and the teller’s version of the story. Taking license in the retelling, the teller dilutes the story, further removing it from the original state. As much as Rolfe desires to communicate the stories accurately, the tendency to embellish exists. Rolfe’s tales deserve more critical attention than they likely receive from his fellow pilgrims.
rumor, the tales offer as much information regarding Rolfe as regarding the subject-matter. Though Rolfe has much to say during episodes of debate, his positions depend upon past readings much more than any current examples. Because Rolfe lives in the lost paradise of the past, the memories of his beloved Tahiti continue to haunt him in the present.

The Narrator

The narrator, though not involved in reading in the manner of the other pilgrims, offers sound, interpretive advice regarding the need for diligence in order to reach correct conclusions. Thus, his statements serve as an acceptable summary point. In the brief "Prelusive" (2.35) canto, the narrator seems to address the external reader directly. Though this happens often throughout Clarel, the present instance is the most specific and significant. Because the narrator has no stake in the interpretive capacities of the pilgrim-readers mentioned above, he willingly constructs individuals with varying degrees of interpretive strength. Their individual failures harm themselves, if any harm comes at all. However, in order for the narrator's tale to be understood, the external reader must know how to read the poem and this is what the "Prelusive" canto offers. As the title suggests, the canto serves as an introduction to the challenges of reading. Using the visual images of Giovanni Battista Piranesi's prints to suggest the comparable complexity when reading, the narrator offers a concise interpretation of the difficulties the external reader must expect and accept. Only through attentive and conscientious consideration will the external reader be able to interpret text correctly.

By equating the complexity of the prints with the complexity of man's mind, the narrator constructs a visual representation of the intellectual, interpretive task. Like the

\[43\] For a more specific discussion of Piranesi, see Bezanson's notes (Clarel 789-91).
elements of the prints—the stairs, galleries, cloisters, ring-bolts, pillars, chains, and chambers—the elements of the reader’s interpretive faculties are connected, specifically the mind and the heart. Recognizably, these are the two competing means the pilgrim-readers within the poem use to interpret the world. But most pilgrims within the poem attempt to use one exclusively, without considering that the other must serve as a supplement. The narrator notes that these two human capacities must be used in conjunction. The mind may afford the individual with a construction of the world; but the heart gives value to the construction. The two capacities work in conjunction to train the individual in the most appropriate manner of reading. To succeed, the narrator stresses the importance of repetition. Pilgrims retrace their physical and intellectual steps along the path towards spiritual enlightenment. The entire focus becomes process. The narrator alludes to the differences between active and passive reading. The reader must meditate on the text at hand; he must read and re-read. Over time, the reader comprehends the text by uniting intellectual and emotional faculties. Joseph Flibbert calls the dream-vision the means “by which the imagination finds ideal truth in fables” (Flibbert 135), but he cites a couplet within the “Prelusive” canto to make this assertion. When the narrator notes, “Thy wings, Imagination, span / Ideal truth in fable’s seat” (2.35.18-9), the external reader reaches the conclusion alluded to throughout the discussion of reverence. By reading the stories of the past, one can connect these legends by allowing his imagination to bridge the gap to his present condition. The narrator claims this to be one of the essential elements for reading. As the subject of reading in Clarel tends to be stories from the past, the reader must establish a connection to the present through his imagination. This action maintains the tradition; it keeps the legend
alive. But more importantly, imagination allows the reader to break down the walls preventing interpretation. Through diligent effort, the reader, “In freaks of intimation see / Paul’s ‘mystery of iniquity:’ / Involved indeed, a blur of dream” (2.35.23-5). Though his meaning seems hazy, the narrator suggests hard work will discover what lies beyond the seemingly insurmountable obstacles to comprehension. Returning to the image of Piranesi’s prints, the narrator articulates the duty of the student: “Dwell on those etchings in the night, / Those touches bitten in the steel / By aqua-fortis, till ye feel / The Pauline text in gray of light; / Turn hither then and read aright” (2.35.33-7). The challenge of reading visual text is no different from the challenge of reading written text. The reader must read and re-read before any illumination happens. Only then, when the text has been sufficiently pored over, will the reader be prepared to read aright. The narrator, in this brief canto, urges the reader to interpret correctly. To maintain inquisitive stamina, the reader must view the actions as valuable. He must imagine a greater good to come from this comprehension. To varying degrees, this valuation of text applies to Clarel, Derwent, Nehemiah, and Rolfe. Each approaches text from a presumed position of faith that acknowledges an a priori appreciation and enthusiasm for legend and tradition. The extent to which each applies his imagination to the process becomes a central concern. The more willingly the individual imagines the need to connect the past to the present as a means of sustaining his own faith, the more likely he reads with the requisite attention and diligence.
CHAPTER FOUR

CLAREL’S DEVELOPING APPRECIATION
FOR SUBJECTIVE TRUTH

While each pilgrim’s individual involvement in the process of reading establishes his reverence for legends of the past and traditions of the present, one can readily see another important characteristic developing from this reverence. The textual enterprises of the pilgrims may be understood as exercises in practicing to interpret correctly; but the pilgrimage serves another purpose for the individual pilgrims. In the individual search for faith—or at the very least, a search for answers—each pilgrim uses the pilgrimage as a means of learning how to live in an ever-changing world. Clarel, for example, wants to discover what kind of life is most worth living. As a former theology student, Clarel finds insufficient validation in his struggle to live through written texts. His presence in Jerusalem suggests that Clarel at least wishes to supplement his life of books with experiences that are more real, if not find another approach to living altogether. Realizing that his beloved texts do not contain answers for the questions he now asks, Clarel begins his search for self in order to find the manner of living that will provide the greatest sense of satisfaction. Rolfe, the self-proclaimed wanderer, chooses to return to Jerusalem for what seems to be similar reasons. He hopes that Jerusalem will provide him with the requisite personal insight so that his life of wandering may cease. Though worldly in his travels and experiences, Rolfe still fails to realize the inner peace he
remembers to have been characteristic of his life in the South Pacific. His present search seeks to synthesize the memories of the past with the experiences of the present so that some aspects of his search, finally, might come to an end.

In this search to discover the most appropriate manner of living, the narrator constructs the pilgrimage in such a fashion that it mirrors much of Kierkegaard's "philosophy" of existence, not that Kierkegaard ever accepted his collection of thoughts on existent beings as resembling a systematic philosophy. With regard to this characteristic of the poem, Melville reveals an intuitive understanding of Kierkegaard and his primary concerns with subjective truth. The similarities between Kierkegaard's thoughts on the existent being and Melville's use of the pilgrimage as a structuring device deserve note. Both Kierkegaard and Melville stress the significance of the process under development because neither seems comfortable asserting that any accomplishment, any specific point, along the developing timeline of process is a satisfying end. More simply, each imagines more can be understood, more can to be discovered, about the individual self. If the individual understands that subjective reality stands as the "true" truth, the process of discovery is limitless. Clarel and Rolfe are not the only pilgrims to involve themselves in this process of discovery—Derwent, Vine, Nehemiah, Mortmain, Margoth, and Djalea deserve attention for their varying degrees of self-directed discovery. The extent to which each pilgrim addresses his own individual recognition of the subjective

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44 Though virtual contemporaries, there is no evidence that Melville owned or read any of Kierkegaard's writings. Merton Sealts includes no entries for Kierkegaard in his Melville's Reading (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1988). Of course, Melville would have had to read Kierkegaard while he was rather young, not to mention in its original Danish. Though only six years older than Melville, Kierkegaard died very young, producing his major contributions Either/Or (1842), Fear and Trembling (1843), The Concept of Dread (1844), and Sickness unto Death (1849) in an astounding seven year period. At Kierkegaard's death in November, 1855, Melville would have been 36 years old and less than one year from his journey to Palestine which ultimately forms the basis of experiences for Clarel. Each of Kierkegaard's texts mentioned above will be addressed in the forthcoming chapter. The similarity between the two independent modes of thought is striking.
nature of existence, as opposed to its objective foil, determines the extent to which each pilgrim participates in Kierkegaard’s notion of Becoming as a synthesis of Being (thesis) and Nothing (antithesis), an adaptation of Hegel’s classic example of triadism. The dialectic between Being and Nothing ultimately stresses Becoming as a movement towards greater self-consciousness. One must recognize the stress on the process insisted upon by Kierkegaard himself: the individual exists in a constant state of Becoming—there is no definite endpoint. Clarel stands to gain the most in this process of self-discovery. Though other pilgrims will be considered, few recognize the need for self-improvement. Most, in fact, spend the duration of the pilgrimage attempting to convince their fellow pilgrims of the advantages of one particular viewpoint, or one particular way of life. None, however, asks the fundamental question: how should I live?

Before beginning the discussion of the individual pilgrims, it is necessary to articulate the major foci of Kierkegaard’s writings as they relate to the struggle for individual autonomy as the means of discovering subjective truth within *Clarel*. Paul Strathem calls Kierkegaard’s insistence upon the subjective nature of truth one of the more significant breaks from Hegelian notions of an Absolute Spirit as the object of the self-conscious pursuit (Strathem 23-4). In *Either/Or*, Kierkegaard describes the choices facing the individual in terms of the individual. Questions regarding existence no longer stress the significance of man as part of a greater whole, as Kierkegaard understood Hegel. Rather, by applying the force of the subjective, Kierkegaard suggests that man must choose

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45 One assumes that the current viewpoints of pilgrims like Nehemiah, Vine, Rolfe, and Derwent to be the synthesis of past efforts. But, the convictions implied by these viewpoints and their current argumentative applications suggest the process of on-going discovery to have ceased. The viewpoints now resemble static, objective “truth” or “fact.” This contradicts, in some cases, the notion of subjective conceptions for these truths, ones constantly in flux as a result of the continuing process of searching. Each pilgrim assumes a finality to exist where none should. Perhaps Clarel’s willingness to continue searching more reveals the fact that he has few life experiences, where the reader safely concludes the opposite for Nehemiah, Vine, Rolfe, and Derwent.
between two distinct modes of life, and from this choice, he must accept responsibility
for his life. The two choices are: 1) the aesthetic and 2) the ethical. The aesthetic life, at
its most basic understanding, is one characterized by the pursuit of pleasure, but is not
limited to pleasures gained by the self.\(^{46}\) The pursuit of pleasure, though seemingly a
beneficial thing, contains myriad deceptions. For Kierkegaard, the constant pursuit of
something external to the self negates any possibility of freedom. The individual no
longer lives by conscious decision. His choices are dictated by chance and the external
world. If the individual’s pleasure, the sole object of his existence, no longer remains
within his control, his entire existence becomes contingent upon the whims of fate and
accident (39). With the realization that one’s life is meaningless when individual
freedom is taken away, the individual leading the aesthetic life succumbs to despair. In
order to take control again of his life, the individual must accept, according to Strathern,
that, “Self-creation by conscious choice often seemed the only alternative to despair. In
Kierkegaard’s words, the only way out of the abyss was ‘to will deeply and sincerely’”
(41).

The result of this deep, sincere willing on the part of the individual is the alternative,
the ethical choice. The ethical life, by contrast to the aesthetic, seeks to define the self as
a product of conscious self-construction. Self-creation, not the pursuit of pleasure,
becomes the goal of life. When the individual makes this choice, the world, and thus the
individual’s life, ceases to be contingent and dependent upon chance. Fate plays no part.

\(^{46}\) Strathern explains the seeming contradiction more clearly: “This need not be a shallow attitude to life.
In working for our own pleasure, we almost invariably work for the pleasure of others too, if we are
thinking in the longer term. Indeed, it could be argued that the scientist, who selflessly dedicates his entire
life to curing a painful disease, sacrificing personal, domestic, and social pleasure in the process, is also
living the aesthetic life if he does this simply because he enjoys scientific research. And in the context of
modern psychology and the liberal society, it is difficult to see how anyone doesn’t live the aesthetic life.
In our weird and wonderful ways, it seems we all seek pleasure” (37-8).
Strathern notes the difference most succinctly: the aesthetic life concerns itself with the external world; the ethical life concerns itself with the internal world (43). By focusing on the internal world, the individual seems to pursue a notably Platonic imperative: Know thyself. But Kierkegaard’s conception of knowledge with respect to the self differs from Plato’s insofar as the former implies this pursuit insulates from the polluting effects of the external world whereas Plato suggests the self to be the only subject an individual can claim to know. Strathern notes the flaw in Kierkegaard’s embrace of the ethical life to be its improbability. There is no way to live an exclusively ethical life, Strathern argues, because “there will always necessarily be an element of the ‘outer’ and accidental about our lives. Even when we have chosen the ethical, an element of the aesthetic is bound to remain” (44). Kierkegaard himself must have anticipated this type of objection. His next publication addresses this oversight.

In *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard synthesizes the two previously considered choices of life to create the religious choice, and examines faith as the ultimate subjective act, one dependent upon an illogical leap to transcend the social implications of the ethical life and to achieve a deeper, individual purpose (44-5). The religious choice brings together the external and internal qualities of the aesthetic and ethical choices of life. By doing so, the religious choice simultaneously embraces both uncertainty and certainty. Though an ethical life certainly resembles the religious life in some respects, Kierkegaard suggests the former is a product of social constructions, while the latter derives its meaning from its insularity, its subjectivity. Though ethical and moral behaviors depend upon socially accepted definitions, and thus they are understood logically, religious behavior and the religious choice of life do not depend upon such
limitations. The socially constructed quality alone makes the ethical life a product of man. The religious life, however, attempts to partake of the supra-logical, the illogical even, because it presumes value in a manner of living that extends beyond the realm of human experience. By choosing to accept this task, the individual embraces the Hegelian notion of Becoming that Kierkegaard appropriates. Jean Wahl proposes the religious individual assumes the necessity of achieving original and authentic experiences that exist only as he considers the infinite; and from this, the individual comes to understand the parameters of his existence (Wahl 4). In short, “true existence is achieved by intensity of feeling” (4), not by intellectual assessment. To answer the guiding question “how to live?” Kierkegaard postulates feeling and emotion, not intellect and logic, to be the more formidable guides. After all, Kierkegaard’s existent individual seeks not to be identified with any systematic approach to life. If truth is found in subjectivity, only the individual’s experiences can assist him in the contemplation of his existence.

With The Concept of Dread, Kierkegaard considers the tenuous nature of existence, even the choices made by those impassioned, subjective individuals. If one cannot know whether a chosen manner of living is “right,” Kierkegaard speculates how this causes an excessive amount of anxiety. Since subjective “truths,” held from the opposing viewpoints of different individuals, will interpret objective “facts” differently, the individual creates his own world. Unfortunately, this means subjective truths are grounded in no objective reality—they are grounded in nothingness (Strathern 55). Though this presents the existent individual with an unforeseen recognition of freedom, it also produces an extensive amount of dread at the incomprehensible grandness of existence’s possibilities. If life can be anything at any given time; if the individual needs
only to act in order to redirect any given course; life never is an objective fact. Being alive may be an objective fact if the burden of proof extends only to recognizing that an individual is living, as opposed to being dead. But this proof comes from the examination of a specific moment that is suspended intellectually; from this suspension, the analyst extrapolates to reach a conclusion that is not necessarily true for a future moment. If life is a subjective reality, the freedom to be anything transforms individual existence into a constant state of becoming. There is no present state; only the deferred possibility of a future state. Freedom becomes a terrifyingly limiting actuality, not a liberating realization. The terror transforms itself into dread. Kierkegaard notes dread to be a matter of psychology, and qualifies dread as being of two types, either external (the prospect of a physical threat) or internal (the contemplation of one's freedom). Kierkegaard concerns himself mainly with the internal kind of dread, one that results, interestingly, from the contemplation of freedom. Too focused on the contemplation of freedom, the individual risks madness, but without this contemplation, there is no possibility for the individual to ascertain the complexity of the existent's challenge. Kierkegaard concludes the individual must risk madness; yet understand the point at which a leap of faith stands as the only option for salvation (58-9). Existing in the limitless realm of Becoming rather than Being, the individual, even when confronted with freedom's infiniteness, must understand the deferred state of self-recognition to be favorable to any objective proof. Becoming still places the power of self-creation with

Strathern summarizes this concept: "Consciousness is thus utterly precarious. Once we become aware of this, existence becomes even more of a risk. And this is further emphasized when we bear in mind that we might die at any moment . . . Simultaneously we should remain aware of the complete freedom that we have at every moment. We can choose anything—we can completely transform our lives. At every moment we are confronted with utter freedom. This is the true situation that faces us. As a result of this, when we are fully aware of the reality of our situation, we experience 'dread'" (57).
the individual. However improbable it may seem, the possibility of self-determination exists, even as an illogical leap toward God, as the means of resolving the dread caused by freedom.

_Sickness unto Death_ addresses one last concern, the failure to will the self into becoming what the individual aspires to be. Kierkegaard claims this failure brings about despair, and the only means of transcending this despair is through faith. Contemplating an idealized version of the self, Kierkegaard, according to Strathern, reveals a religious agenda (68), but also the possibility that the leap towards God notes the willing acquiescence to an illusion. As a believer himself, Kierkegaard presupposes the ideal individual also to be a believer. Thus, if the individual fails to will himself into a believer through the leap of faith, only emptiness follows, and a wish for death. Again, Kierkegaard sees the only resolution to be in the direction of the leap of faith. Despair, when recognized not as an individual crisis, but as a characteristic of the human condition, can be used to direct specific action. Kierkegaard believes the correct manner to be towards God. In this sense, the individual will produce the self towards which all of his actions point.

It is possible to contemplate the similarities between Kierkegaard’s construction of an existent and Melville’s construction of his pilgrims in the poem, but it is absolutely essential to acknowledge the enterprise to be an intellectual exercise. It is unlikely that Melville consciously constructed his pilgrims in the image of Kierkegaard’s existents; it is even more unlikely that Melville knew Kierkegaard’s writings. However, Clarel’s search for faith becomes a quest for self-creation. Because he experiences dread and despair, conveniently grouped together as doubt, Clarel wants proof that God exists.
before he makes Kierkegaard’s requisite leap of faith. Overly pragmatic in his approach, Clarel imagines that the only way he will find such evidence is through personal investigation. His decision to come to Jerusalem is the first attempt, as noted by Wahl, to return to original and authentic experience (Wahl 4). If Clarel believes Jerusalem to be the physical representation of faith, he concludes his journey to the physical origins of Christianity will manifest themselves in spiritual awakenings. His spirituality, as ill-conceived as it sounds, depends upon his physical location.

To begin the consideration of Clarel as Kierkegaardian existent, it is necessary to consider the student’s presence in Jerusalem. It implies an uncertainty on his part regarding his own choice of life. Clearly, whatever choice he previously made no longer seems particularly valid. As noted in the previous chapter, Clarel’s life defined by and through his involvement with written text proves too abstract. The student’s trip to Jerusalem attempts to transform the abstract; or at the very least, it seeks to concretize the abstraction. These assumptions provide an indication about Clarel’s choice of life. To some extent, Clarel pursues the aesthetic life insofar as his theological studies give him pleasure. Clarel values being a part of a greater tradition, one which he helps maintain simply through his involvement in the dialogue. He reads the Old and New Testament accounts that contain the basis for Christian mythology; he enjoys the debates in which he participates with his fellow students, as well as his professors; he enjoys the intellectual, spiritual, and emotional struggles which take place as part of these debates. Clarel, as a student, finds a great deal of personal fulfillment in his education. The pleasure Clarel derives from his studies, however, exists as something essentially external to him. Clarel appreciates his level of immersion within the texts as evidence of the texts...
being a part of him. Involved on a daily basis, Clarel may even identify his existence, at
the very least as a theology student, as dependent upon these texts. Yet, something has
changed for Clarel. He no longer believes the texts have the power to sustain him, and he
no longer identifies exclusively with the texts. Because he cannot believe in the
authenticity of the experiences he reads, Clarel begins to doubt the validity of the
representations. The external quality of the texts now threatens the pleasure he once
derived from them. The power of Clarel’s relationship to text depends upon his ability to
derive meaning from the texts, as well as his ability to project value onto them. He must
see the allegories within the texts more meaningfully than as simple written accounts and
this is no longer the case. Clarel’s decision to travel to Jerusalem indicates his
willingness to move beyond an aesthetic (i.e., primarily external) manner of life in order
to find a more significant way to live.

Though this desire for growth is admirable, Clarel fails to recognize that his valuation
of Jerusalem as the physical manifestation of Christian spirituality is another, though
different, aesthetic search. Because Clarel cannot continue to believe in the power of the
written word, he imagines that a concrete substitute, something more “real,” can
compensate for his loss of faith. But Jerusalem as an external entity becomes a substitute
for Clarel’s texts. Jerusalem has no more power than the texts themselves because Clarel,
not Jerusalem, is the vehicle through which Jerusalem achieves its power. If Clarel
cannot believe in the Scriptures, it is unlikely that he will believe in Jerusalem, either for
its physical significance or as a place in which his faith might return. Or, it is likely that
Clarel’s difficulties with Scripture, the ultimate shortcomings he finds in their inability to
sustain his beliefs, will become his difficulties with Jerusalem. Because Clarel imagines
that his faith depends upon external entities, texts or cities in the present example, he fails to understand an essential element of faith. An individual’s faith may have its origins in a social setting, but the maintenance of faith depends upon individual effort. Though Clarel’s intentions for coming to Jerusalem are admirable, he doesn’t quite understand the complexity of the search for another manner of living. His disillusionment begins in the opening canto as Clarel articulates the ways in which his image of Jerusalem derived from his interpretation of texts does not match with the physical image before him.

From the standpoint of Clarel’s movement towards an ethical (i.e., primarily internal) manner of living, his disillusionment is a very important step. Clarel needs to be presented with more and more examples of how external objects fail to provide solace for internal needs. The movement away from his aesthetic life as an embrace of the external world towards his ethical life becomes a process of self-discovery through which self-creation stands as the formidable achievement. Clarel’s understanding of self at his arrival in Jerusalem is limited at best. He does not know how to define himself outside of the parameters of his religious studies. In fact, Clarel has no identity other than as a theology student. In terms of Clarel’s self-creation, these limitations afford him a great deal of freedom. Because he exhibits few character traits that reveal any other interests in his life, Clarel can choose to create himself in any fashion he wishes. As long as he desires to understand the role of faith in his life, the choice seems particularly limited. But the limitations are not simply that Clarel’s self-creation directs him towards a life defined by faith. Clarel’s desire to understand the spiritual dilemma before him suggests that he wishes to resolve his crisis by subjecting his faith to an objective, rational critique. Because Clarel wants physical proof for a spiritual matter, he undertakes a search beyond
appropriate parameters. Because there is no sound entry point, there can be no viable end. Either Clarel’s crisis of faith momentarily blinds him to this problem, or he does not understand the incompatibility of the two.

The drama of the poem depends upon this dilemma remaining unresolved. The pilgrimage itself is a flawed approach to Clarel’s spiritual search. Though the pilgrimage represents Clarel’s recognition of action as the means towards self-creation, the action itself, the physical movement around the environs of Jerusalem, has almost nothing at stake. Clarel joins the pilgrimage for no better reason than to pass time while Ruth’s mourning period keeps the two lovers separated. There is very little personal action taken on Clarel’s part considering the lengthy debates highlighting the pilgrimage. More often than not, Clarel remains silent, his participation limited to reflection on and contemplation of the various argumentative points made by other pilgrims. The physical movement can be seen as little more than a backdrop upon which the debates continue. As such, the pilgrimage transforms itself into a moveable symposium, of sorts, in which the role of faith in the more secular world becomes the focus. In this context, Clarel’s search for faith and God presuppose an objective, ordered structure in which he seeks to find his place. His experiences during the pilgrimage serve to erode his insistence on such objective rationalism in favor of the more Kierkegaardian recognition of his subjective existence and its pursuit of subjective truth. Only through subjective thought, and this becomes the object of Clarel’s discovery over the course of the pilgrimage, will Clarel learn to take action that leads to the subjective truth characterized by passionate, inward commitments. Strathern summarizes objective truth according to Kierkegaard as dependent upon objective criteria that can be observed—it depends upon what is said;
subjective truth, however, depends upon subjective criteria knowable only to the individual—it depends upon an individual response to how a thing is said (51). For the debates of the pilgrimage to be viable to Clarel, he must learn to discount the social component of these debates. The participants argue over “facts” traceable to past readings of specific texts. Yet the interpretation of these facts, the means to make them subjectively applicable, does not receive as much attention. How Clarel makes meaning from the experience, ultimately, is the only thing that will allow him to recognize the extent to which he creates himself. Clarel’s self-creation exists in a constant state of Becoming. While the goal may never be achieved, the stress of the enterprise is the search.

Because Clarel sees the limitations of his aesthetic choice for life, he hopes to find a guide that can teach him how he should live. The recognition on Clarel’s part is admirable; however, the hope to find a guide whom he can emulate emphasizes the external nature of his search. This flaw in Clarel’s reasoning is expected and necessary. Before he truly understands the limitations of these external choices, he must experience them and decide for himself, not because of another’s influence, that such choices are inherently flawed. Clarel cannot find the truths he seeks in sources external to himself. He must explore the various options before him—literally, the guides—until he accepts that the answers he seeks can only be found internally. The pilgrimage is characterized by its extensive debates and discussions on various matters of faith. Though Clarel experiences many of these debates as a listener only, the debates in which he participates actively reveal more of the longings and desires he wishes to address. These realizations come to Clarel as the result of intimate conversations with Nehemiah, Vine, Rolfe, and
Derwent. As potential ethical guides, these pilgrims offer Clarel the ability to comprehend the means to self-creation. By the end of the pilgrimage and the return to Jerusalem, nothing is resolved in relation to these debates of faith. No pilgrim’s opinions are swayed. This suggests the importance of the individual pilgrim recognizing the force of subjective truth. Each pilgrim must discover his own truths. Those whom Clarel and other pilgrims have met illustrate this point. Clarel returns to Jerusalem with a greater understanding that no guide can serve his needs. He must be his own guide and he must look towards the truths he accepts. In Kierkegaardian terms of Becoming, the ending of the poem affords Clarel the means to self-creation. His aesthetic and ethical slates have been wiped clean. He is free to become the individual of his choosing.

Nehemiah

Overwhelmed by his discoveries in Jerusalem, Clarel wishes to find a guide that will be able to direct him through the physical and spiritual mazes he finds to be characteristic of his current condition. As a stranger in a strange land, Clarel encounters much that tests his resolve. Imagining that he does not possess the spiritual fortitude to continue unassisted, Clarel remembers his past readings of Scripture. On the road to Emmaus himself, Clarel recalls how the arisen Christ appeared to two disciples undertaking the same journey.\(^48\) When the narrator later mediates Clarel’s wish to find a guide, it seems appropriate that he discovers Nehemiah, a pilgrim equally interested in witnessing the testimonies of Scripture come to life. Clarel momentarily believes this transformation of legend into reality will alleviate his fears. Or, if not alleviate his fears, a transformation of this magnitude will reveal to Clarel the truths behind Luke’s texts. The metaphorical value of Luke’s teachings becomes secondary. But Clarel imagines he needs a guide like

Christ in order to continue. Clarel seems to be making an odd distinction in this wish. He claims to need a guide like Christ, but this is something that he already has. With a full knowledge of Christ's teachings—the sum of his theological training—Clarel already possesses the object of his wish. Christ accompanies Clarel everywhere he goes, as long as Clarel is willing to accept Christ as an intellectual construction of his faith. At the moment of his request, Clarel does not believe this extensive familiarity with Scripture to be enough. He desires an actual physical entity capable of substantiating the teachings he already knows. Perhaps this distinction underscores the degree to which Clarel no longer feels connected to his faith. As his beliefs waver, he does not hold metaphorical truth to be sufficient. Its textual existence lacks a tangible validity. Clarel needs to see in order to believe, a gross perversion of the essence of faith.

The narrator reveals Clarel's request, notably humble for all its potential irreverence:

"[C]ould I but meet / Some stranger of a lore replete, / Who, marking how my looks betray / The dumb thoughts clogging here my feet, / Would question me, expound and prove, / And make my heart to burn with love— / Emmaus were no dream to-day!" (1.7.46-52). Clarel hopes this stranger can relieve him of his "dumb thoughts" and "expound and prove" these matters of faith. Yet, the wish oversimplifies his anxieties. He does not wish to understand the function of his current state of doubt, nor does he imagine that he possesses the evidence that he seeks. Clarel's thoughts suggest that his past readings of Scripture, though they provide the means to insight by remembering Luke's teachings, do not suit his present needs. The stranger for whom Clarel wishes will possess secret knowledge, a kind absolutely unbeknownst to the student. And it will be this mysterious knowledge, not the teachings of Christ, which will be able to ease
Clarel’s grief. In a succinct analysis, the stranger will be able to show Clarel the errors of his past beliefs and afford him the means to love again. Clarel sees this revelation as the lesson to be learned from the disciples’ encounter with Christ on the road to Emmaus. But, Clarel’s oversimplification stresses his desire for a quick resolution. He wants simple, direct answers and he wants them now.

When Nehemiah appears immediately following the wish, the narrator describes the scene. A potential guide has been provided, but it remains to be seen whether Nehemiah will fulfill the requested duties. The narrator provides most of the commentary for the rest of the canto. In the narrator’s descriptions, one observes many indications that Nehemiah will be able to satisfy Clarel’s wishes. Nehemiah first appears to Clarel “as in answer to the prayer” (1.7.54) he offers. Continuing the description of Nehemiah’s presumably “divine” origins, the narrator notes, “He seemed, illusion such was given, / Emerging from the level heaven, / And vested with its liquid calm” (1.7.60-2). The narrator’s language indicates that this description depends upon an assumption (“He seemed”); but, more importantly, the narrator constructs a figure whose literary qualities take precedent. One last assumption by the narrator assesses Nehemiah’s spirituality: “In wasted strength he seemed upheld / Invisibly by faith serene— / Paul’s evidence of things not seen” (1.7.66-8). To see Nehemiah’s descriptions as particularly literary, one must understand why the narrator wishes to construct such a figure. Clarel’s wish would have his guide assume all of the characteristics of faith he wants to attain himself. Furthermore, Clarel’s wish for a guide would be the embodiment, the physical embodiment, of spirituality. Because the physical construction of a spiritual state is an impossible task, the narrator cloaks the impossibility in precise language. By claiming
Nehemiah seems to be one thing or another, the narrator simply offers an interpretation, not evidence of facts. The narrator's interpretation, a notably subjective viewpoint, of Nehemiah can adhere to the wishes of Clarel in hopes of offering what the student needs: an example of prayers being answered; the possibility of the answer being heaven sent; evidence that faith sustains. Each of these needs addresses specific concerns for Clarel, but collectively considered, they offer Clarel a kind of evidence that suggests man is being watched over by a benevolent creator.

Nehemiah interprets Clarel's "untranquil face" (1.7.73) as the anxiety he needs to address. His first words to Clarel indicate his ability to intuit Clarel's need by offering the guidance from which he feels Clarel would most benefit. Nehemiah asks Clarel two specific questions before making his offer for guidance. Addressing Clarel as "'Young friend in Christ" (1.7.76), Nehemiah asks: "'what thoughts molest / That here ye droop so? Wanderest / without a guide where guide should be?'" (1.7.76-8). By synthesizing the two questions, Nehemiah ascertains Clarel's crisis of faith and his spiritual need. For Clarel, Nehemiah's assessments provide an understandable serenity. This heaven-sent guide, without any previous knowledge, on first meeting, recognizes Clarel's dilemma. Understanding the revelation could have an unnerving effect on Clarel; Nehemiah makes his offer of guidance in the form of the Bible. By offering the Bible instead of himself, Nehemiah reinforces an earlier point. Clarel's presence in Jerusalem, however, indicates his unwillingness or inability to see the Bible as an appropriate guide. No longer believing in the legitimacy of the Bible as a spiritual guide, Clarel seeks a person, not another text. Without directly refusing the offer, Clarel inquires concerning Nehemiah's
name. In reply, Nehemiah offers his own meekness, calling himself, "The sinner Nehemiah" (1.7.93).49

This first encounter serves as the necessary background for the "Saint and Student" (1.9) canto in which Clarel considers Nehemiah's potential as an ethical guide. As constructed by the narrator, Nehemiah appears to Clarel as the physical embodiment of the serenity he seeks through faith. The key to understanding this canto, and Clarel's self-evaluation relative to Nehemiah, comes from the comparison of the two figures. Though moving in and out of a dream-vision as the canto begins, Nehemiah speaks to Clarel with promises of the serenity to come in the new millennium. For the second time, Nehemiah calls Clarel his "friend in Christ" (1.9.1) immediately prior to making the third offer of the Bible as guide. The third offer differs from the preceding two insofar as Nehemiah articulates for Clarel just what he would find: "No ground there is that faith would view / But here 'tis rendered with the rest; / The way to fields of Beulah dear / And New Jerusalem is here" (1.9.11-4). The saint's interpretations of the Bible's spiritual offerings, as well as the serenity to be found, do not surprise Clarel, but his response to Nehemiah reveals his skepticism, the doubt characteristic of his present condition. Clarel's tone may appear to be negative in response, but it is the observation of the narrator that clarifies the issue. Clarel claims to be familiar with the Bible (1.9.15), but the narrator notes the student "mused awhile in bitterness" (1.9.16) immediately following his acknowledgement of familiarity.

49 Before he meets Nehemiah, Clarel asks: "'Christ lived a Jew; and in Judæa / May linger any breath of him?'" (1.7.33-4). If Clarel accepts Nehemiah to be the proposed "lingering breath" of Christ, his speculations project, at least in his own mind, the possibility that the physical manifestations suggested by Holy Writ are not limited to metaphor.
Nehemiah intuits this bitterness and inquires as to Clarel's reasons for coming to Jerusalem. An individual familiar with the Bible and traveling to one of Christianity's holiest sites, Clarel must be a penitent Christian come to Jerusalem on pilgrimage. To confirm his suspicions, Nehemiah asks Clarel: "'A pilgrim art thou? pilgrim thou?"" (1.9.20). Though the reason for asking the same question twice is unclear, Nehemiah seeks the information that would clarify his intuition. But, more importantly, Nehemiah's question forces Clarel to consider the parameters of his own faith, particularly as relates to the appropriateness of calling himself a pilgrim. When Clarel responds to Nehemiah, "'I am a traveler—no more'" (1.9.27), he acknowledges the limitations of his own beliefs. To call himself a traveler, Clarel must feel that he lacks the qualities of belief that the "pilgrim" qualification deserves. For Clarel, the pilgrim actively visits the legendary sites of his faith in order to reaffirm his beliefs. In Jerusalem, for example, accompanied by fellow believers of all shapes, sizes, and origins, the pilgrim truly feels the love of brotherhood and community that negates all the apparent physical differences between pilgrims. The pilgrim, for Clarel, deserves the serenity that comes from the strengths of his belief, those made all the more strong by his present pilgrimage. The journey provides its own greatest rewards. By contrast, the traveler is little more than a tourist, one interested in noting the sites of Christian tradition. Whether the traveler believes is immaterial; the essence of the trip to Jerusalem, for example, is to see the Biblical city. Its theological relevance is

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50 The narrator interrupts Clarel's immediate response by assuming to understand how Clarel interprets Nehemiah's question. The narrator observes: "Words simple, which in Clarel bred / More than the simple saint divined" (1.9.21-2). Though his intention cannot be known, the narrator suggests one of the inherent flaws of communication. Nehemiah asks a specific answer and expects a specific answer. Clarel interprets the question to seek information beyond the question's literal meaning. The context suggests Clarel overanalyzes Nehemiah's question. He offers more information than Nehemiah seeks.
overshadowed by its spectacle. The journey for the tourist provides its greatest rewards when he is able to recount the visit as one of the many advantages of travel. For a receptive audience, the traveler recounts the images, the sounds, and the smells of the city. While the traveler comes into contact with the same persons and places as the pilgrim, the impact made on the two differs. For the pilgrim, the impact is spiritual; for the tourist, the impact is physical.

Clarel understands this distinction, and he fears the complete loss of spiritual significance should the impact of Jerusalem remain exclusively physical. Clarel’s search for a guide at this point focuses on one that can help him make the transition from traveler to pilgrim. Nehemiah accepts the challenge of guide, but he knows his task with Clarel to be different from past episodes. Something more pressing directs his actions. Though Nehemiah calls himself a wanderer, he sees nothing accidental about the present meeting. Nehemiah’s claim to be a wanderer—“‘Heart, come with me; all times I roam’” (1.9.34)—allows for a greater sense of connectedness to Clarel.¹⁵¹ The previously noted observation regarding Clarel’s wandering (1.7.76-8) and Nehemiah’s claim that Clarel is a “‘wayfarer’” (1.9.9) underscore the significance of the meeting. If Nehemiah can serve

¹⁵¹ Nehemiah refers to Clarel as “heart” on two occasions (1.9.9; 1.9.34). Though possibly a term of endearment, it seems Nehemiah’s statement is more purposeful than providing Clarel with a sense of familiarity and security. Nehemiah uses the metonym to highlight the dual nature of his efforts at consolation. One literal interpretation suggests that Nehemiah speaks directly to Clarel’s heart, the seat of emotion, compassion, and spirituality when he first offers the Bible as a guide. The second use, applying another literal interpretation, suggests Nehemiah addresses Clarel’s spiritual quest as something for which he may provide assistance. But, in keeping with the present line of interpretation, it appears that Nehemiah’s sophistication underlies this seemingly simple substitution. Like Clarel’s desire to transform himself from physical (traveler) to spiritual (pilgrim) quester, Nehemiah uses “heart” with the same sense of progression. He addresses the physical heart in the first instance to help Clarel understand the simplicity of the return to faith—one need only accept the guidance being offered. The Bible, Nehemiah knows, provides such guidance. In the second instance, however, Nehemiah’s words seem to speak more to Clarel’s dormant spirituality. The self-proclaimed sinner’s words echo Christ’s call to his disciples to “follow me,” as noted in the Gospels of Matthew (8.22, 9.9, 16.24, 19.21), Mark (2.14, 8.34, 10.21), Luke (5.27, 9.23, 9.59, 18.22), and John (1.43, 10.27, 12.26, 13.36, 21.19). Though this parallel should not suggest this reader’s belief that Nehemiah is a Christ-figure, the call offered by Nehemiah to Clarel can be seen as a call to faith.
as Clarel’s guide, each ends his own wandering. Nehemiah assumes the role of teacher and Clarel resumes the role of student. Each is given a purpose. Nehemiah understands his purpose to be working towards divine providence. In his own wanderings, Nehemiah notes the frequency with which his discoveries of individuals seems fortuitous, but his meeting with Clarel, as he interprets it, resembles none of his earlier encounters. Though “Ever I find some passer-by” (1.9.38), Nehemiah accepts Clarel’s presence as something greater than a chance discovery. Something greater than either individual intervenes to assure the meeting: “But thee I’m sent to; share and rove, / With me divide the scrip of love” (1.9.39-40). Nehemiah’s words indicate Clarel’s wandering will continue, but the wandering will be guided both by Nehemiah and the Bible. No longer will it be aimless.

Nehemiah’s argument yields a concession from Clarel, one dependent upon his willingness to see the “primal faith” (1.9.43) of Nehemiah as admirable and deserving his reverence; but also his need for fraternal companionship. Because Clarel notes Nehemiah’s faith to be admirable, he believes it is important to have a similar faith, if for no other reason than its ability to soothe the self-destructive capacities of doubt. Clarel’s acquiescence is as much an indication of his appreciation of Nehemiah’s position as it is an understanding that faith represents a means towards self-improvement. The more consciously self-aware Clarel becomes, the more likely his capacity for self-creation. Though this Kierkegaardian approach to an ethical existence must continue to confront the flaws of the aesthetic life (the dependence on external forces, i.e., the Bible), Clarel makes a conscious decision to redirect his understanding of the world from a dependence on external criteria to internal criteria. Though Nehemiah’s guidance serves mainly to
familiarize Clarel with the legendary sites of Christian tradition (and in this sense externalizes the definition of self); Clarel’s search must make small strides before it makes larger ones. Such a dependence upon external criteria seems to push Clarel more towards an aesthetic life and less towards an ethical life; but the transition from aesthetic to ethical, from external to internal criteria, must be gradual.\textsuperscript{52} Clarel’s willingness to make the transition marks the necessary starting point for the remainder of the pilgrimage. He must make progress through his involvement with other guides if he is to recognize, ultimately, just how suited external guides truly are. As long as Clarel still sees the need for a guide other than himself, he remains firmly attached to the aesthetic life. Nehemiah’s presence and Clarel’s receptivity mark the transition point. However, it is Nehemiah’s eventual and necessary failure to provide Clarel with objective truth that makes Clarel more open to the possibility of subjective truth.

\textbf{Vine}

From his first encounter with Vine at the Sepulcher, Clarel imagines the mysterious stranger to be full of potential as a guide. Though Vine’s reserve prevents any extensive conversations; and thus, any true sense of fraternity; Clarel happens upon one instance where Vine willingly offers his perspectives on the pilgrimage. Following the encounter with the Dominican monk,\textsuperscript{53} Clarel finds Vine characteristically apart from the rest of the pilgrim group. Disheartened by his inability to discern the communicative efforts of the Dominican and, afterwards, Rolfe, Clarel seeks communion with Vine. Partially hidden within the foliage at the banks of the Jordan, Vine begins an unsolicited critique of man

\textsuperscript{52} At the conclusion of the canto, the narrator qualifies Clarel’s concession to let Nehemiah be his guide as follows: “The student gave assent, and caught / Dim solacement to previous thought” (1.9.47-8). The “dim solacement” suggests his transition will not be achieved easily.

\textsuperscript{53} The Dominican monk and his efforts at communication will be addressed in Chapter Five.
and his present condition. As Clarel approaches, eventually lying down beside this teacher, Vine offers his subjective assessment of the past as significantly more meaningful than the present. The past, for all its simplicity and reverence, deserves the admiration of the truly faithful. Through a comparison, one easily notes what contemporary man lacks. This particularly simple point seems to encapsulate Vine’s assessment. But his manner of presentation deserves attention. Through an extended comparison of the Old World’s “sheik” and the New World’s “Red Man,” Vine presents Clarel with a subjective perspective on truth that contrasts with the earlier objective perspective offered by Nehemiah. The recognition of the shift, though Clarel does not make the transformation at this point, is necessary for the student’s eventual development.

Though “‘In sylvan John’s baptistry’” (2.27.20), Vine reveals to Clarel that his “‘bad habits persevere’” (2.27.22). Even the reverence Vine imagines he should feel at so significant a site as the Jordan cannot prevent his critical nature. He confesses to Clarel: “‘I have been moralizing here / Like any imbecile’” (2.27.23-4), using this self-condemning statement as the introduction to his observations regarding the legitimacy of subjective truths. If Vine imagines himself to moralize, he and Clarel should understand this confession to account for the moral reflections that occur to Vine as a result of observing the present setting. But Vine’s suggestion that moralizing is the playground of imbeciles presents Clarel with his first opportunity to recognize one of the differences between objective and subjective truths. Vine knows that morality itself is a social construct. By suggesting that moral reflections upon social situations are fit only for the feeble-minded, Vine critiques the validity of the objective viewpoint. Clarel, familiar
with the differences between ethics (as the individual application) and morality (the socially agreed upon standard of acceptable behavior), should be able to interpret Vine’s assessment of moralizing as recognizing the limitations of such social constructs. To refute the validity of morality as merely social construct suggests Vine recognizes a greater standard. Clarel must interpret Vine’s intention as accepting the possibility of the subjective viewpoint possessing greater significance.

Vine offers an example of his moralizing. Anthropomorphizing the willows along the banks of the Jordan, Vine speaks for these elements of nature. Vine first projects a concern for the imminent danger to come in the pilgrimage’s advance towards the Dead Sea. He notes, however, that the willows offer the opportunity to “tarry” for some time. Following this apparent concern on the willow’s part, another projection offers the fatalist’s viewpoint of predestination: “So let be” and “be it so” (2.27.32; 2.27.34). Though the willows offer conflicting viewpoints regarding specific action, Vine intends for Clarel to recognize the stasis that results from externalizing one’s sense of duty. If the individual defers to the socially accepted notions of truth, at least in the case of the willows, his fate seems to be out of his own hands. Offering both the call for self-restraint, as well as the self-deluding refusal to acknowledge danger, the willows force the individual into stasis. He freezes because the choices offered from the socially constructed moral perspective dictate neither option offers an acceptable course of action. Compromise between the two extremes always presents itself as a possibility. But Vine’s greater point seems to be the willingness to accept that neither of the two extremes, nor the compromise of the two—because all three derive their meanings from social constructions external to the self—are valid. The individual’s subjective construction of
alternatives not only contemplates action; it assures the individual that his choice, because it emanates internally, will lead to the more individuated self. Vine's suggests to Clarel the importance of self-creation in a world dominated by imbeciles. The narrator notes the impact of Vine's words on Clarel: "Surprised at such a fluent turn, / The student did but listen—learn" (2.27.35-6). The narrator's couplet suggests Clarel understands Vine's intention.

The communication in the canto continues in this one-way fashion. As the narrator previously observes, Clarel only listens. He does not respond to Vine's statements. If his silence indicates an internal consideration of Vine's points, Clarel needs to be able to discern Vine's meaning. Taking the narrator's statement as evidence, it seems Clarel understands clearly. But, in a symbolic gesture that intends to afford Clarel the greater opportunity for comprehension, Vine, previously hidden within the foliage, pushes "aside the twigs which screened" (2.27.37) himself from Clarel. The physical gesture contains intellectual significance. Vine wants to ensure that few barriers stand between his critique of objective morality and Clarel's understanding. By removing the twigs, Vine clears the pathway of communication. He limits the possibility that Clarel's understanding will be interrupted. At the very least, this remains his hope. Vine's critique continues with a comparison of the Old and New World's purest examples, those individuals un tarnished, to an extent, by society. He selects the sheik as the representative of the Old World; and the American Indian as representative of the New World.

By selecting these particular figures, Vine begins his assertion that the so-called primitive cultures are superior to those that have followed. Vine never describes either
figure as a noble savage, but the critique seems dependent upon Rousseau’s conception.\textsuperscript{54} Vine does not attempt to construct an elaborate critique of society in favor of the “natural” existence of his chosen “primitives,” but he does highlight the loss of innocence implied by the collision of cultures. Comparatively, Vine finds the Old World’s sheik to be superior to his counterpart in the New World simply because he imagines the sheik’s physical appearance speaks to an inner peace. Vine asks Clarel whether he notes the same characteristic, but because of the one-sidedness of the conversation, it is difficult to discern whether Vine truly wants a response. Because the question functions more rhetorically, one may conclude that Vine offers Clarel this question as a meditative consideration for the future. Following the question, Vine speculates his own conclusions simply might lead another to believe as he does. As much as Vine seemingly values the natural existence notable in the past, he links the condition to Scriptures in order to exhibit another level of reverence. He calls the sheiks the “Clan of outcast Hagar” (2.27.44), as well as “these Nimrods” (2.27.49), the Biblical descendents of Noah through Ham. But more significantly than attaching a name, Vine offers his perspective, in the form of the rhetorical question previously noted, to Clarel regarding the nobility of these sheiks: “But in these Nimrods noted you / The natural language of the eye, / [ . . . ] / Methought therein one might espy, / For all the wildness, thought refined / By the old Asia’s dreamful mind” (2.27.49-56). Whatever limitations Vine is willing to concede due to the supposed “wildness” of the sheiks, he does not feel the “refined” intellect and imagination to be limited. Though outcasts, these sheiks maintain admirable characteristics. The “thought refined” remains undiluted by even the limited

\textsuperscript{54} Seals notes Melville owned a copy of Rousseau’s \textit{Confessions}, but no other texts by the French philosopher (\textit{Melville’s Reading} 209).
interaction with the greater society. For all the advances in commerce, political thought, and scientific discovery, these sheiks hold to the traditions of Asia's past. Vine suggests the recognition of the "natural language of the eye" indicates the unaffected purity of the sheiks. If Vine remembers the cliché that suggests the eye is the window to the soul, he seems to be exploiting it here. The naturalness of the language has not been tainted in any fashion. Spiritual and intellectual purity characterize these sheiks.

Clarel does not pay much attention to Vine. His concerns are limited to the physical nature of Vine, as many critics note Clarel's willingness to pursue unconventional (with regard to the "conventions" of nineteenth-century gender politics) sexual practices. Because his concerns lie elsewhere, Clarel hears, but he does not listen to Vine's considerations. The narrator provides Clarel's thoughts: "O, now but for communion true / And close; let go each alien theme; / Give me thyself" (2.27.68-70). Because Vine cannot know Clarel's thoughts, he continues his observations regarding the sheik, finally returning to the initial consideration of the importance of subjective constructions of truth, but one necessarily linked to spirituality. Vine calls the purity he claims to exist in the sheiks to be characteristic of Job, and that the sheiks themselves "show a lingering trace / Of some quite unrecorded race / Such as the Book of Job implies" (2.27.74-6). Vine implies the lesson to be learned from Job comes from unwavering faith. No matter the individual turmoil, one must believe. Though he claims the wisdom of the era that produced such a text far outweighs the wisdom of contemporary times, Vine uses a specific example of an encounter with an unspecified group of tribesmen to clarify his

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position. Noting these individuals to operate according to their own sense of law; noting their characteristic violence not to blight their graciousness; Vine offers Clarel the following: “'Disowning law, / Not lawless lived they; no, indeed; / Their chief—why one of Sydney’s clan, / A slayer, but chivalric man; / And chivalry, with all that breed / Was Arabic or Saracen / In source, they tell’” (2.27.83-9). Vine implies these sheiks adhere to subjective laws rather than the legal dictates of society. These same subjective laws, according to the unnamed “they” Vine cites as his source, possess the graciousness that originates in Arabic and Syrian tribes. These individuals stand as the models for self-creation and self-knowledge because of their gallantry. Unlike the rest of modern society, whose fragmentation from Biblical tradition—“'But, as men stray / Further from Ararat away’” (2.27.89-90)—is mirrored by their ever-increasing tendencies towards boorish behavior; these sheiks remain adherents to their own truths. Vine’s frustration at the collision between man’s possibilities (the example of the sheiks) and his actualities (the example of the pilgrim group) manifests itself in his condemnation of Columbus as instigator of this fall from natural grace. Clarel’s inability to understand Vine’s rather complex assessment stems from his preoccupation with finding a mate. No matter the sexual implications of this search, Clarel’s failure to note the transition from Nehemiah’s perspective on objective truth to Vine’s perspective on subjective truth limits his own development along the lines of self-creation. Clarel stands a better chance at recognizing this transition when not concerned with the physical beauty of his prospective guide. Vine allows the screen of twigs to return because he knows Clarel does not understand. Preoccupied with a physical union, Clarel cannot comprehend Vine’s intended message
regarding the need for subjective truths as providing the necessary solace for faith. Clarel
is not yet prepared to make the transition.

Rolfe

Following the revelry that characterizes the arrival of the pilgrim group at Mar Saba,
Rolfe and Clarel, unable to sleep, venture out to a “railed-in ledge” (3.15.46) overlooking
the Kedron gorge. Over the course of the “In Moonlight” (3.15) and “The Easter Fire”
(3.16) cantos, Rolfe offers Clarel another perspective for his concerns on the right way to
live. “In Moonlight” offers Clarel the example of Djalea while “The Easter Fire”
provides commentary on the appropriateness of the shift from objective to subjective
contemplations of truth. Still suffering from an inability to synthesize the various
experiences of the pilgrimage, Clarel seeks direction from Rolfe who asks Clarel to
recognize the necessity of actions, not words, in creating one’s manner of living. Rolfe
stresses the need to create, not simply adhere to, the parameters of faith and belief. The
individual cannot subject himself to the standards of other believers without the
experience ultimately losing its immediacy. For Rolfe, or any other guide, to tell Clarel
how to live is as much a perversion of the search as Clarel’s inability to recognize his
own need. Rolfe can give Clarel an example of how some other individual, like Djalea,
chooses to live; however, Clarel must decide for himself the most appropriate means of
undertaking the process of self-creation. Finally, this proves too great for Clarel at this
stage of the pilgrimage.

Rolfe intuits Clarel’s disturbance. The narrator offers that Rolfe “read[s]” (3.15.64)
him and Rolfe’s capacities at interpretation appear to be sound. In less than twenty lines
(3.15.46-64), Rolfe rightly concludes what bothers Clarel even though neither character
speaks during this time. The narrator supplies the only information. Rolfe offers Clarel, “Some simple thing to ease the mind / Dejected in her littleness” (3.15.62-3), and draws Clarel’s attention to Djalea’s turban, noting the luxuriant ease of the Druze. His calmness stands in contrast to Clarel’s anxiety, and Rolfe intends the comparison to reveal to Clarel the security that comes from Djalea’s simple faith. Rolfe points to the physical evidence in the scene as revelatory. Djalea’s spiritual ease is as notable as his physical ease in his reclining. By indulging in the luxuries of his pipe, Djalea exhibits another example of his serenity. But it is the turban, in combination with the physical and sensual ease just noted, that reveals Djalea’s fluency in what Rolfe claims to be the “‘secrets sacerdotal’” (3.15.80). Djalea’s wisdom may be inaccessible to pilgrims like Rolfe and Clarel, but Rolfe wants Clarel to recognize the image as revealing something that exists beyond sight. To discover the secret calm of Djalea, in essence to ask him the question that Clarel wishes to have answered, Rolfe calls to the Druze.

The narrator draws attention to Djalea’s immediate response. He replies “not by word / Indeed, but act: he came” (3.15.93-4). Though Rolfe and Clarel have noted this characteristic all along—Djalea acts to protect the pilgrims during the pilgrimage; he does not discuss what should be done prior to acting—the narrator offers this observation in an effort to make a distinction. Almost without exception, the members of the pilgrim group respond to “courteous challenge[s]” (3.15.92) by discussion. The activity is mainly intellectual and logical. One pilgrim poses a challenge; another responds with a critique; but seldom does a pilgrim concede a point of contention to his fellow pilgrim. The two, ultimately, tire of the discussion and the entirety ends without resolution.

56 By “simple,” one should not conclude Djalea’s faith comes easy. Rather, Djalea’s confidence in the ability of his faith to sustain him, regardless of external crisis, reveals the trust he puts in himself to create order. His faith in Allah reveals his faith in himself.
Djalea, by comparison, resolves his challenges through action, as in the present example when Djalea responds similarly to Rolfe’s challenge. He comes to Rolfe and Clarel. But when Rolfe poses the question regarding how Djalea maintains his faith, the Druze offers a challengingly simple response. With his imperative construction, Rolfe demands as much as he asks Djalea to reveal his secret: “’Tell us here— / Your Druze faith: are there not degrees, / Orders, ascents of mysteries / Therein? One would not pry and peer: / Of course there’s no disclosing these; / But what’s that working thought you win?’” (3.15.104-9). As much as Rolfe wants Djalea to reveal, he understands the limitations of the question. For example, he knows Djalea cannot reveal the kinds of mysteries of faith that are contingent upon belief only. There is no proof; thus Rolfe qualifies his inquiry by noting his realization that Djalea cannot disclose his beliefs as truths. Rather, Rolfe asks Djalea to reveal how he believes, the “working thought” that guides or underlies all other beliefs.

Rolfe draws Clarel’s attention to Djalea because he expects Djalea’s reply to reinforce the greater point he tries to make to Clarel; namely, faith itself is its own answer. Rolfe anticipates Djalea’s response, otherwise his observations regarding Djalea prior to his questioning have no value. By suggesting Djalea’s luxuriant ease of faith to Clarel, Rolfe wants to show Clarel that belief sustains belief; faith is the only means to faith. By asking another how he should live, Clarel fails to recognize the immediacy of faith. Only Clarel can answer the question he so often asks. Djalea’s responses to Rolfe’s question reveal the necessity of self-sustained faith. Addressing Rolfe’s questions, Djalea offers: “’No God there is but God’” (3.15.115) and “’Allah preserve ye, Allah great!’” (3.15.123). Though the responses appear to be non sequiturs, Djalea
avoids the potential danger of allowing words to substitute for actions. His response, of course, comes in the form of two statements. But the statements are only affirmations of faith, nothing else. He does not allow Rolfe’s question or Clarel’s need for an answer to lure him into an explanation of something that exists beyond the realm of logical determination. Because Djalea recognizes this, he succeeds where other pilgrims fail. His faith remains real because he does not subject it to objective, rational tests. Djalea believes because he believes. Though this statement fails to meet the criteria for logical proof, Djalea’s faith does not depend upon either logic or proof as a means of making it real. Because Clarel still needs proof prior to believing, he can neither understand Djalea’s message nor Rolfe’s intention in using Djalea as an example. The force of Djalea’s message resounds more meaningfully as the concluding line of the canto. There is nothing more to say on the matter.

In “The Easter Fire,” Rolfe attempts to clarify the subtle point of his message to Clarel. Though he admires the strength of Djalea’s faith, Rolfe does not feel all Muslims are equally worthy of such admiration. He uses Belex as an example to warn Clarel of the inherent dangers of pursuing subjective truths. Rolfe’s message appears overly convoluted at first. He makes Belex the entry-point for his critique, but expands his argument to include Greek and Latin Christians as well. Using two specific examples, Belex’s former position as guard of the Holy Sepulcher and his participation in the Greek Easter bacchanal, Rolfe notes how easily ritual becomes more meaningful than the faith meant to be upheld through its performance. By holding Djalea in such high esteem, Rolfe fears he makes Islam appear too appealing to Clarel. Though Rolfe does not

57 Rolfe notes the key to Djalea’s wisdom to be his reserve. He asks Clarel rhetorically: “‘Where’ll ye find / Nobleman to keep silence with / Better than Lord Djalea?’” (3.16.3-5). Silence, Rolfe implies, reveals much more about faith than incessant discussion.
complete the question regarding Clarel's interests in conversion, it seems this is his primary concern. Clarel dismisses Rolfe's concerns before moving the discussion towards Belex. Acknowledging his familiarity with Belex, Rolfe summarizes for Clarel the dangers presented by such an individual. As a guard, Belex displays the same characteristics Rolfe notes of other Muslim guards of the Sepulcher. The "'bored dead apathy'" (3.16.19) Belex brings to the charge suggests to Rolfe that Belex maintains more interest in the symbolic meaning of the activity than the activity itself. Rolfe does not deny that Belex reveres the Sepulcher. Like other Muslims, Belex appreciates Christian theology as well as the legendary sites: "'To Christ the Turk as much as Frank / Concedes a supernatural rank; / Our Holy Places too he mates / All but with Mecca's own'" (3.16.31-4). Rolfe believes, however, that the Muslim places too much significance on the primary symbol of Christianity, the Cross, instead of what the symbol represents. For instance, Rolfe offers that the Muslim who sees the Cross defaced in any way feels "'his faith then needs be strained; / The more, if he himself have done / (Enforced thereto by harsh command) / Irreverence unto Mary's Son'" (3.16.37-40). Rolfe's point here implies an admirable trait in the Muslim; namely, the adherent reveres not only his own understanding of religious truth, but reveres the beliefs of other religions. Such an enlightened example of tolerance deserves the respect of Rolfe and Clarel. However, Rolfe transforms this characteristic, seemingly claiming the effect of such appearances contains more weight than the actual feelings. By asserting that ritual suggests a kind of underlying fraudulence in the feelings of the participants, Rolfe moves beyond his simple critique of subjectivity and treads dangerously close to intolerance through his self-righteousness.
Though Rolfe extensively summarizes the fraud of the Greek Easter celebration at the Holy Sepulcher, his concern remains its lack of credibility. Rolfe acknowledges that the legend behind the ritual comes from a "'dream / Artless, which few will disesteem—''' (3.16.125-6), that the angels brought fire to the lamps at the Holy Sepulcher during Easter.\footnote{Bezanson provides thorough commentary on the ritual and the legend (Clarel 807).} Feeling the ritual possesses greater relevance than the event it intends to commemorate, Rolfe objects to certain actions in the maintenance of the ritual, but understands the meaning they hold for many. However, when the meaning of the ritual exceeds the meaning of the intended commemorative event, Rolfe fears the eventual shift towards individual, subjective interpretation of religiously significant events. If the individual begins to define for himself those things previously left to the wisdom of the priests, Rolfe fears that, "'Some doctrines fall away from creeds, / And therewith, hopes, which scarce again, / In those same forms, shall solace men—'" (3.16.152-4). Rolfe thinks that placing too much significance on the ritual ultimately threatens the individual religion itself. The system cannot alter to accommodate the individual. The doctrines cannot shift at the whim of the adherent. Without tradition, Rolfe concludes, religion has very little force and very little meaning.

Though Rolfe begins his assault on Belex, he shifts to include Derwent as one of the responsible parties. Derwent's responsibility takes a different form than Belex's, but Rolfe believes the priest's form to be far more destructive. Derwent concedes the receding place of faith by his willingness to be malleable, by altering the system to accommodate the individual. His optimism and meliorism blind him, so Rolfe thinks, to the dilution of faith. By allowing all possibilities; and by seeing all possibilities as equally positive contributions to God's providence, Derwent transforms himself into an
embodiment of ritual—he simply acts out his role without regard to the importance of maintaining his position. Rolfe calls Derwent’s attempt to synthesize all things together an indication that the Anglican priest is spiritually androgynous: “‘Things all diverse he would unite: / His idol’s an hermaphrodite’” (3.16.173-4). He feels this defrauds all legitimate believers. Though Rolfe preaches tolerance, he seems willing to be tolerant only to a point. Beyond that, Rolfe attempts to mask his disgust through skillful articulation. Not wanting to offend Clarel nor wanting to suggest his own feelings of ill-will towards Derwent, Rolfe retreats. He does not feel Derwent acts deliberately to disrupt. Derwent simply makes mistakes from time to time. Regarding Clarel’s opinion of Rolfe, irrevocable damage has been done. As much as Clarel likes Rolfe, he cannot accept the characteristic “Manysidedness” (3.16.263) of his verbal foray. Though Rolfe critiques others for the presumed fraudulence of ritualistic behavior, Clarel sees the ritual to be indicative of strong beliefs; regardless of how misguided they may appear to others. He finds this characteristic to be far more admirable than Rolfe’s easy cynicism that he masks by appealing to tolerance. “Better a partisan!” (3.16.259), Clarel thinks, than overly suspicious and contemptuous of the quality of faith in another. Though Rolfe intends to warn Clarel about the pitfalls of ritual as an external artifice indicative of subjective belief, his emotional investment in the argument, coupled with his insistent tone, prevents the student from learning the proposed lesson. Clarel recognizes that Rolfe preaches tolerance, but in this instance he does not adhere to his own standards. Rolfe believes faith should be simple like Djalea’s, but not primitive like Belex’s (though it seems Rolfe’s only standard of primitivism regarding Belex is his past participation in ritual activities of which Rolfe does not approve). It is little wonder that Clarel becomes
confused and distraught by Rolfe's argument. Having once felt Rolfe to be an admirable teacher, Clarel discovers another example of how he must seek valid truths on his own.

**Derwent**

Clarel's conversation with Derwent during the "In Confidence" (3.21) canto has been addressed during the previous chapter, but the present consideration differs. In circumstances similar to the encounter with Rolfe, Clarel discovers Derwent alone atop one of Mar Saba's towers. Here the two watch the sun rise and discuss the place of truth. Clarel notes Derwent to be the most cryptic of his fellow pilgrims, but the last of the possible guides. If Derwent cannot provide Clarel with the hope he seeks, he will be left alone to make his own discoveries. For Clarel, the idea of solitary questing seems fraught with danger. However, this is the direction Derwent ultimately encourages because he accepts, and hopes to communicate to Clarel, truth to be a non-specific thing, at least in terms of its objectivity. Because Derwent grants "'License to all'" (3.21.96) in this search for truth, he offers the individual, subjective claim to truth to be the more competent approach. Clarel's search hints at the student's belief in a Platonic conception by accepting Truth as something external to the self and external to all individual experience. Derwent refuses to accept this conception. If all persons are permitted to define truth on an individual level, each contributes to the fragmentation of the social (meaning objective) understanding of truth. For Derwent, this is not a problem. The possibility remains that a collective understanding, through compromise, affords a "True center where they [the individual searchers] might convene" (3.21.128). Derwent does

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59 Though the consideration from Chapter Three introduces Clarel's movement towards the subjective position, the focus of the present chapter will be an assessment of Derwent's specific development of this argument. His six points previously noted will be considered as a step-by-step approach for Clarel's movement towards the subjective perspective.

167
not acknowledge that the collective understanding supercedes the individual understanding. Rather, through compromise, the social aspect of the search is reintroduced. Derwent promises no certainty in either the individual or collective search. He offers solace to be the result of the process. He believes the process, not the endpoint, provides the meaning.

This does not satisfy Clarel. Because Clarel seeks certainty, Derwent alters his argumentative tactic. To reveal the process of movement away from the objective and towards the subjective, Derwent highlights one of the limitations of objective truths: the need for individuals who have, and can disseminate, these truths. Because the searcher, in this case Clarel, desires access to these truths, he assumes some greater good to come from possessing such knowledge. Derwent refutes this presumption by articulating that knowledge (meaning, knowledge of objective truths) can no more provide solace than the individuals who claim to possess such knowledge. These so-called “pilots,” the clergy, the Bible, Christ, merely afford other ground for debate. One claim to truth is contradicted by another claim from competing clergy, competing holy texts, competing saviors. Clarel recognizes this point as it is his own objection: “This side—that side, / They crossing hail through fogs that dwell / Upon a limitless deep tide, / While their own cutters toll the bell / Of groping” (3.21.151-5).

Derwent anticipates Clarel’s objection. In fact, he needs the student to recognize the limitation of an external guide if the argument towards the subjective is to be at all attractive to him. Derwent draws the logical extension from the assumption of pilot-guides; namely, the objective search presumes divine order and concern. If God exists; if he created man in His image; if He wants man to understand this relationship; he must
have terrestrial representatives capable of understanding and articulating this relationship. If God does not exist, man's search for objective truth and meaning highlights his own arrogance as well as his intellectual limitations. Derwent advises Clarel that one needs to find solace and hope where he can. The solace and hope may not be based upon any external proof, but they can be held in high regard even without any objective validity.

Derwent suggests to Clarel: "'Have Faith, which, even from the myth, / Draws something to be useful with: / In any form some truths will hold; / Employ the present-sanctioned mold'" (3.21.184-7). Even while recognizing the objective limitations of faith, one must embrace faith as a subjective presumption of life's ritualistic nature. This makes faith equally a ritual, but it also allows truth to be found everywhere. Rolfe, of course, objects to this approach to faith. But Derwent understands the subjective benefits far more clearly than Rolfe. Derwent argues that only on the subjective level can faith be "useful," but the individual must believe in this usefulness without any objective proof. Faith becomes subjective, dependent upon the individual's willingness to act as his own guide. Clarel's confusion stems from his inability to understand Derwent's reasoning because he doesn't know how to search as guide to himself, but this is Derwent's point. One must act, many times without understanding why. This implies faith in oneself, an inherently grander and bolder statement than faith based upon an attempt to recognize and understand divine providence. Once the individual conceives of this subjective understanding of faith, he will not recognize the legitimacy of any guide external to the self.

Derwent restates his earlier position that the individual must find hope and solace where he can, but this restatement serves as preface to the final point he intends to make.
to Clarel. Derwent asks two specific questions designed to elicit the same response: "'But is it good / Such gnats to fight? or well to brood / In selfish introverted search, / Leaving the poor world in the lurch?'" (3.21.262-5). Though Derwent's questions on the surface seem to contradict his earlier statements regarding subjectivity, his concerns for the introverted search do not criticize the subjective search. To fight doubt, the gnats Derwent mentions, serves little purpose. Doubt will always be a part of faith, particularly faith dependent upon the self. To waste energy fighting an indefatigable enemy shows very little foresight. Introverted brooding serves a similarly fruitless end. Derwent's question does not challenge the legitimacy of the subjective search. Instead, his question warns against internalization and stands as a call for action. By acknowledging, "'Betwixt rejection and belief, / Shadings there are—degrees, in brief'" (3.21.281-2), Derwent assesses for Clarel the need to act. These degrees suggest varying subjective positions, varying means of pursuing subjective truth. But the emphasis remains the pursuit. One must actively engage in the subjective search. When Clarel insists on knowing prior to acting, Derwent laments the student's "deep diving" not as a course of action, but as a means of searching that is subject to the same limitations as objective truths. Clarel's wish to "answer" metaphysical dilemmas suggests his need to find an objective resolution true for all persons. Derwent knows only subjective answers satisfy these questions. Though they cannot hold for all persons or all cases, the answers satisfy the individual asking the question. The deep diving seeks a "buried" truth applicable to all situations, but Derwent refutes the notion that such truths exist. The "surface" (3.21.310) truths offered as an alternative by Derwent should not be interpreted as a superficial assessment. The surface truths, relative to the buried truths, suggest man's
capacity to answer questions relative to himself, regardless of the applicability to his fellow man. The broader application does not hold because one can only speak, and seek, for the self, not for others. Instead of offering solace, Derwent’s position leaves Clarel reeling from doubt. The final quatrain of the canto, Clarel’s three unanswered questions directed to Nehemiah, gives hope to Clarel’s recognition of the subjective pursuit. Because he intellectually realizes Nehemiah’s death precludes him from answering the questions, Clarel further realizes he asks himself these questions, just as Derwent suggests. Clarel’s ability to answer the questions, and no one else’s, must become the focus. The close of the canto gives an indication that Clarel intends to consider the possibility of subjective truths, rather than dismissing them entirely.

The Results

By the end of the poem, at his return to Jerusalem to find Ruth dead, Clarel finds the pilgrimage has resolved nothing. Not only does he no longer understand his place relative to faith; Clarel no longer understands his place relative to the remaining pilgrims. Such an inability to understand, however, should not suggest that nothing has happened. Though the pilgrimage’s physical redundancy—the tour returns to Jerusalem—mimics Clarel’s spiritual redundancy, Clarel’s overall sense of self is stronger than at the outset. He may no longer have Ruth and he may no longer have the solace of his previous beliefs, but he comes to an understanding that neither of these external quantities of the physical or spiritual realms substitute for a self incompletely defined. Clarel’s search for physical and spiritual complements to his completed self may come later. But Clarel must continue the quest for self-creation before any other components may be added. His ability to recognize the potential importance of the subjective perspective exists in its
earliest stages. The process of self-discovery for Clarel will be lengthy and uncertain. However, when Clarel asks the "How to live?" question in another form, he reveals the slow transformation about to take place: "What end may prove [fulfilling]?” (4.29.86). The narrator asks this question for Clarel prior to the discovery of Ruth and Agar’s graves. Though the question seems essentially the same, there is an important different. "How to live?” implies the answer lies external to the self, that some external agent will provide this answer, and that external communication exists as the means of discovery. "What end may prove fulfilling?” implies the answer lies within the individual, that internal communication exists as the means of discovery. Though subtle, the distinction between these two questions deserves notice. The former question intends the discovery of an external, objective source. The latter question intends self-discovery, not the communication of objective fact. As long as Clarel continues to pursue questions of the latter variety, he will create a self capable of acting as its own guide.
CHAPTER FIVE

THE FIVE GAMS OF THE PILGRIMAGE

James D. Young's "The Nine Gams of the Pequod" (1954) investigates Melville's use of the whaling vessel's nine meetings at sea. While these nine incidents transpire over the last half of Moby-Dick, Young notes the gams to function "as an integrated series" (Young 449), dependent and building upon one another as a means of examining the inherent problems with communication: "[T]hey are ganglia which focus and connect the linear narrative" (454). Yet, as an activity, communication is "hazardous, tentative, and unsatisfactory" (451) because there can be no assurance that the desired effects of communication will be understood. By grouping the gams into three distinct sets, each containing three encounters, Young constructs a framework that argues the breakdown of communication, either through interference from the natural world or through human error, ultimately dooms the Pequod and its sailors. The first set, the gams with the Albatross, the Town-Ho, and the Jeroboam, according to Young, outlines the warnings and prophecies Ahab ought to interpret correctly to reach the conclusion that the pursuit of Moby-Dick is doomed (450-4). The second set, the gams with the Virgin, the Rose-Bud, and the Samuel Enderby, reveals the "impossible attitudes" of innocence, inexperience, and indifference, respectively, which Ahab finds unsuitable as a means of interacting with the world (455-9). The third set, the gams with the Bachelor, the Rachel,
and the Delight, "present[s] a basis for action, the action itself, and the consequences of such action" (459). Because Ahab cannot interpret the encounters before him correctly, the tragic meeting with Moby-Dick cannot be avoided.

Because of his monomaniacal pursuit of Moby-Dick, Ahab communicates with the whaling ships only selectively. He chooses to listen and respond only to aspects of the gam containing direct and specific information related to the whale. By disregarding parts of the communicative process, Ahab dooms himself to misinterpretation and his shipmates to death. In this sense, Ahab reveals himself to be a poor, or at least hasty, reader. He doesn't approach the activity with the diligence necessary to attain complete comprehension. He desires only the information he hopes may lead him to an encounter with Moby-Dick, refusing, however, to acknowledge the evidence before him—Captain Boomer of the Samuel Enderby and the crew of the Delight, for example—as capable of revealing the outcome of such an encounter. Crew members like Ishmael and Starbuck realize Ahab need look no further than his own example to appreciate the dangers of Moby-Dick. Ahab willingly subordinates reason and past experience to future hope, however potentially disastrous.

To make the transition from the use of the gam in Moby-Dick to its use in Clarel, it is necessary to establish a link. Do the gams in Clarel address the difficulties of communication? Do the gams organize themselves into a similarly integrated series? Do the gams reinforce the pilgrim-readers' place in the greater world? Do the gams relieve the false sense of isolation imposed upon the pilgrim group? Do the pilgrim-readers interpret the information correctly? These questions serve a purpose more advanced than the present situation requires. As stated previously, the definition of a gam in the context
of Clarel will maintain fidelity, as closely as possible, with the definition of a gam as used in the context of Moby-Dick: brief, singular instances. In Moby-Dick, the gam does not extend beyond the boundaries of the chapter in which it begins. For Clarel, the same limitation will be imposed. To be considered a gam, the encounter must not extend beyond the boundaries of the canto in which it begins. Five encounters meet the criteria for inclusion: the Syrian monk, the Dominican monk, the Cypriote, the Lyonese, and the Muscovite. The examination of the encounters corresponds to the order in which they occur within the poem. These gams offer the pilgrim-readers five distinct opportunities to learn from a specific example, but the offerings demand strong interpretive skills. Each pilgrim-reader must recognize the text under consideration and distill the intended lesson.

The Syrian Monk

The Syrian monk appears during the second full day of the pilgrimage. Having spent the previous night in Jericho, Clarel, Rolfe, and Vine, awake at an early hour, ascend the mountain of Quarantania. During the ascension, the group comes upon, according to the narrator, “A strange wayfarer” (2.18.4) reclining on the mountainside. The narrator alone speaks for the first forty-four lines of the canto during which he describes the physical appearance of the wayfarer, the reaction of the pilgrims to finding him on the mountainside, the wayfarer’s resistance to speak, the pilgrims’ intuitive understanding of his position, presumably from his dress, as a Syrian monk, and the group’s desire to have him tell his tale. Before hearing the Syrian monk’s tale of his re-enactment of Christ’s temptation by Satan on Quarantania, the narrator provides an overview, offering the Syrian monk’s rationale for undergoing this trial. Like Clarel, the Syrian monk suffers
from the "sin of doubt" (2.18.38) and hopes his experiences on Quarantania will reveal him to be as faithful as Christ. The narrator summarizes the five points of the Syrian monk's tale: 1) how he has lived on Quarantania; 2) his descent into Jericho for purposes of begging; 3) the visions he experiences; 4) a detailed account of the first night; and 5) the manner of his own ascent.

Within this frame, the narrator draws attention to events that have already transpired, as well as events that will come. The narrator's intention is one of reinforcement. Vine, four cantos previously, briefly sees this same Syrian monk (2.14.103-5). Unclear of the individual's identity, Vine chooses to keep the information to himself. The narrator provides few details, except that this same "form" (2.14.103) does not appear to be hostile. He quickly qualifies this observation, though, noting how frequently "Robbers and outlaws" (2.14.109) hide within the same caves once used only by men of faith. The narrator's juxtaposition of robbers and holy men appears to be social commentary. He notes how the changing times bring about the need for greater caution during travel. Mortmain, in the very next canto, will test these potential dangers by choosing to spend his night alone before regrouping with the pilgrim group at the Dead Sea.

The tale of the Syrian monk is simple, but the implications do not seem to be understood by the listeners. The Syrian monk intends to make the greater point that faith must endure. Regardless of the barriers between God and man, the Syrian monk notes faith to be the only means of crossing the seemingly endless chasm between the eternal promises of divine providence and human accomplishment. The conclusion comes as a result of his experiences and he hopes his listeners will reach this conclusion as well. Unfortunately for Clarel, Rolfe, and Vine, they do not understand. To reach this position
regarding faith, the Syrian monk must first experience the temptation of doubt. As earlier acknowledgment by the narrator, the Syrian monk is experiencing a crisis of faith. He doubts already. Because of his own past readings, the Syrian monk knows Quarantania to be the site of Christ’s temptation and he sees Christ’s victory over temptation as an example of the power of faith. By bringing himself to the same physical location, the Syrian monk seeks to confront temptation in order to reaffirm his prior beliefs and receive the comforts that come from faith. He chooses a trial of forty days as a means of testing himself, detailing these challenges for his listeners.

The Syrian monk faces the early challenges admirably. Ascending the "Cleft crag and cliff" (2.18.46), he reaches the midpoint to find an abandoned stone hut once a place of religious meditation. Inside, the Syrian monk discovers, "White bones lay here, remains of feast / Dragged in by bird of prey or beast" (2.18.53-4). Though potentially horrifying to find oneself within the feeding room of wild animals, the Syrian monk feels no such terror. Nature’s requisition of previous holy quarters appropriately symbolizes the Syrian monk’s own diminished faith. The stone hut becomes a microcosm for the greater world. It symbolizes how faith diminishes. Down the cliff, the Syrian monk sees, to the extent that it is possible, the imminence of death just as he sees evidence of death within the hut. Confronting death all around him, the Syrian monk stands bravely. However, by the time he reaches the summit of the mountain, his courage dissipates and he tells the listeners the change comes because of his realization for the first time that man has no place in the world: "It was upon the summit fear / First fell; there first I saw this world; / And scarce man’s place it seemed to be; / The mazed Gehennas so were curled / As worm-tracks under bark of tree" (2.18.58-62).
Understanding this transformation depends upon accepting the Syrian monk’s premise that the ascension of the mountain becomes his physical trial of education. If the Syrian monk climbs in order to learn something about himself, Rolfe, Vine, and Clarel must determine the end result of the climbing. For the Syrian monk already burdened by doubt, the summit crystallizes the fears he holds at bay throughout the journey. The images of death that characterize the midpoint of the climb return with greater clarity. Prior to arriving at the summit, the Syrian monk disregards death’s ever-presence, though he understands it to be part of the natural order of the world. He has not seen, however, any evidence of man’s existence in this order. The recluse no longer uses the stone hut; the monk climbs alone; there is no one else. He concludes his new perspective of the world to be real and this first instance of unimpeded sight disenchants the previously held notions about man’s relationship to nature. The Syrian monk’s conclusion comes from a faithless perspective, one suffering, as the narrator notes, from the sin of doubt. The Syrian monk constructs his position in anticipation of the change that he undergoes during the rest of his trials. Since it is his intention to convince his listeners of the importance of faith, his tale uses his own example as a means of exhibiting how joy and peace come from sorrow.

Suffering from the momentary belief that man has no place in the world, the Syrian monk seeks refuge within the ruins of a chapel of legend. He acknowledges very few people know of the chapel, but his choice to go there indicates a desire to meditate on Christ’s endurance when tempted by Satan. He states, “'That a wrecked chapel marks the site / Where tempter and the tempted stood / Of old. I sat me down to brood / Within that ruin’” (2.18.66-9). By noting the chapel to be both “wrecked” and a “ruin,” the Syrian
monk alludes to one of the results of man not having a place in the world. The long-abandoned site high atop a mountain no longer exits as a revered place. If the chapel was constructed as a means of remembering the trials of Christ, yet has fallen to ruin, the Syrian monk broods appropriately. The reverent individuals exist in such few numbers that the chapel does not receive its proper maintenance. The deterioration of the building becomes a physical representation of the failing spiritual condition of man. The Syrian monk cannot be unaware of the relationship between his recent realization and the condition of the chapel. His brooding becomes more appropriate when he stresses the contrast between the subject of his meditation—Christ's endurance in the face of temptation—and man's obvious inability to exhibit such qualities.

Though the Syrian monk cannot reconcile these two extremes, his presence at the chapel gives insight into the rationalization for his journey. Whether he realizes the implications at the time (though he obviously must at the time of the telling, otherwise the points would not be juxtaposed), the Syrian monk returns to this abandoned site of legend as a means of lessening the distance between Christ's example of how to live, the ideal, and man's failures to follow the example, the real. The action shows a reverence for the legend as well as the greater context upon which the legend operates. Even at a time of doubt, when he feels least capable of believing in any spiritual connection to the divine promises of Holy Writ, the Syrian monk maintains hope that the truth-value inherent in the legend exceeds whatever truth upon which the legend is based. This acceptance is the turning point in the monk's tale. At his spiritual change, however, the monk's meditations are suspended because he cannot remain attentive, and his tale notes the transformation: "'But thought / Would wander'" (2.18.75-6).
The Syrian monk reaches for a stone that draws his attention away from the earlier meditation and picks it up, squeezing it with enough force to draw blood. The self-inflicted wound triggers the first of two visions the monk experiences, one with Satan and the other with Christ. Both visions have the characteristics of real experiences, but the Syrian monk acknowledges each to transpire internally. Structurally speaking, the Syrian monk uses the two voices as a means of showing the process by which he returns to faith. Stan Goldman argues the initial turning away from God caused by doubt makes the return a true testament of faith. Making this distinction, Goldman argues the theological implications and differences between common and heroic doubt. Goldman notes common doubt, as the name suggests, is easy. Common doubt exists as a matter of whim. Heroic doubt, by contrast, produces “reverent skepticism,” a characteristic necessary “to contend with doubt and belief at the same time” (Goldman 81). The Syrian monk, according to Goldman, possesses heroic doubt. Only by experiencing the emotional and intellectual pains of doubt, like those at the summit, as well as the self-inflicted physical pains of the stone, can the monk appreciate the extremes between doubt’s isolating capacities and faith’s inclusive capacities. Without the experience of loneliness, the monk cannot fully understand the solace faith provides.

Satan’s presence elevates the stakes for the Syrian monk. No longer does he contemplate a reenactment of the temptation legend he knows well. The Syrian monk becomes the tempted, thus tested, individual. Satan appears when the Syrian monk is most vulnerable: his wounds are fresh, his susceptibility greatest. But the Syrian monk withstands the challenges. His faith slowly returns through Satan’s consolations. It is Satan’s hope that the Syrian monk, in his emotionally, spiritually, and physically
weakened state, might embrace his offers. Satan suggests six alternative viewpoints to a life of faith: 1) a child abandoned by God ought to look elsewhere; 2) Evil exists as probably as God and in greater proportions than Good; 3) justness is an artifice, nothing else; 4) the finitude of man's existence; 5) the impossibility of understanding death; and 6) the impossibility of achieving peace on Earth (2.18.89-131). Though Satan paints a grim picture of the world and the doubter's position, the Syrian monk endures. He confronts Satan's attacks with four statements of faith, two questions, and one instance of silence; yet never does he concede Satan's position. In response to being an abandoned child, the Syrian monk looks to the sky and affirms his faith: "'He is there'" (2.18.100). In response to Satan's observation regarding God and Evil, the monk asks: "'Is there no good?'" (2.18.103). In response to the suggestion that Evil exists in greater proportion than Goodness, the Syrian monk appeals to God's wisdom: "'He's just'" (2.18.105). When unable to answer Satan's question regarding justness, the Syrian monk simply acknowledges his beliefs: "'Faith bideth'" (2.18.111). He poses the difficult question regarding man's finite existence: "'And death?'" (2.18.119). Finally, regarding Satan's retort concerning death, he reaffirms his beliefs in God's omniscience and wisdom: "'The grave will test / But He, He is, though doubt attend / Peace will He give ere come the end'" (2.18.123-5). The Syrian monk's final statement reveals the coexistence of his two spiritual states. His doubt does not diminish God's existence.

Satan's final effort notes man, the "'unselfish yearner'" (2.18.127), to be incapable of rest. The insatiable pursuit of knowledge and understanding will serve to frustrate man's efforts at peace. The Syrian monk interprets this to be a plausible position and appeals to God through prayer for either enlightenment or death, either eternity or annihilation.
The voice of God, like the spirit of Satan, enters the Syrian monk, but with different results. Satan's words highlight the contrasts with the Syrian monk, where God's words emphasize the similarities. God's words, "like tenon into mortice fitting" (2.18.138), offer solace. Though offered in the form of a cryptic whisper, God's words seem to approve of the process by which the Syrian monk comes to understand his own faith: "Content thee: in conclusion caught / Thou'llt find how thought's extremes agree,— / The forethought clinched by afterthought / The firstling by finality" (2.18.140-3). If the extremes of thought, doubt and faith, agree, the Syrian monk must conclude from God's statements that the two modes of thought exist in a state of symbiosis. Just as evil and good are inseparably connected, doubt and faith coexist interdependently. If the Syrian monk at this time embraces his faith anew, Goldman suggests the return to God comes with the recognition that God's imminence rests within the human heart and stresses man's divine nature (Goldman 104). Joseph Knapp reaches the same conclusion. He believes every man to be divine, but in order to find the peace granted to the faithful, man must be prepared to undertake the search, and it must be done alone (Knapp, Tortured Synthesis 110). The Syrian monk accepts God's will and wisdom and drops the stone. The tale ends. The Syrian monk offers through his own example a course of action and a way to live that prepares the individual to use doubt as a starting point, not as an indication of failure or as an end. Because the pilgrim-readers fail to recognize the tale as an interpretive challenge, communication fails. The text is the tale; the lesson, that doubts exists as a necessary component of true faith.

Rolfe fails to see his role as other than passive. His immediate response to the conclusion of the tale indicates he wishes for the Syrian monk to provide a resolution to
the ambiguous conclusion. In essence, Rolfe demands the Syrian monk provide the tale as well as the correct interpretation. He does not understand that the role of listener demands far more than simply absorbing information. Because he wants to know the specific results of the Syrian monk's experience, Rolfe interprets the gam less as an opportunity for learning than as an entertaining anecdote. Rolfe fails to realize the need to participate actively. A pilgrim-reader who understands the tale not to be a self-contained, closed entity, but one open to interpretation knows the tale to be the starting point only. As indicated by his question, Rolfe does not understand: "'Surely, not all we've heard: / Peace—solace—was in the end conferred?'" (2.18.150-1). So assured is Rolfe in his position that he cannot imagine the tale serves a purpose other than entertainment. Because the tale seems suspended without its resolution, its moral, Rolfe demands to know whether the Syrian monk found the peace that Satan claimed to be beyond the aspirations of man. And if this is not the case, perhaps the Syrian monk found solace in the cryptic whisper of God. "Surely" one of these two circumstances must be the case. His phrasing, however, indicates a further lack of understanding. Because Rolfe imagines peace or solace to be the result of the experience, he misunderstands that no such stasis exists. Neither peace nor solace is free from the possibility of change. Like doubt and faith, each is subject to myriad influences, none of which remains static or unchanged. The Syrian monk, as the most obvious example, though Clarel works equally well, possessed faith at some time in the past beyond the boundaries of the tale. His doubt, however, serves as the tale's starting point. The tale's ending point suggests that the Syrian monk finds a means of returning to his faith, but this exists some time in the future. As the narrator indicates earlier in the canto, the
Syrian monk finds himself in the midst of his trials. His search for faith continues, as evidenced by his abrupt departure from the pilgrim-readers. He continues his climb in pursuit of the peace and solace Rolfe imagines being far more easily attainable. In his disgust at the Syrian monk’s departure, Rolfe dismisses the entirety of the tale as little more than the hallucinations of a starving monk. He suggests the monk’s visions not to be real, rather the results of his ascetic denial of self. Rather than possessing insight, the Syrian monk deludes himself into believing his experiences with Satan and God. Rolfe reaches this conclusion out of frustration. In this episode, he reveals himself to be an undisciplined, if not particularly poor, reader.

Clarel’s silence is ambiguous, but the narrator’s reference to him as a “student” rather than by his Christian name provides a means of interpretation. At this point in the pilgrimage, Clarel maintains the belief that Rolfe and Vine could be the kind of guides he wishes to find. As such, his silence suggests deference on his part. Clarel wants to hear the interpretations of Rolfe and Vine before revealing his own. His assumption seems to be that the past experiences of Rolfe and Vine make them more suited to the task of interpretation. However, Clarel does not benefit from his deference or his silence. Vine does not speak, but his silence does not indicate an indecisive attentiveness that, like Clarel, has yet to evaluate the tale. Vine sits with a disinterested preoccupation, pulling apart a chrysanthemum recently extracted from the ground. Hershel Parker characterizes these actions as typifying Vine’s “explicitly disintegrative” acts throughout the poem (Parker, “The Character of Vine” 102). Though in the minority of critics with regard to Vine, Parker interprets Vine condemningly, his gestures proof of “an erratic staginess and contempt for himself and others” (113). Clarel’s silence can be understood in one of two
ways: an inability to interpret or as delayed response, presuming the need for further evaluation. A more harmonious and likely understanding of Clarel’s reserve exists somewhere between these extremes, but his silence, unfortunately, speaks volumes. Clarel does not yet understand the greater message within the Syrian monk’s tale because he does not see the example as a suggested course of action. Vine’s disinterest prevents his understanding. None of the pilgrim-readers seems to appreciate the simplicity of the Syrian monk’s message. The irony of the situation comes from Clarel’s inability to see the former condition of the Syrian monk to be his own. Each, in the midst of doubt, physically journeys to the lands previously known only through Christian mythology. Clarel’s hasty assessment that Rolfe and Vine stand as possible candidates for his guide blinds him to the Syrian monk’s capacity to offer the same kind of guidance.

The Dominican Monk

The gam with the Dominican monk occurs seven cantos later. In terms of the narrative, the pilgrim-readers have arrived at the Jordan River. Feeling particularly reverent, Rolfe, “late enamored of the spell / Of rituals olden” (2.24.21-2), encourages his fellows to join him in song. He suggests the Ave maris stella and Derwent and Vine acquiesce. The Dominican monk introduces himself in response to overhearing the song. As guide to a group of French pilgrims, the Dominican monk also recently has arrived at the Jordan, but he has come from Mar Saba, one of the eventual destinations for the pilgrims. The Dominican speaks the first two lines of the canto: “’Ah Rome, your tie!

60 The Syrian monk’s violet eyes (2.24.149) deserve comment, but receive none. Bezanson offers a note connecting the color to the angelic qualities of St. Cecilia (Clarel 743). Should one conclude the Syrian monk to be angelic? Is he an emissary from God? Of greatest importance, however, would be the interpretation of the pilgrim-readers. One can be fairly certain of the following: 1) all of the pilgrim-readers see the Syrian monk’s eye color, yet none comments; 2) because of their extensive familiarity with Christian mythology (and the lives of the saints would be part of this), all of the pilgrim-readers would be aware of the connection to St. Cecilia, yet none comments. This is an unfortunate oversight.
may child clean part? / Nay, tugs the mother at the heart!” (2.25.1-2). Using a maternal metaphor, the Dominican suggests an umbilical relationship to exist between man and Rome, the city itself a metonymic substitute for Catholicism. In spite of circumstances, the condition of doubt, for instance, man cannot break entirely from the maternal protection of the Catholic Church. As the Syrian monk’s tale suggests earlier, doubt does not exist as a state of departure. Rather, doubt ought to be considered merely a means to establishing one’s faith anew. The mother, the Dominican monk’s metaphor, pulls at her child, offering peace and solace when all else seems lost. No matter the child’s sense of autonomy, in some respects, he must revere his mother as possessing something greater than himself. A bold manner of introduction, perhaps, but the Dominican monk intends to establish, for the pilgrim-readers quick-witted enough to interpret, the subject matter and theme of the forthcoming gam.

The Dominican monk speaks to the three singers, Rolfe, Vine, and Derwent, articulating the reasons for his approach. Leading the French pilgrims to the Jordan, he claims to overhear the singing which urges his approach. Upon his arrival, he notes the subject matter of their discussion. However the pilgrim-readers “‘slight the rule / Of Rome’” (2.25.12-3), the disparaging remarks happen beyond the boundaries of the poem. The Dominican monk, “‘Through strong compulsion of the need’” (2.25.14), intends to offer a refutation in favor of Rome so that the pilgrim-readers have an opportunity to see Rome’s expansive glory. The narrator interrupts the progress of the Dominican monk in order to provide a physical description and a brief history before acknowledging the conversation turns to debate on “matters of more pith” (2.25.32). Derwent urges the
Dominican's return to subject matter and theme. He begins, essentially, a dramatic monologue that lasts the duration of the canto.

The Dominican's tale brings a message of reverence and the importance of maintaining reverence for Rome in spite of the contemporary tendency towards irreverence and doubt. Beginning his assessment of Rome's beneficence, the Dominican establishes a contrast between Rome's capacity to offer spiritual treasure and the human tendency to seek and acquire those terrestrial treasures given monetary value. Knowing that economic value is a worthless thing in and of itself, the Dominican suggests Rome values, "'Means to the mass to beautify / The rude emotion; lend meet voice / To organs which would fain rejoice / But lack the song; and oft present / To sorrow bound, an instrument / Which liberates'" (2.25.46-51). Rome offers hope for an unknown future as well as solace for the familiar past and present. Unable to accept the possibility of flawless, unchanging longevity, Rolfe interrupts the Dominican to suggest the inevitable necessity of change. When the Dominican refutes change's applicability to Rome, Rolfe suggests that an unwillingness to change may be Rome's downfall. But the Dominican skillfully dodges Rolfe's assessment by noting how the two approach the topic from contrasting points of view. Rolfe's notions of adaptation as a means of survival suggest his adherence to tenets of science, particularly Darwinian natural selection. Though not a proponent of science like Margoth, Rolfe's statements indicate the overwhelming influence of such scientific advances. Because Rolfe uses the language of science as a tactic in a debate regarding matters of faith, he opens the argumentative door for his opponent. The Dominican counters that matters of science and matters of faith do not follow the same rules. Change exists as a constant in the propagation of biological
systems, among them, "things of human sort" (2.25.65). Rolfe falls for the Dominican’s trap, as it were, by rebutting, with notable exasperation, the disbelief that Rome is “superhuman” (2.25.66). But Rolfe fails to realize the applicability of the word. The Dominican uses his phrase to suggest that the human realm, as a biological system constantly adapting to its ever-changing environment, changes. Rome, as an agent of spiritual matters, is not subject to Rolfe’s suggested laws. Human tendency and necessity do not apply to such a realm. To define superhuman as other than human, or beyond human, more closely approaches the Dominican’s intention. Rome is superhuman in its concern for matters beyond the terrestrial plain of existence. As the Dominican earlier observes, Rome’s greatest capacity is its ability to provide hope and solace for fears regarding man’s finite existence. Rome offers everlasting life as a reward for reverence. The Dominican notes science offers, "'Brave schemes these boyish times instill'" (2.25.67), but nothing more. The brave schemes of boyish, immature times serve no greater purpose than refutation for its own sake, as far as the Dominican observes. Science does not deserve a more hallowed position than faith, nor should it claim otherwise.

Further in his evaluation of Rome, the Dominican notes its democratic characteristics, how, "'Before the church our human race / Stand equal'" (2.25.86-7). None is dismissed as too low to deserve inclusion, nor too high to be reminded that merit, not birthright or financial status, earns the rewards of the promised afterlife. Derwent, a silent listener to this point, interjects that Luther’s reformation forced the Church to make concessions, but the Dominican simply shifts his definition of change to meet Derwent’s challenge. The Church changes subtly, not dramatically. These changes do not affect the grander,
external form, only the minute, internal details. The static, unchanging form deserves more recognition than the dynamic, changing details. The Church’s resiliency over time impresses the Dominican most, and he wishes to pass this same sense of reverence to the pilgrim-readers. Twice he notes the endurance of the Church—"'Against all this stands Rome's array'" (2.25.105) and "'Rome stands'" (2.25.109)—before conceding briefly that the future remains unknowable, that past resiliency does not guarantee future resiliency. Rome may fall, but the Dominican’s prayer to God shows humility and reverence for tradition.

His prayer may be interpreted as a sound rhetorical maneuver rather than as a change of heart. The concession lulls Derwent to believe that the Dominican, having been convinced of Rolfe’s position in the debate, will soon depart. Certainly, Derwent does not wish to see the Dominican defeated. His benignity shows him an opportunity to ease the apparently vanquished debater. By pointing out that the French pilgrims request his return, Derwent gives the Dominican an easy opportunity to remove himself from the situation. Addressing his parting words to Rolfe and Derwent, the Dominican uses the majority of the remaining eighty lines of the canto to offer three specific statements, plus one summation, that reveal his call for reverence. He hopes the clarification will ease the "'Reserved objections'" (2.25.129) he understands to underlie the rift between himself and his listeners.

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61 See, for example, Shirley Dettlaff, “Ionian Form and Esau’s Waste: Melville’s View of Art in Clarel,” American Literature 54 (May 1982): 212-28. Dettlaff acknowledges the form/detail relationship in regards to Melville’s construction of art. She notes: “Form is superior to this decorative detail because it is an abstract beauty, the simple, symmetrical outline which expresses an ordered whole” (221). The Dominican does not concern himself with art here so the connection is limited. However, the two perspectives do converge. For further discussion of form in Melville’s art, see Agnes D. Cannon, “Melville’s Concept of the Poet and Poetry,” Arizona Quarterly 31 (Winter 1975): 315-39; and Bryan C. Short, “Form as Vision in Herman Melville’s Clarel,” American Literature 50 (January 1979): 553-69.
The Dominican’s first point returns the discussion to the notions of change as perceived by the Church. He argues that the changes are imperceptibly small and reveal no deterioration in the Church’s foundation. These small changes show the Church’s willingness to adapt to the demands of a contemporary society. In essence, the Dominican appropriates Rolfe’s earlier connection between the Church and the ever-changing biological entities of nature. Noting the adaptive processes of the “‘invisible nerves and tissues’” (2.25.134) suggests that the changes take place on such a microscopic level that only over great periods of time will these changes be recognizable. The Dominican uses a metaphorical rendering as a means of comparison, a rendering again that connects the Church’s adaptations to the biological entity of greatest interest to the pilgrims, man. Like man who lives in varying climactic regions, whose body learns to adjust to the demands of the new region, the Church “‘acclimate[s] itself / While form and function hold their own—‘‘” (2.25.139-40). By using the language of metaphor, the Dominican assumes the interpretive and analytical powers of the pilgrim-readers to be sound. Bringing his first point to a conclusion, he says as much: “‘Well, you are wise / Enough—you can analogize / And take my meaning: I have done’” (2.25.141-3). His presumption, in all likelihood, is accurate. The Dominican has heard the positions of Rolfe and Derwent relative to his own. In fact, he must admit that Rolfe and Derwent present qualified objections to some of his generalizations. The pilgrims are wise enough to understand the Dominican’s analogy. However, the statement depends upon an assumption that cannot be tested, at least within the boundaries of the canto. At issue for the Dominican remains the reverence for such longevity in the Church.
Though the French pilgrims again call him, the Dominican cannot depart without offering a second point. In the language of metaphor, the Dominican offers a comparison of knowledge as offered by science and religion. Though scientific knowledge may illuminate the terrestrial plain, it can offer no understanding of the spiritual plain. Because the Dominican knows the spiritual plain to have a greater attraction for his listeners, he presents the comparison so that the advantages of a spiritual existence shine. By suggesting that science and religion—its subjects, respectively, nature and God—address different needs, the Dominican indicates the benefits of one over the other. The external reader notes just how familiar this argument seems. Four cantos previously, in “The Priest and Rolfe” (2.21) canto, the two discuss the merits of science as argued by Margoth. Always accepting the gentlest position, Derwent notes the discoveries of science to be useful without giving them much priority. Rolfe counters, however, that such discoveries themselves are but other theories, other renderings of truths that offer no solace. But in rebuttal of the Dominican monk, Rolfe willingly sides with science, at least in its confrontation with religion. Taken out of its proper context, the Dominican’s words would serve as Rolfe’s from the earlier canto: “‘Shall Science then / Which solely dealeth with this thing / Named Nature, shall she ever bring / One solitary hope to men?’” (2.25.154-7). As earlier noted by the Dominican, the Church’s greatest capacities remain its abilities to offer hope and solace to those in need. In the future, if the pilgrims recall nothing else from the words of the Dominican, he hopes they will recall the kindly offerings to be found in the Church. As gently as possible, while maintaining the imperative construction, the Dominican twice pleads the pilgrims will remember the message, not the messenger: “‘Remember hospitable Rome’” (2.25.165). Rome’s
hospitality comes from its capacity to offer hope when other alternatives fail. As such, the Dominican believes reverence is due.

The Dominican again delays departure to offer a third point, the destructive power of pride. Respecting the individual beliefs of his listeners, the Dominican pleads that none allows personal pride to be a driving force behind the destruction of all belief. Individual doubt may be an important step in the return to faith; however, it does not legitimize the destruction of all belief systems. Reverence for Rome must endure because, according to the Dominican, Rome serves as the foundation for all belief systems. Human arrogance alone denies this account, but human compassion ought not to allow singular beliefs, no matter how steadfast, the opportunity to destroy value systems that give meaning to life—only the "'mad, unblest, and blind'" (2.25.171), individuals more than characteristic of the times, would attempt such an upheaval. The consequences would be too great: "'If Rome could fall / 'Twould not be Rome alone, but all / Religion. All with Rome have tie'" (2.25.173-5). The argument for reverence depends upon this point. Rome deserves reverence because all belief systems, not to mention the many adherents, depend upon Rome. Personal pride ought not to be the means by which the hopes and solace of so many may be destroyed.

Prior to concluding his third point, the Dominican offers the only recognition of the game as gam. Using the language and imagery of the sea, the Dominican concludes his argument with humility and an appeal for forgiveness: "'Offence I mean not. More's to tell: / But frigates meet—hail—part. Farewell'" (2.25.189-90). The Dominican does not intend to offend the sensibilities of any of his listeners. His plea for reverence, he believes, will prove beneficial over time. Besides, in such a brief encounter, the

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62 Salvaterra makes this point regarding the Church of the Nativity (4.13.140-58).
Dominican cannot possibly offer enough evidence to convince his listeners to abandon long-held beliefs. There always remains more to tell. Of greatest interest becomes the Dominican’s acknowledgement of the gam as a means of reinforcing the importance of the communication at stake, as well as the necessity of recognizing the learning opportunity before the pilgrims. Each pilgrim, the Dominican included, exists as a frigate, alone and adrift in the greater world, in need of communication, regardless of how unaware the frigate may be of this need. Young, in his conclusions regarding the gam in *Moby-Dick*, notes: “[H]owever independent our separate lives may be, we cannot escape entirely from relation and communication with others. This is so because our individuality itself may require some relation in order to exert and maintain its essential independence” (Young 449). Young believes communication to be inadequate in *Moby-Dick*, and so does the Dominican by the end of his encounter. He cannot, in such a short amount of time, convince the pilgrim-readers of his position, nor can he be convinced into believing their positions. Communication fails at this point as the Dominican offers a departing “farewell.”

The Dominican’s three delays lead to a fourth, a summary encapsulation of the three previous points. The narrator calls attention to these two stanzas, noting, “he a verse did weave, / Or hummed in low recitative” (2.25.191-2). The two stanzas address the subject of reverence through unity, but from differing perspectives. The first stanza claims that longevity itself becomes a satisfactory rationale for revering the Church and the stanza intends to be taken from a general perspective. The Dominican sings: “Yearly for a thousand years / On Christmas Day the wreath appears, / And the people joy together: / Prithee, Prince or Parliament, / An equal holiday invent / Outlasting centuries of
weather” (2.25.193-8). The Dominican draws attention to longevity from the opening line. An annual observation brings persons from disparate backgrounds together in celebration. The gathering joyously celebrates man, his failures and successes, presumably filled with opportunities for taking solace in the tragedies of the past year, as well as hope for the coming year. Solace and hope, the Church’s gifts, as designated by the Dominican, encompass the variety of emotional responses, potentially summarizing the experiences of the individual facing as much tragedy as joy. The annual holiday affords the celebrants with an occasion for renewal. Each new year forces man to prepare himself for unforeseen events. The Church, should its assistance be required, stands alongside man in his preparation. No governing body, from a single, monarchical ruler to the legislatively assembled bodies of parliament, could hope to construct such a unifying force as Christmas Day. The governing capacities of man cannot approach those of God. The humanity of the former is exhibited in the capacity to divide. The divinity of the latter is exhibited in the capacity to unite. Without regard to historical change, the noted “centuries of weather,” the Church endures—it weathers many storms. Man’s constructions wither and crumble in the face of such challenges. The first stanza of the Dominican’s verse offers the Church’s capacity to sustain itself, its longevity, as one of the qualities worthy of reverence. In this general application, the Dominican further notes the mass appeal of Rome.

The Dominican’s second stanza moves from the general example to the specific example. Where the first stanza notes the actions of the many in celebration of one of the holiest days for the Church, the second stanza affords the pilgrim-readers the opportunity to apply the offered knowledge: “Arrested by a trembling shell, / Wee tinkling of the
small mass-bell, / A giant drops upon the knee. / Thou art wise—effect as much; / Let thy wisdom by a touch / Reverence like this decree” (2.25.199-204). The first three lines point to the example of the giant who shows his reverence in an act of humility. Though not Christmas Day, the giant kneels before the bell ringing as a signal for Mass. The giant humbles himself before the bell to show his faith in the celebration’s significance. The celebration of the Eucharist allows the faithful the opportunity at communion with Christ. The individual sacrifice through faith allows the believer’s hope to flourish. He is satisfied that the sufferings of this world will be rewarded in the next. Though one does not observe the giant partaking in the Eucharist service, his action demonstrates his reverence for the celebration’s capacity to unite man and Christ. By bringing the two together, Christ saves the individual from facing the suffering of life, as well as death, alone. The Mass bell, like the Church, will ring far longer than the life of the giant. It is worth noting the juxtaposition between the insignificance of size in the bell (a “small mass-bell”) and the sounds resonating from it (a “Wee tinkling”), as compared to the physical presence of the giant. The powers of each are not comparable to their physical size. Appearances deceive. A limitless grandeur emanates from the physical insignificance of the bell. From the physical grandeur of the giant comes recognition of man’s comparable insignificance.

The final three lines of the second stanza offer multiple interpretive possibilities and it seems the intention of the Dominican to test the interpretive prowess of his listeners. “Thou are wise enough,” as the Dominican alludes to the powers of synthesis for his listeners. Whether their earlier responses are any indication, the Dominican remains hopeful that Rolfe, Derwent, and Vine can extract the desired lesson. Each hears the

63 The Dominican also kneels before prayer (2.25.113) as an act of reverence and penitence before God.
giant's humble response to the call to Mass, essentially the call to faith. The Dominican wishes his three listeners to hear the same call. The second half of the line (2.25.202) offers a direction to the course of action. To "effect as much," Rolfe, Derwent, and Vine need to use the wisdom the Dominican claims to exist as a means of producing similar results. An action of humility, like that of the giant, reveals the diminished sense of pride necessary, according to the Dominican's earlier examples, to achieve an understanding of the Church's offerings. Following the example of the giant, Rolfe, Derwent, and Vine need to find a situation where individual doubts regarding the validity of such actions do not prohibit enacting them. Such a statement should not suggest that any sense of hypocrisy underlies the action itself. Performing the action for its own sake, however, may be an appropriate entry point. The initial experience of the action may have no value, spiritual or otherwise, for the actor. However, repetition offers the opportunity for the individual to establish meaning for himself. If the Dominican's claims to meaning do not produce the desired reverence for the Church; if the Dominican's example of the giant fails in the same regard; the potential penitent must create his own meaning in order for the action to transform the actor into something of greater value. Repetition remains the key to effecting the change the Dominican seeks. Repetition reveals wisdom that places its faith in value systems that remain beyond the realm of human comprehension. Faith exists, for the Dominican, as a necessary matter of will. The agent must actively pursue faith. But the call to faith must come from within. An external agent, like the Dominican, may offer the initial entry point for the individual; but in order to sustain the action, the desire to produce results must be internally motivated. Rolfe, Derwent, and Vine, as individuals, must wish to be reverent of their own volition.
The Dominican, in the final couplet of the canto, demands a great deal from all parties. His choice of grammar and syntax indicate his own sophistication and demand an equally rigorous understanding of language. Whether Rolfe and Derwent understand the Dominican's meaning reveals itself in the next canto, the forum for interpretation, and thus worthy of specific examination. The interpretive opportunity presents itself immediately. Removing the qualifying prepositional phrases "by a touch" and "like this decree," the pilgrim-readers are left with a simple imperative statement: Let thy wisdom . . . Reverence. The simple request is a plea as much as a command, as long as the Dominican uses "reverence" here as a transitive verb. Just as the example of the giant suggests earlier, the Dominican wishes for individual wisdom to be the means to action. If this cannot be done of one's own accord, as does not seem the case for Rolfe, Derwent, or Vine, the Dominican offers the qualifying prepositional phrase "by a touch." Through his own example and through the example of the giant, the Dominican offers each a guide, a touch, to adjust individual views. The wisdom that already exists needs directional assistance. The touch provides this assistance. The Dominican's tale leads to this final couplet. He uses his opportunity to highlight the wisdom of his listeners, revealed in their capacity for debate. Once this wisdom reveals itself, he provides a directional guide toward which wisdom should move as a means of achieving a given action. The transmission of such valuable information "like this decree," the canto itself, suggests the tale contains not the terrestrial laws of man, but the divine laws of God. As a monk, the Dominican possesses the authority to reveal such laws. Interpreting "like this decree" as a simile, the pilgrim-readers further understand that the Dominican consciously stresses the importance of the gam. His wisdom reveals itself in the reverent
action of the tale. He offers his listeners the opportunity to move beyond the "libertine dreams" (2.25.179) of science and religion mutually destroying one another. His abrupt departure, however, notes the movement toward a greater position of faith, again, must be internally motivated. Though "More's to tell," the listeners must discover this for themselves. When the listeners understand these notions to be the purpose of the Dominican's game, they will be able to act.

The next canto, "Of Rome" (1.32), offers the opportunity to hear Rolfe and Derwent's commentary and interpretation. More interestingly, it is revealed, thanks to the narrator's intervention, that other individuals have overheard the Dominican. Margoth opens the canto by denouncing the Dominican's position of faith in favor of science's greater powers for understanding and revealing the world. Clarel, the "student" (2.26.27), hears the Dominican, but chooses, as he does with the Syrian, to remain silent in deference to the interpretation of others. Vine sits silently. Rolfe and Derwent's discussion dominates the canto. But the discussion centers less on a point-by-point evaluation of the Dominican's statements than as a historical consideration of Rome followed by speculation for Rome's future. Regarding the Dominican, Rolfe notes: "[H]e took no shallow tone, / That new St. Dominick. Who'll repay? / Wilt thou?" (2.26.31-3). Derwent declines the offer to rebut, suggesting instead that the Elder Scot, having departed sixteen cantos previously, would have enjoyed the chance to "Fight fire with fire" (2.26.36).

The Dominican is a mystery to Rolfe and Derwent. As such, the narrator focuses the early parts of the canto on the discussion of him. Rolfe may wonder whether the Dominican is a hypocrite, but Derwent claims that the Dominican's faith exists as a
matter of social standing and distinction. Doubt no longer distinguishes the social elite from the "'ribald commonplace'" (2.26.52). Derwent believes that the Dominican's reverence for Rome comes as a reaction towards the other extreme. Where doubt once stood as the distinctive characteristic, faith now stands. Openly embracing his faith, the Dominican stands in contrast to the easy doubt (as previously noted by Goldman to contrast heroic doubt) embraced by the masses. Of course, Derwent acknowledges that his interpretation of the situation does not necessarily validate his conclusions. He realizes that there is no fashion in which his speculations may be proven. Recognizing the chasm that exists between the desire to know and the capacity to fulfill that desire, Derwent reaffirms the futility of interpretive investigation. The "deep diving" yields no treasure. If such treasure exists, it remains buried, in spite of great efforts to the contrary. Derwent concludes: "'tis troublesome / To analyze, and thankless too: / Much better be a dove, and coo / Softly" (2.26.55-8). Such a conclusion, however understandable from a practical perspective, fails to appreciate the value of process, a value reinforced through the individual pilgrim's history of reading. The process of analysis offers its own internal rewards, but rewards that cannot be quantified or qualified. Derwent's halt in the process is confusing because, to this point in the canto, he shows himself to be an insightful interpreter. One possibility for Derwent's refusal comes from his diplomatic nature. Derwent does not desire to upset the status quo.

As noted by the narrator in his version of the poem's "General Prologue," Derwent's thoughts and beliefs tend to parallel currently accepted views: "Imported or domestic mode, / Thought's last adopted style he showed" (2.1.34-5). Rather than offer an interpretation of the Dominican that hazards placing him in a condemnable position,
Derwent chooses the soft coo of the dove as his mode. Certainly Derwent intends Rolfe to recognize the dove imagery as particularly Christian. But Derwent does not seem to accept, or realize, that being dove-like (essentially, Christ-like) does not come as a result of refusing to commit himself. He hopes that his path of least resistance will place him in a revered position. Derwent's refusal seems more a lack of integrity than anything else. However incomprehensible Rolfe's outrage at Rome, his willingness to choose a position makes him more admirable than Derwent. At the least, Rolfe hazards failure in the hopes of achieving greater understanding. He chooses to interpret events and characters. Derwent's refusal to participate condemns him to the safety of the majority. Derwent may never understand the events and characters around him, but he accepts this lack of knowledge as a consequence of being free from attack. It is difficult to reconcile such a conclusion when Derwent, in spite of his tendencies, offers another fine interpretation of the Dominican as a means of bringing this aspect of the discussion to a close. Derwent understands the Dominican's faith and his reverence for the longevity of Rome through his impassioned speeches. He further understands the caliber of the Dominican's character. Derwent concludes his passion and integrity, characteristics not uncommon in other Catholic evangelists, contribute to Rome's longevity. As long as individuals like the Dominican serve Rome, the Church will always have believers: "'His manner has a certain lure, / Disinterested, earnest, pure / And liberal. 'Tis such as he / Win over men'" (2.26.59-62). Clearly, this same lure does not appeal to Rolfe or Derwent. But, for those in need of hope and solace, the Dominican's promises have their merit. Derwent recognizes this. Because there will always be individuals in need of hope and solace, Derwent must understand that the Church's existence seems guaranteed.
Rolfe and Derwent invest greater interpretive energies when the subject changes. The discussion of Rome comes as a continuation of the Dominican’s powers of persuasion. Rolfe notes his own admiration for some of the Church’s practitioners, without acknowledging an appreciation for the Church as a system of belief. The narrator devotes the remainder of the canto to Rolfe and Derwent’s discussion of this position. While each can see the value of an individual like the Dominican, neither wants to accept Catholicism as a spiritual guide. Addressing the subject of reverence, Rolfe and Derwent allude to the following question without ever asking directly: How should one revere Rome? Rolfe and Derwent revere the particulars without accepting the greater framework within which these particulars operate. Rolfe, for example, appreciates the “‘swordsmen of the priestly sword / Wielded in spiritual fight’” (2.26.66-7). He reveres faith as an idea and admires those for whom faith stands as a given, rather than as something needing justification. Rolfe clearly feels spirituality to be a valuable thing, but he cannot accept that this same spirituality must operate within a context. Rolfe applauds the Catholic, but despises Catholicism because he chooses to distinguish between the practitioner and the practice. In a final tally, however, the admirable deeds of the practitioners will always be outnumbered by the less admirable charms of the practice. Rolfe understands the longevity of the Church is attributable to individuals like the Dominican, those possessing the powers of persuasion noted by Derwent. No matter the good intentions of the practitioner, Rolfe sees conversion less as a pursuit of hope and wish for solace on the part of the penitent than as the nefarious machinations of the practice imbedded in the words of the practitioner. Rolfe argues the Church’s “‘sway / Seductive draws rich minds away’” (2.26.96-7). His language suggests that the Church
misrepresents herself, making promises to converts that cannot be realized. Rolfe notes the susceptibility of “rich minds” to this seduction. If even those possessing superior intellect, with substantial capacity for reason, can be convinced, Rolfe suggests that little hope exists for those without these qualities. Rolfe concludes that Rome endures because she has the advantage of time and the necessary patience to enact change. Rolfe’s recognition of Rome’s imperviousness to change, or at least its longevity in the face of historical odds, then, parallels the statements made by the Syrian and the Dominican. In the case of the former, the Church’s endurance offers the means to faith; in the latter, the Church’s endurance offers the means to reverence. Rolfe does not become a believer because of these recognitions. If anything, he becomes more suspicious of Rome once he recognizes that powerlessness characterizes man’s condition.

Derwent’s critique of Rome begins from a similar position of admiration, but an admiration contingent upon its harmlessness. Derwent never feels threatened by Rome in the same manner Rolfe feels threatened. He establishes early that Rome does not appeal to him and that the lures of evangelists like the Dominican have no force. Because he further believes Rome’s influence to be limited, both spiritually and chronologically, Derwent feels no harm comes from embracing some of Catholicism’s beautiful characteristics: “‘Less care I to disown or hide / Aught that she has of merit rare: / Her legends—some are sweet as May; / Ungarnered wealth no doubt is there’” (2.26.84-7). However Derwent disagrees with Catholic dogma, he cannot deny that the legends others read will offer, in some unspecified future, the means to create art, proving themselves “‘the poet’s second mine’” (2.26.93). Perhaps this admiration stems from Derwent’s characteristic tolerance. Whatever its origins, Derwent recognizes the essential attractive
capacity from these legends to extend into the greater theological arena. Though never personally susceptible, Derwent accepts the Dominican's observation that Rome offers the hope and solace many deem necessary in times of change. Derwent sees the constant flux of history as contributing, ultimately, to Rome's fall, the chronological limitations to which he alludes prior to expressing his joy in the legends. Man does not adapt, as the Dominican's metaphor may suggest, merely beneath the surface. This may characterize Rome's subtle shift as a means of maintaining structural integrity. Recognizing the wealth of new discoveries, man may find Catholicism too primitive, so Derwent suggests. Rome's influence, like the tides, may expand and contract as Rolfe suggests. To lose influence and authority in one region simply means expansion into another region. Derwent, however, attempts to address the reason behind these shifts.

Were Rome as influential and static as the Dominican believes, only the number of regions themselves would limit Catholicism's influence. Over time, seeking and finding individuals needing hope and solace, Catholicism would become the dominant spiritual influence in the world. Derwent does not believe this to be inevitable. In fact, he notes just how unlikely such a scenario seems. Rome's legends appeal to Derwent for their artistic beauty. He imagines the characteristic moral and spiritual lessons they contain do provide guidance for those wishing to conduct their lives according to certain standards. Derwent knows all belief systems to be dependent upon the suspension of disbelief. The faithful and reverent Catholic believes, no matter how miraculous and improbable the events contained in the legends and myths. When these self-imposed barriers begin to diminish, the strength of the legends and myths diminishes; belief falters, and doubt returns. Derwent implies this condition plagues the contemporary condition of man.
Advancements in science bring forth previously unrecognizable explanations for phenomena once deemed the work of a divine being. "'The world is now too civilized / For Rome'" (2.26.118-9), Derwent observes. Yet, the acquisition of knowledge does not demystify the questions previously deemed answerable by religion. Nor does a newfound understanding of natural law eliminate man's curiosity. Derwent may believe his contemporary society to be moving in a direction that deems spiritual influence inconsequential. But the present company of pilgrim-readers suggests that scientific advancement affords no real ease to man's desire to understand his place in the world. The damage that comes from such advancement, however, goes unrecognized by Derwent.

If what he says is true, science replaces a position of hope and solace—faith—with one of skepticism. The questions unanswered by religion were taken on faith to be attributable to the chasm between human intellectual capacity and the inaccessible majesty of divine omniscience. Man must accept that he cannot understand the ways of God. Man must accept that he cannot demand an explanation from God. Man must accept that understanding the reason for the unexplainable does not make accepting it any easier. Faith gives man the capacity to accept such things. Science does not. Science provides answers, but neither hope nor solace. Science reveals the mysteries behind some legends and myths, but not the reasons behind their construction. Science sheds light on the unknown without compensating for the impersonal nature of fact. Derwent intuitively understands this, but he does not state it specifically. Instead, he offers Rolfe an extension from his position regarding Rome's inevitable influential collapse: "'But here's a thought I still pursue— / A thought I dreamed each thinker knew: / No more can
men be what they've been; / All's altered—earth's another scene”'" (2.26.155.8). Derwent's words look forward instead of backward. He knows man's history to contain important indications as to the direction in which he hopes to move. The past, though, when given too prominent a place, becomes suffocating and limiting. An unwillingness to accept the changes that come as the result of scientific advancement does not diminish the impact of such advances. Personal and cultural stagnancy are not practical solutions, nor are wishes to regain paradise lost. Such conclusions ignore the position Derwent claims "each thinker" knows. Rolfe claims only to know that Rome "'bides'" (2.26.165), echoing both his earlier position that Rome "'subsists'," "'lives'," and "'re-affirms'" (2.26.95-6), as well as the Dominican's position on endurance. Derwent maintains his position by suggesting that what Rolfe takes to be evidence of Rome's endurance merely is an illusion, the true "'Vine angelic'" (2.26.169) choking from the infestation of "'Parasite-bugs'" (2.26.181) passing as religion.

The canto comes to an abrupt end seven lines later. No further evaluation takes place. Rather, the two pilgrims turn to the cooling comforts of wine to refresh their depleted energies. The "'troublesome'" and "'thankless'" task of interpretation offers too few rewards and no clear answers to Rolfe or Derwent. Rolfe appears to be the pilgrim least satisfied by his investigations, but perhaps this suggests his search to be more genuine than the search by Derwent. Interpretation occurs, but only briefly. This may be read as a kind of communicative success, the Dominican's words enacting a change, except that the pilgrims establish no real position on the matter of reverence. The manner of abandonment suggests that neither Rolfe nor Derwent intend to return to the subject. The narrator notes how Rolfe's appearance suggests the discussion will continue, but a
change comes over him. "Fall back we must" (2.26.186), he offers Derwent as an invitation to enjoy the wine. However, Rolfe’s language reveals an intellectual complacency characteristic throughout the canto. Rolfe continually looks to the past as a means of refuge when confronting a situation beyond his comprehension. The offer to fall back, in this context, reveals a frustration with the process of interpretation. As a task, interpretation does not offer immediate results, only incremental gains. Over time, the incremental gains yield considerable gains. But Rolfe does not possess the patience for the mental labor and this causes the communication to fail.

The narrator does not offer what Clarel gains from overhearing Rolfe and Derwent, merely that Clarel remains "Perplexed by that Dominican / Nor less by Rolfe—capricious man" (2.27.8-9). The conversation between Clarel and Vine in the next canto is not an interpretation of the Dominican so it has no direct applicability in this context except that such recognition establishes that, like Rolfe and Derwent, Clarel and Vine fail to regard the Dominican’s words.

The Cypriote

The pilgrim group encounters the Cypriote along the route to Mar Saba during the fourth day of the pilgrimage. Nehemiah’s recent death casts a gloom over the group that lightens briefly with the Cypriote’s presence. The group first hears the Cypriote’s approach through his song. These three stanzas offer a light-hearted contrast to the perspectives of the pilgrim-readers maligned by the death of their companion. The Cypriote sings of leisure, pleasure, and life unburdened by the horrors like those recently experienced by the pilgrim-readers. Bezanson describes the Cypriote as an example of "UNTROUBLED YOUTH" (Clarel 619) whose songs and viewpoints do not align
thematically with the troubles, the forthcoming death of his mother, the pilgrim-readers
come to know. The first stanza draws attention to the contrast between the belief systems
of the pilgrim-readers and the Cypriote. The monotheistic beliefs of the former, in spite
of the slight differences within this structure attributable to the differences between sects,
do not match the polytheistic beliefs of the latter. The Cypriote exhibits himself as a
product of an older, pagan tradition. As such, the Cypriote understands these “'Noble
gods’” (3.4.1), despite their immortality, suffer from the kinds of flaws suffered by
mankind. After “'labor divine’” (3.4.7), these same gods seek respite. As reward for
labor, the gods enjoy a refined ease that comes from consuming “'care-killing wine’”
(3.4.3). The second stanza of the Cypriote’s song draws more focused attention to the
immortality of the gods, while the third stanza offers man’s eternal separation from this
plain of existence. The third stanza, in the midst of this unnerving concession, stresses
the importance of faith. Man must believe that the gods would help by offering relief to
his mortality were it possible, “'Might but revelers pause in the prime!’” (3.4.21). In this
respect, the message of the Cypriote does not differ so greatly from the message of the
Syrian. Each notes the importance of faith in combating life’s sorrows. Though the
offers come from competing theistic perspectives, the hope remains the same: faith
sustains the individual in a time of crisis. The Cypriote’s stoic acceptance of life’s
travails includes the imminent death of his mother. However devastating the other
pilgrim-readers feel such an experience should be the event does not seem to be having
such detrimental effects on the young man. One may rightfully suspect that the
Cypriote’s steadiness is attributable to his inability to acknowledge this trauma and denial
serves as the most effective coping mechanism. In light of his introductory song, the
Cypriote accepts the differences between the immortal gods and mortal man. He knows these differences to be lamentable and sad, but his faith assures him that the gods would intervene and correct this error were it possible. The gods sympathize and this sustains the Cypriote. Stoicism offers an alternative to melancholy grief. From this perspective, the Cypriote allows himself to be happy.

Rolfe fails to understand this characteristic in the Cypriote, suggesting that such songs have no place in "funeral Siddim" (3.4.23) and offers that only a simpleton could be self-deluding in this manner. For Rolfe, the Cypriote's song, following so closely upon the death of Nehemiah, seems insensitive. Rolfe fails to realize that his sorrows do not necessarily apply to the Cypriote except in the broadest sense. The Cypriote cannot know of Nehemiah's recent death, nor without knowing him could the Cypriote's reaction be comparable to Rolfe's. At the point of Rolfe's response to the Cypriote's song, he has not met the young traveler. He only hears the song. It seems apparent, however, that Rolfe doesn't understand the song in the manner the Cypriote intends. This assessment depends upon an interpretation of the Cypriote's level of sophistication that counters the responses of Rolfe, Derwent, and Vine (the only pilgrims to respond to the Cypriote's presence). This interpretation highlights a failure in Rolfe that parallels his failures at interpretation with regard to the Syrian and the Dominican previously. Rolfe's haste precludes accurate interpretation.

Derwent's response takes an optimistic and jovial turn. The Cypriote's words seem just the antidote to the current gloom. He inquires, "What rescuer, what Delian?" (3.4.31) comes to relieve the pilgrims. Bezanson notes that Derwent's words speak to his interpretive capacities. Simply from hearing the song, Derwent ascertains that the singer
descends from Greek ancestry, connecting Delian to Apollo, the god of song and music (\textit{Clarel} 795). But it is Mortmain who provides the clearest interpretation of the song by connecting the events of the pilgrimage to events from Greek mythology. His realization occurs internally and the narrator voices his conclusions. The singer, descending into Siddim, parallels the descent of Orpheus into Hades (3.4.36-44), but the pagan connection does not end here. Mortmain qualifies his observation by suggesting that the singer awakens the pilgrim-readers from their grief by offering, however briefly, solace from the thoughts about Nehemiah. The Cypriote’s manner reinforces this.

When questioned, the Cypriote claims his presence in the desert to be the result of filial piety. Having recently visited Mar Saba, he notes how his actions fulfill the wishes of his mother, namely, that he take “‘Three flagons good for holy wine’” (3.4.74) to the monastery. The young Cypriote’s duties do not conclude with this action. He includes one final act of reverence for his mother, a trip to the Jordan so that he might dip her burial shroud in its waters. Though Derwent’s horror at this confession may rightfully speak for all the pilgrims, or at least the horror at the realization of the Cypriote’s impending loss, the Cypriote’s lack of emotion need not characterize him as shallow. Rather, his stoic acceptance of death simply contrasts the morbid solemnity of the pilgrim group. His frankness unnerves Derwent when it takes the form of another song addressing the specifics of burial: “‘My shroud is saintly linen, / In lavender ‘tis laid; / I have chosen a bed by the marigold / And supplied me a silver spade’” (3.4.91-4). Though Derwent cannot understand the ease with which the Cypriote catalogues the steps for burial, Rolfe offers an informed perspective. A product of constant searching himself, Rolfe notes his familiarity with this Greek tradition. Just the previous year, Rolfe claims
to have encountered Greek pilgrims at the Jordan dipping their "'winding-sheets'" (3.4.102) in anticipation of their own funerals. Rolfe's most insightful observation reveals the Cypriote's message to the pilgrim-readers, though it is unclear whether this realization reaches them. Though this action may seem morbid and offensive to Christian sentiments, Rolfe acknowledges that Greek tradition, in spite of Christian influence, maintains the pagan insistence that death serves as a time for reverence as great as other religious holidays of great significance. If Rolfe understands this, his initial reaction seems ambiguous. Perhaps the shock of the encounter unbalances him. But past experiences testify to Rolfe's capacity to understand the Greek manners so seemingly ill-suited towards death, even though he still voices reserve at the Cypriote's manners. "'Your courier, the forerunning note / Which ere we sighted you, we heard— / You're bold to trill it so, my bird'" (3.4.115-7). The Cypriote shrugs off such claims to his particular boldness. His actions show an adherence to Greek tradition. He remains stoic and joyful, not deluded. He accepts death as the natural end of life, but qualifies these feelings in response to Rolfe's previous accusation of boldness. "'I do but trill it for the air'" (3.4.121), the Cypriote notes, suggesting the singing exists as a therapeutic action in itself. No pilgrim-reader offers to refute this point, and the Cypriote continues on his way.

The pilgrims hear two final verses as the Cypriote descends towards the Dead Sea, both suggesting the importance of stoicism as an approach to life. Yet, the narrator notes the pilgrims view the Cypriote's innocence, as revealed by such songs, simply to be the product of his inexperience. The first suggests a course of action and a manner of living: "'With a rose in thy mouth / Through the world lightly veer: / Rose in the mouth / Makes
a rose of the year”’ (3.4.129-32). This kind of blind optimism, likely the interpretation the pilgrim-readers draw from the song, is no worse than that exhibited by Derwent throughout the poem. The only thing differentiating these two equally optimistic perspectives would be the source of the optimism. The Cypriote’s pagan understanding of death differs dramatically from Derwent’s Christian understanding. The Cypriote knows his gods to be like himself, thus his optimism comes from the comfort this knowledge brings. Derwent cannot know his God and his optimism comes from the unsettling vacancy this lack of knowledge brings. The lack of immediacy makes Derwent’s condition less real, less suited to daily existence when compared to the Cypriote.

The second verse addresses the inevitability of death even within such an optimistic view. For the Cypriote, death does not change the place of the rose. In fact, death offers the opportunity to test the resolve of one’s optimism: “With the Prince of the South / O’er the Styx bravely steer: / Rose in the mouth / And a wreath on the bier!” (3.4.135-8). Because these viewpoints suggest an inexperienced naïveté, the pilgrims express a hope that life does not afford the Cypriote evidence that tragedy cannot always be confronted with reserve. The prayer-like appeal that time and age do not bring experiences capable of altering the Cypriote’s perspective on death seems maternal. Assuming the Cypriote adheres to his pagan beliefs, the prayer seems unwarranted. The prayer does show the pilgrim-readers empathizing in a manner not previously noted. While the narrator notes the pilgrim-readers all desire to protect the Cypriote’s innocence, he specifies Vine’s thoughts only. “Ah, young to be!” (3.4.154), Vine rejoices, applauding the resiliency of youth. Amidst death, life affords the Cypriote a reason to rejoice. Because of the
differences between the Greek and Christian traditions, however, none of the pilgrim-readers understands the Cypriote's example. Collectively, they view the Cypriote as an inexperienced youth incapable of understanding the gravity of existence's tenuous nature. Though the Cypriote offers stoicism as an alternative to living, the pilgrims do not understand this to be the case. Again, communication fails.

The Lyonese

The pilgrimage nears completion by the time the pilgrim-readers arrive in Bethlehem. There, Clarel shares his hostel room with a pilgrim from Lyon. The game that takes place in the hostel differs from the three previous in its subject matter. Thematically similar to the stoic, carefree views held by the Cypriote, the Lyonese, with his attachment to sensual pleasure instead of intellectual or spiritual pleasures, offers Clarel an alternative to his ceaseless inquiries and wanderings. Though these sensual pleasures offer fleeting satisfaction, the Lyonese knows replicating these pleasures to be simple. Quantity of experience may not be a viable substitute for quality of experience, but the Lyonese knows the hazards of each and prefers the physically great, though intellectually poor, rewards of the flesh. By contrast, intellectual and spiritual pleasures put the pilgrim to task. The effort must be great for the reward to be great. However, the eventual achievement does not diminish the pressing desire to seek more of these same pleasures. The Lyonese chooses a path of easy replication and offers this alternative as solace from Clarel's wanderings.

In "The Prodigal" (4.26), Clarel, incapable of sleep, attempts to draw the Lyonese into conversation. Despite all his efforts to avoid the engagement, the Lyonese eventually yields to Clarel's insistent demands. The narrator offers the introductory
information regarding the history of the Lyonese: “A native of the banks of Rhone / He traveled for a Lyons house / Which dealt in bales luxurious” (4.26.34-6). Having been delayed from his travels, the Lyonese opts to spend his time indulging in Jerusalem and Bethlehem “in a freak of fun” (4.26.39) rather than in “Jaffa gray” (4.26.37), the port of his delay. Though the narrator concludes from these confessions that the Lyonese is an “irreverent one” (4.26.42), the narrator knows the Lyonese to be an informed individual, certainly reverent with regards to the historical and religious significance of the Holy Land. Further, the narrator knows the Lyonese uses his irreverence as a shield, as a means of offering his alternative. The Lyonese tests the evaluative powers of Clarel by forcing him to decipher the cryptic messages regarding the pursuit of sensual instead of spiritual pleasures.

In the “Twilight” (4.24) canto, having heard the Lyonese singing without having seen him, Clarel wonders “to thee what thoughts belong— / Announced by such a song” (4.24.25-6). This same curiosity brings Clarel to question whether the Lyonese happens to be the person he heard previously and “how the most drear / Solemnity of Judah’s glade / Affect might such a mind” (4.26.55-7). The Lyonese quickly ascertains Clarel’s intention beyond the specific question. Though Clarel questions the Lyonese specifically as to how he manages to reconcile his light-hearted songs with the gloom of Judah, the Lyonese understands Clarel to be looking for advice. Clarel wants to know how the Lyonese copes. Clarel’s search for a guide has not ceased. He imagines the Lyonese can help him. By determining this, and doing so immediately, the Lyonese reveals himself to be an accomplished reader and interpreter. But his response shows him to be an equally effective teacher of sorts. The Lyonese does not answer Clarel directly because there is
no answer that will satisfy the inquiry. The Lyonese does offer Clarel an opportunity for reflection, one, to Clarel’s credit, that he takes. More than that, Clarel reflects correctly, discovering for himself the answer to the question he directs to the Lyonese. When Clarel asks “how,” the Lyonese responds: “Amigo! favored lads there are, / Born under such a lucky star, / They weigh not things too curious, see, / Albeit conforming to their time / And usages thereof, and clime: / Well, mine’s that happy family” (4.26.60-5). The Lyonese suggests that the fortunate ones do not seek concealed truths. They recognize the difficulty and futility of “deep diving” and let others pursue such ends as they wish. The Lyonese claims to come from this gifted group. The Lyonese hopes Clarel will take his meaning to be that the individual in search of truth has more than one possibility before him. Truth exists wherever one chooses to look. The “things too curious” that puzzle the quest of the individual oppose the things less curious. The choices represent opposite extremes.

Clarel intuitively understands the Lyonese’s meaning, but this comprehension gives him reason for pause. He wonders if he should be more like the Lyonese. Turning aside from “problems ill-defined” (4.26.67) and the frustrations of “vain employ” (4.26.68), Clarel would be liberated enough to indulge in experiences like the Lyonese, what Clarel calls the “easy joy[s]” (4.26.70). Clarel’s recognition becomes the basis for comprehending the canto. By drawing a distinction between easy (meaning sensual) joys and hard (meaning spiritual/intellectual) joys, Clarel articulates two distinct forces at work. The Lyonese, as the representative of easy joys, exhibits for Clarel the simplicity of a life of leisure. From the outset of the poem, Clarel’s presence in the Holy Land signifies a different pursuit. In search of the physical representations and landmarks that
give validity to spiritual beliefs, Clarel’s choice to pursue hard joys precludes him from the indulgences of a traveler like the Lyonese. However, these two individuals do not directly oppose one another. The Lyonese further complicates matters for Clarel by revealing his own familiarity with the pursuit of hard joys. Having experienced both hardships, as it were, the Lyonese becomes a testament to the failure, unfortunately, of easy joys and hard joys to provide the needed solace. As the canto progresses, the Lyonese demonstrates his familiarity with both pursuits. Through these demonstrations, he shows that neither pursuit exists as an end in itself. Whether the feelings of joy come from the easy or hard route, the Lyonese discovers that both require constant repetition upon completion. The cycle is endless because neither kind of joy fulfills the individual completely. This pursuit of joy exists as a pilgrimage in its own right. The seeker constantly exists in a state of unsatisfied pursuit of an uncertain resolution. The Lyonese intends to reveal this disheartening fact to Clarel. Yet, when Clarel approaches this understanding, he fears the discovery. If his conclusions are correct, Clarel realizes that he consciously turns his back on easy joys in favor of hard joys, imagining the reward for the latter to be greater than the reward for the former. The narrator provides this information in a summation of Clarel’s thoughts. But Clarel’s fear at the realization of his “Foregoing many an easy joy” (4.26.70) elicits a response from his theological training. He deflects the Lyonese’s statements in an attempt to return the conversation to more familiar ground (though not exactly “solid” ground due to its abstract nature).

The dialogue of the canto oscillates between Clarel’s solicitations of the Lyonese to indulge in hard joys (the theological relevance of Judah) and the Lyonese’s replies that reveal his preference for easy joys (his history with Don Rovenna). The conversation
becomes another example of failed communication, at least considering the specific replies from the two. The conversation even contains elements of humor thanks to the Lyonese. He uses humor to highlight for Clarel the impossibility of resolving the questions he poses. By offering non sequitur responses, the Lyonese intends for Clarel to interpret the replies as recognition of the futility of the questions. Unfortunately, Clarel’s eagerness blinds him to this possibility. When Clarel asks the Lyonese whether his travels reveal to him lands as blighted as Judah (4.26.74-89), the Lyonese, the narrator notes, “invoked the air” (4.26.94), speaking to Don Rovenna, inquiring whether their leisure hours in Spain and Peru were spent pursuing fruitless inquiries (4.26.95-102). Though the narrator indicates that Clarel understands the mocking tone of the Lyonese to some extent, he does not understand the intentions beyond the perceived mocking. The invocation of Don Rovenna becomes an example to Clarel of how leisure time should be spent: in “‘chat of love-wile and duenna / And saya-manto in Peru’” (4.26.97-8). Life’s liberty and possibility, so says the Lyonese, ought to be enjoyed rather than squandered pursuing hard joys that leave the seeker no better for the acquired knowledge. When Clarel again refuses to address the Lyonese’s non sequitur by returning the subject to Judah’s blighted condition, the Lyonese interrupts the questioning to offer Clarel evidence that his choice of easy joys comes as an alternative to the failings encountered by pursuing hard joys. Failings, of course, suggest that the seeker comes to no satisfactory conclusion regarding the question, not that the seeker lacks the drive to investigate completely. Bezanson characterizes the Lyonese’s substantial offering as exhibiting an extensive knowledge of the Bible (Clarel 834-5), one that Clarel should understand to reveal the Lyonese’s greater intentions. He does not simply avoid
answering Clarel’s questions because he lacks knowledge. His Biblical familiarity suggests by contrast that such proficiency gives little assistance in answering difficult questions. Beyond familiarity with the Biblical literature, the Lyonese notes little can be gained. To clarify one of the Lyonese’s points, Clarel offers more specific information showing an equal proficiency and capacity for recall. But the details of the account do not concern the Lyonese. His point remains that spiritual and intellectual inquiries have limitations and these same limitations are inscribed within the questions, thus ensuring their longevity. The difficulty of the pursuit is not rewarded in comparable degree.

When Clarel again asks questions regarding Palestine, the Lyonese attributes this stubbornness to Clarel’s being a Westerner though Don Ravenna, another Westerner, knew “‘quite other cheer’” (4.26.150). The Lyonese does concede to discuss “‘dame Judah’” (4.26.153), but not as Clarel wishes. The Lyonese offers that Judah, its appearances to the contrary, produces many admirable things. Dame Judah is not, as Clarel would have it, a theological reference point suited to the pursuit of hard joys. With the sound blessings of Nature, Judah possesses the physical characteristics that make grape vines flourish. The “‘true wine-zone of Noah’” (4.26.156) affords many easy joys and this deserves Clarel’s recognition as much as any theological importance. To make his point, the Lyonese cites many examples of those who have enjoyed the fruits of the land: King Herod, the Maccabees, the “‘spies from EschoT’” (4.26.166), and King Solomon. Each of these individuals, according to the Lyonese, indulged in the sensual pleasures of Judah’s wine. The Lyonese’s interpretive spin on these Scriptural texts shows his clever, attentive reading strategies.
Though Clarel does not find humor in these points, his refutation of the Lyonese on the point of the Song of Solomon shows no authoritative reading capacity. To condemn the Lyonese for his irreverence and blasphemy, Clarel points to the interpretations offered by St. Bernard as the more accurate renderings of the Song. Yet, Clarel’s justification, an appeal to accepted and common knowledge as evidence for pursuing hard joys, shows no independent thought. He defers to St. Bernard and the subsequent affirmative interpretations that depend upon St. Bernard’s earliest work. Clarel respects longevity as evidence of truth-value without regarding the possibility that multiple levels of interpretive “truth” exist. The Lyonese juxtaposes his interpretation with what he assumes to be Clarel’s objection to show the overlap between easy and hard joys. Depending upon one’s interpretive perspective, easy joys can be found where one assumes only hard joys exist. Clarel assumes easy and hard joys to be mutually exclusive ends while the Lyonese knows interpretation reveals an overlap. The individual chooses the joys he wishes to pursue by deciding the value he wishes to gain from the experience. Because Clarel sees gradations of value in favor of hard joys, he limits the easy joys he experiences along the way.

Although the Lyonese suspects his teaching efforts to be in vain, he tries one final direct approach. Instead of revealing the intertwined nature of easy and hard joys, he returns the discussion to easy joys by asking Clarel: “‘Blue eyes or black, which like you best? / Your Bella Donna, how’s she dressed?’” (4.26.201-2). The narrator tries to interject that the Lyonese cannot know his questions will be deemed inappropriate by Clarel. The “student late / Of reverend theology” (4.26.206-7) flinches at the ease with which the Lyonese equates sensual and spiritual matters, but the narrator’s revealing
description seems apt. Clarel no longer is a theology student. He used to be, but this is not the case now. This does not prevent Clarel from feeling the Lyonese to be insensitive. The Lyonese’s minor dissertation on the beauty of Jewish women forces Clarel to confront his sensual side. But the Lyonese does not tempt Clarel in a bawdy fashion, nor does he show a particular irreverence. By citing examples of the beauty of Jewish women from the Bible, from Roman history, and from Roman art, the Lyonese attempts to bolster his position. At the absolute minimum, these references reveal his expansive reading, but offer no proof to support either Clarel’s beliefs or the narrator’s earlier statement regarding the Lyonese’s irreverence. The Lyonese, because he recognizes the limitations, refuses to use Scripture as a guide to search for hard truths. Instead, he uses the same passages to justify his pursuit of leisure. Though this rings of the devil’s use of Scripture for self-serving purposes, the Lyonese’s intentions seem far less nefarious.

When the narrator notes Clarel’s concession regarding the potential wisdom of the Lyonese, a turning point for Clarel presents itself. He begins to recognize the true depth behind the apparent shallowness of the Lyonese’s pursuits. The Lyonese, after all, desires to be more helpful than harmful. Three times he calls Clarel his amigo (4.26.60; 4.26.143; 4.26.284) and each communicates the Lyonese’s efforts to resolve the differences in their perspectives. The Lyonese does not wish for Clarel to relinquish his idealistic pursuits, merely to recognize their limitations to be their perceived rewards. The Lyonese offers a final song before retiring for sleep. His cryptic message offers

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64 Clarel’s responses to the Lyonese, the ambiguous consideration of the Lyonese’s physical beauty (4.26.242-57), and Clarel’s subsequent dream (4.26.302-15) where an unspecified individual—perhaps the Lyonese—draws him toward easy joys, merit further discussion with regards to the hazy sexual orientation of each character.
Clarel a course of action if he interprets the song correctly. The Lyonese’s song argues physical pleasure through action to be superior to spiritual pursuits because the rewards are obvious and immediate. The rewards promised those pursuers of hard joys, like the deluding phantom lights of the song’s first stanza, exist beyond the experiential reference points of the individual. Eternal life on the spiritual plain brings solace to the individual, but comprehending the magnitude of such an existence is impossible for man. If the spiritual promises do not entice, the Lyonese offers the second stanza and the physical actions and joys coming from it: “But, if magic none prevail, / Mocking in untrue romance; / Let your Paradise exhale / Odors; and enlink the dance; / And, ye rosy feet, advance / Till ye meet morn’s ruddy Hours / Unabashed in Shushan’s bowers!” (4.26.295-301). If the individual fails to revere the “magic” of the spiritual promises, the Paradise itself will expire. This leaves the individual to pursue easy joys and accept his own pleasures as appropriate guides to action.

During the night, Clarel dreams of the two choices presented to him. On one extreme, the Lyonese represents the easy joys typified by leisure and pleasure-seeking. On the other, Salvaterra represents the hard joys typified by ascetic denial. Though the pilgrimage presents Clarel with many opportunities to understand the necessity of choosing between attractive extremes, the challenge for Clarel is recognizing that neither extreme offers the solace he seeks. The often-articulated compromise, the Middle Way, as noted by Clark Davis, among others, becomes the logical choice. Moderation between competing extremes offers the benefits of each. For the first time in the pilgrimage, during this dream sequence, Clarel seems to recognize the necessity of

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compromise: "[He] seemed to stand / Betwixt a Shushan and a sand; / The Lyonese was lord of one, / The desert did the Tuscan own, / The pale pure monk" (4.26.303-7). Clarel must understand the importance of interpreting the physical locus to be an indication of the proper course of life. The ascetic life of monks like Salvaterra, the Syrian, and the Dominican ensure the continuity of religious values. However, Clarel needs to understand that this is not the life he will lead. He may lead an ascetic, Christian life without sacrificing himself to God entirely. Most simply, Clarel may pursue a religious life, one characterized by faith, hope, and reverence, without becoming a religious figure.

The dream reveals itself as a guide when Clarel hesitates at the moment of decision. Not knowing how to choose, yet not recognizing his physical locus to be representative of a conscious compromise, Clarel feels the "strain / Of clasping arms which would detain / His heart from such ascetic range" (4.26.308-10). The narrator allows Clarel to awaken at this pivotal moment in order to complicate interpretive matters. Clarel may wake out of fear or out of relief. The narrator allows the ambiguity to dominate the scene. Clarel wakes out of fear that the ascetic life no longer appeals to him because his entire life points towards accepting the ascetic position. His theological studies suggest an acceptance of the discrepancy between man’s intellectual limitations and God’s infinite omniscience. These studies would also encourage humility as a compromise here. The spiritual domain, the realm of God, remains accessible only through faith. If the dream suggests to Clarel that his faith is entirely gone, he may continue to spiral further into despair. To understand Clarel’s relief necessitates applying the same evidence from the opposite perspective. The dominance of faith in the life of the theology student demands a rigorous denial of man’s mental capacities and his logical
tendencies. If the dream suggests to Clarel that such suspensions of disbelief are no
longer necessary, he can appreciate the relief to come. By dismissing his dependence on
external, unknowable authorities, Clarel liberates himself from the confines imposed by
doubt. He frees himself to choose the path revealed by the Lyonese.

There is no evidence, however, that Clarel chooses this path. There are no specific
instances where his actions suggest his acceptance that sensual pleasures take precedence
over spiritual and intellectual pleasures. However, the narrator suggests that this
becomes a possibility, if not an inevitability by the canto’s end. Clarel understands
himself to be changed by the experience with the Lyonese. He feels the influence
working within him. The narrator notes Clarel “knew organic change, / Or felt, at least,
that change was working— / A subtle innovator lurking” (4.26.313-5). Ascending to the
roof of the hostel the next morning, Clarel hears the “light malacca gay” (4.26.323) of the
departing Lyonese. From atop the roof, Clarel hears the Lyonese’s final song, a show of
reverence for the ruling and teaching capacities of nature. The Lyonese’s first song is set
in the Shushun bowers, within nature. The pleasures and freedoms offered by the song
are found in the beauty of nature. If Clarel sees the pursuit of easy joys as a natural
change to come, he cannot fear the repercussions. Nature cannot guide poorly. It seems
that communication succeeds to a point as a result of this gam, but only to a point. If
Clarel understands the necessity of the change, but cannot enact the change, one must
conclude that communication fails. At the very least, an internal change happens as a
result of the gam with the Lyonese. There is no means to note internal changes in any of
the other pilgrim-readers as a result of the previous gams. This represents an anomaly of
the pilgrimage. The Lyonese, for all his critically disputed prodigality, offers Clarel
guidance in a way no other participant does. If the Lyonese, however, offers Clarel the same lesson from a different perspective, Clarel must learn to recognize the similarity between the varying approaches. He must be able to recognize that different contexts do not necessarily imply different lessons. The Lyonese does reveal Clarel’s particularly narrow perspective.

The Muscovite

The least significant of the gams seems to be the last one. However, Clarel’s encounter with the Muscovite merits inclusion. The canto’s title does not contain a reference to the pilgrim, as the previous four have. But, the primary action of the canto revolves around the conversation between Clarel and this guide. The gam reveals specific information unlike the more abstract communication of the previous gams. The overall result, though, is less clear. The revelation of the Lyonese’s Judaism catalyzes Clarel’s awareness of the on-going pulls of easy and hard joys. By the end of the gam with the Lyonese, Clarel feels capable of pursuing easy joys as an alternative to the more demanding, and less rewarding, pursuit of hard joys. However, the end of the gam with the Muscovite diminishes Clarel’s previous balance. He feels stranded between equal attractions to both, without an understanding of which direction to take.

On the tenth and final day of the pilgrimage, with the return to Jerusalem forthcoming, Clarel wanders alone. He eagerly anticipates the return because he wants to reunite with Ruth. But, Clarel’s doubts still haunt him. His thoughts return to familiar questions, all essentially asking how he might continue to live if he abandons his spiritual beliefs (4.28.74-84). These seven questions stress Clarel’s fears for his uncertain future. If he chooses the path of the Lyonese, Clarel knows he will be abandoning the search.
He chastises himself because his past theological training leads him to believe that the path to spiritual enlightenment is not easy. The search tasks Clarel because it forces him to consider life from a perspective beyond the realm of human experience. However difficult the search, Clarel cannot turn away. He asks rhetorically: "'[H]ow live / At all, if once a fugitive / From thy own nobler part, though pain / Be portion inwrought with the grain?'" (4.28.81-4). This final question summarizes Clarel's concerns most concisely. If he abandons his spirituality, he does not feel he lives in any real sense, regardless of the sensual pleasures he experiences. His "nobler part" understands that spiritual rewards, however immeasurable by terrestrial standards, are more significant even though pain remains a part of the equation. These questions presuppose Clarel's belief that endurance is an essential characteristic. He asks the questions for their own sake, not because he expects or desires an answer. Because he asks questions, Clarel understands the dilemma before him. He understands the challenge.

The arrival of the Muscovite immediately following these questions seems fortuitous, yet it would be incorrect to assume the Muscovite holds the answers. He is another searching pilgrim, but he and Clarel have one common experience other than their travels. Like Clarel, the Muscovite claims an encounter with the Lyonese, but seems equally baffled by the experience. The discussion of the Lyonese accounts for the second half of the canto, but neither discovers much that isn't previously suspected. The Muscovite first broaches the subject of the Lyonese, inquiring as to the subject matter of Clarel's discussion with him. Clarel reveals the Jews to have been the subject, but also a great deal of Scriptural commentary from an interpretive position that Clarel does not accept. Clarel claims the Lyonese's interpretations lessened the impact of the Scriptures
because his interpretations were too pragmatic: "'Much too he dropped which quite bereaved / The Scripture of its Runic spell'" (4.28.115-6). Though Clarel immediately recants his claims to the mysteries of Scripture, his intention remains clear. Clarel’s concerns for the Lyonese’s interpretations highlight the significant differences between two competing manners of living: Clarel’s pursuit of hard joys and the Lyonese’s pursuit of easy joys. Because Clarel wants to lead a spiritual life, he interprets the Scriptures from a perspective intending a specific end—he wants affirmation for his choice. Because the Lyonese wants to lead a sensual life of pleasure, he interprets the Scriptures from a perspective intending a specific end—he wants affirmation for his choice. The primary difference between the two choices is the basis for the choices. Clarel makes his choice without properly experiencing an alternative by which he compares the two. The Lyonese makes his choice after considering what comes from experiencing both.

The Muscovite pays no attention to Clarel’s thoughts regarding Scriptural interpretation. Rather, he concludes from Clarel’s statements that his suspicions regarding the Lyonese’s Judaism reveal themselves to be accurate. Why else, the Muscovite reasons, would the Lyonese continually address the subject? Clarel claims the same suspicions (4.26.259-76), but cannot understand why the Lyonese chooses to keep this a secret. The Muscovite believes the Lyonese fears the prejudices of others towards Jews, thus he hides his secret as best he can. Though the Muscovite claims to respect the Lyonese’s right to privacy, he still wishes to know. The game ends when the Muscovite claims his suspicions to be validated by the conversation with Clarel. At this point, the narrator observes the two part ways.
In the final lines of the canto, the narrator reveals Clarel’s thoughts. The influence of the Lyonese remains significant because Clarel continues to consider the options of easy and hard joys. When the narrator reveals these thoughts, one understands Clarel in much the same fashion as the Muscovite understands the Lyonese. As much as Clarel tries to hide his doubts, it is apparent that they exist. When Clarel’s thoughts return to the “reveries vague” (4.28.153) from the previous evening, he begins to recognize the dream as a test of faith. Between the pulls of easy and hard joys, Clarel shows himself to be powerless. His lack of power comes from his indecisiveness and the narrator articulates this through images of nature. Clarel feels the influence of the Lyonese “yet could mar” (4.28.153) the tranquility he desires from a spiritual life. If he wishes to return to his questing, his faith must become the “surging element” (4.28.154) that crashes upon the new ruling force: “So combs the billow ere it breaks upon the bar” (4.28.156). The surging spirituality in Clarel must crash upon the sand bar if the former is to dislodge the latter. The internal conflict for Clarel remains. He cannot yet answer for himself how he wishes to live. These experiences reinforce the Muscovite’s point, “‘All’s much the same: many waves, one beach’” (4.28.97). Clarel must decide from multiple alternatives which wave best suits him. The choice itself does not matter. As the Muscovite implies, the notion of choice itself may inadvertently complicate the matter. If Clarel’s search during the pilgrimage is akin to selecting a wave, one that ultimately ends where all other waves end, Clarel’s choice is rather insignificant. Its “truth” is of no consequence. Clarel’s choice must provide just enough truth to sustain his efforts. As unsatisfying as this may appear to one in search of the right way, Clarel eventually will accept the Muscovite’s wisdom.
The Results

Though communication is inhibited by many factors during the five gams, Clarel seems to be the candidate most capable of learning or adapting as a result of these communications. He is the only pilgrim-reader present for all the gams. Though he remains silent for the first three, he participates in the final two, his words and thoughts indicating that he actively considers the alternatives offered by the Lyonese and the ambiguous interpretation of the Muscovite. Whether the gams possess a structural function in *Clarel* depends upon how one answers the questions from the beginning of the chapter. For communication to be successful there needs to be a collective willingness to accept differing points of view as a means to greater understanding. As such, four criteria need to be met: 1) the communicators must understand the stakes of the communication; 2) the communicators must recognize the advantage of multiple perspectives; 3) the communicators must be willing to incorporate the viewpoints of others; and 4) the communicators must be willing to alter their individual perspectives as a result. These four criteria highlight the limitations imposed upon communication throughout *Clarel*. While the Syrian, the Dominican, the Cypriote, the Lyonese, and the Muscovite intuitively understand these criteria, the pilgrim-readers consent to meeting very few. Communication exists to some extent as a process of compromise and few of the pilgrim-readers are willing to change.

Strong personalities like Rolfe see the gams as challenges to be met. From the Syrian to the Dominican to the Cypriote, Rolfe interprets the viewpoints of these three to be efforts at disruption. Rolfe feels so strongly about the validity of his individual perspective that he is incapable of accepting a conflicting interpretation. The Syrian’s
simple message of faith disturbs Rolfe most because of its ambiguous conclusion. Because the Syrian expects an effort from Rolfe that Rolfe does not expect from himself, the Syrian’s efforts are doomed. By using himself as an example for a manner of living, the Syrian challenges Rolfe to interpret correctly. Rolfe fails the first criteria for understanding. Rolfe dismisses the Syrian’s insight as mere hallucination, seeing the ascetic principles of the Syrian to be far more hazardous than advantageous. Rolfe’s laziness is also apparent. He refuses to participate with the Syrian because he would rather be given the example and told how to interpret it.

Derwent feels equally strongly about his beliefs, but his reserve (or laziness), his unwillingness to invest in argumentation as a part of communication, dooms the process. Addressing the Dominican, Derwent gently offers points that contradict the Dominican’s assessment that Rome does not change significantly. When it is clear to Derwent that little will come from the debate, he offers the Dominican an easy end by drawing the Dominican’s attention to his traveling party’s desire to leave. Rolfe knows no such diplomacy and objects to the Dominican’s message of reverence with as much fervor as his objections to the Syrian’s incomplete tale. In the commentary that follows the Dominican’s canto, Rolfe reveals a pragmatic cynicism that perpetually jeopardizes his understanding. Derwent characteristically shows himself to hold the optimist’s position that all things will prove beneficial in the end. Neither is convinced to alter his perspective. Rolfe fails the first criterion again and Derwent fails the fourth. This suggests Derwent’s easy manner makes him more capable of communicating than Rolfe.

The Cypriote’s message of stoic acceptance of life’s hardships rings hollow as well. Rolfe interprets the Cypriote’s song as irreverent in light of Nehemiah’s recent death, as
well as ill-suited to the gloom of the desert wasteland. When the Cypriote further reveals the tragedies he will experience soon enough, the pilgrim-readers dismiss his cheer as unenlightened youthful enthusiasm. Silent to this point, even Vine offers a silent prayer that the Cypriote does not lose this perspective to age and experience. Even suggesting the pilgrim-readers meet the first and second criteria, each fails the third.

Clarel's position relative to the communication process has been made clear during the respective discussions of the Lyonese and the Muscovite. As the poem's title character, Clarel's development should be central. His silence during the first three gams may be interpreted as failure to comprehend or uncertainty as to the appropriate response, but the two may be linked. If Clarel fails to comprehend the texts of the gams and the lessons, he reveals his wisdom by remaining silent. Not wishing to act prior to understanding, Clarel defers in order to observe other possible responses. Before acting, Clarel wants to have as much information as possible. By doing so, Clarel reveals his patience, but also his realization that the learning process is slow and deliberate. By the time of the gam with the Lyonese, Clarel trusts his past experiences to give him the necessary interpretive practice. This practice covers the first two criteria for communication. Clarel learns to distill the stakes of the communication as well as differing perspectives with regards to these stakes. The persuasive capacities of the Lyonese and the Muscovite allow Clarel to incorporate the third and fourth criteria. By the conclusion of the final gam, Clarel seems to be the only pilgrim capable of communicating successfully. This capacity, however, provides no assurance that successful communication will take place. In fact, the narrator withholds information regarding Clarel's final transformation.
Young’s observations serve one final purpose. The gams in *Clarel* address the difficulties of communication, the primary difficulty being the discrepancy between the intention of the teller of the tale and the interpretation by the listener. As Young notes, the activity proves itself hazardous, tentative, and unsatisfactory. The gams as an integrated series organize themselves around Clarel’s progressive awareness of his condition as learner. By the final gam, Clarel proves himself to be the only pilgrim-reader confronting the challenges of communication. He allows the perspective of another individual access to his own perspective. More concisely, he considers the perspective of another instead of dismissing it outright. This integrated series does not rival the complexity of the gam series in *Moby-Dick*, but Young’s interpretations apply. The modes of living offered by the Syrian monk, the Dominican monk, and the Cypriote—faith, reverence, and stoic acceptance, respectively—represent “impossible attitudes” for living, Young’s second grouping. Rolfe, Derwent, and Vine, the three vocal participants, do not see the value of such simplistic viewpoints. Though Rolfe and Derwent actively participate in debate with these fellow pilgrims, the debate seems an end in itself. There is little evidence suggesting that either Rolfe or Derwent desire to alter their respective views. The Lyonese offers Clarel a “basis for action, the action itself, and the consequences of such action,” Young’s third grouping. These offers suggest dissatisfaction with the pursuit of hard joys to be a basis for action; the pursuit of sensual pleasure is the action itself; and freedom from spiritual dilemmas is the consequence of the action. The Muscovite, as interpreter of Clarel’s wavering spiritual condition, mimics the prophecies and warnings characteristic of Young’s first grouping. Though speaking specifically about the Lyonese, the Muscovite offers a sympathetic
rendering of an individual’s right to privacy. He warns—assuming Clarel to be intuitive enough to understand the warning applies to him as well—of the prying interests of others. Furthermore, the warning accounts for the individual’s inability to separate himself entirely from his past beliefs or from the choice intending to provide distance from this past. The Muscovite suggests Clarel’s spiritual dilemma will continue even if he chooses a life of sensual pleasure. Like the Lyonese trying to conceal his Judaism, Clarel will attempt to convince himself and others that hard joys hold no attraction for him. He will discuss this fact incessantly and neurotically. Like the pilgrimage; like reading; Clarel’s pursuit of spiritual solace will be unending. There will be little evidence of success aside from William Dillingham’s notion that constant searching may be the only, therefore the most admirable, individual triumph (Dillingham 505). Clarel’s search remains hopeful. At the very least, his pursuit stands as a quest for communication with the self. If evidence of God’s existence exhibits itself as Goldman’s imminent voice, Clarel yet may discover the solace he seeks.
CHAPTER SIX

CLAREL AND THE FINAL STAGES
OF UNLEARNING

Following the experiences of his own reading; the investigations into potential guides; and the discoveries made during the five gams; Clarel, during the last evening of the pilgrimage, accumulates the final experiences necessary to unlearn all of the theological baggage he brings with him to the Holy Land. In its present use, baggage should not be read in an overly loaded fashion. True, Clarel brings certain conceptions with him to Jerusalem that color his perception of fellow pilgrims and events. However, the baggage, his spiritual beliefs, serves as a necessary counterpoint for the greater drama of the poem. Throughout his travels, Clarel continually evaluates his understanding of spirituality. His beliefs are challenged constantly by those holding differing views. The challenge for Clarel comes when he must decide whether to augment his own beliefs, as well as how to do this, because of evidence presented by other pilgrims. In the final cantos of the poem, “The Night Ride” (4.29) and “The Valley of Decision” (4.30) serve as the most effective means to observe the final stages of Clarel’s unlearning.

The words from the Lyonese and the Muscovite continue to haunt Clarel. The unresolved conflict between easy and hard joys lingers for Clarel and the pilgrim-group’s proximity to Jerusalem brings a sense of urgency to the internal debate. The Lyonese’s
easy joys become more attractive to Clarel, particularly with the conclusion of the pilgrimage. Spirituality has failed to sustain Clarel during his trials and the narrator notes how the return to Jerusalem reinforces the redundancy of the search, both in terms of its spiritual and physical quests. "Rounding the waste circumference" (4.29.13), Clarel realizes that he discovers nothing tangible and the realization contains a dual significance tied together by the narrator’s exceptional phrasing. Clarel makes no spiritual strides towards rejuvenating his former beliefs because the physical structures he investigates are dead entities, incapable, as far as Clarel understands, of providing living proof. The pilgrimage, according to the narrator, seems to have been a “waste” of time because of the exploration of a “waste” land. But, this position needs qualification. The pilgrimage is a waste of Clarel’s time if the purpose of the pilgrimage is one-dimensional. If Clarel only intends through the pilgrimage to renew the faith of his former beliefs, then the narrator observes correctly. Clarel’s hopes have fallen short of the actual discoveries. In this sense, the pilgrimage is a failure. However, if Clarel’s self-discoveries, both in terms of his recognition of the new position of faith in his life, as well as his developing understanding of the subjective force of reality, can never be “failures,” Clarel, however unintentionally, reinforces the earlier claims that underlie his search from the poem’s opening canto. During “The Hostel” (1.1) canto, Clarel offers a long soliloquy regarding the purpose of his journey. In the evaluation of textual truths when confronted by the physical bases for these truths, Clarel implicitly recognizes how his own beliefs will be tied to his future experiences. Without experiences (and Clarel, at this point in the poem possesses very few) upon which to base his beliefs, Clarel accepts that he cannot truly believe. Clarel acknowledges that physical experiences must supplement the spiritual
beliefs: "'But here unlearning, how to me / Opes the expanse of time's vast sea! / Yes, I am young, but Asia old. / The books, the books not all have told'" (1.1.80-3). Because he accepts the process of unlearning as a re-education through experience, Clarel becomes more capable of synthesizing these same experiences into his own subjective understanding of their respective significances.

The argument stressing Clarel's development through unlearning, at least with regards to "The Night Ride" canto, is limited only to an extent by the fact that Clarel does not articulate these feelings, at least in his own words. The narrator provides Clarel's thoughts in the present canto, but this substitution has been happening throughout the poem. In terms of resolving Clarel's internal conflict, the narrator does not overstep his bounds. His direction, through questions instead of answers, guides Clarel. To prepare for the gravity of the forthcoming canto, the narrator introduces less significant material as preparation. He presents Belex and Djalea preoccupied with their thoughts regarding their compensation when the pilgrimage concludes. In these brief lines, the narrator reveals Belex's thoughts to be similar to those of Flask from *Moby-Dick* when regarding the doubloon. Only concerned with the monetary value of the doubloon, Flask imagines, rather practically, the number of cigars he will purchase if he can spot the White Whale first. Without considering the actual items of purchase, Belex, according to the narrator, "Rolls up and down those guineas bright / Whose minted recompense shall chink / In pouch of sash when travel's brink / Of end is won" (4.29.15-8). A man with money in his pocket, Belex will be able to indulge in whatever luxuries he wishes. Djalea's physical reserve cannot hide his thoughts from the narrator: "On coins his musings

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66 The point about the significance of Clarel's unlearning is first considered in Chapter Three. The earlier observation serves as the basis for the more developed consideration of unlearning as the end result of Clarel's experiences in Jerusalem.
likewise bend— / The starry sequins woven fair / Into black tresses” (4.29.21-3). Though describing Djalea’s thoughts to be more like Flask’s statements in this regard, the narrator quickly qualifies the point so as not to project upon the Druze an ill-suited and uncharacteristic shallowness. The function of the narrator’s brief description of the guides in this capacity stresses the contrast to come. For Clarel, the end of the pilgrimage looms more ominously than for either Belex or Djalea. The latter have their well-earned payments on top of their spiritual contentment; the former, the narrator alludes, has much still to unlearn before he reaches a position of solace.

Suggesting the night ride to be an appropriate time for reflection, the narrator notes the silence of each of the pilgrims, but reveals the extent to which Clarel makes use of the time. The change that comes to Clarel recalls the gam with the Lyonese, at least insofar as Clarel begins to consider the perspective of his former hostel-mate. The return to Jerusalem signals for Clarel the return to Ruth and his thoughts begin to entertain the possibilities of human fulfillment found in pursuits other than spiritual questing. The narrator calls Clarel’s discovery a “new emotion, inly held” (4.29.50), but Clarel’s emotions seem to signal another consideration regarding his choice of life. The abrupt switch from spiritual to something more akin to physical pursuits unnerves the narrator, as indicated by the series of questions he asks. Though more rhetorically than literally intended, the questions reveal the narrator’s beliefs that the spiritual pursuits are more significant than any alternatives and his tone hints at his disappointment that Clarel apparently chooses the easier route. The narrator alone speaks during this canto, but he provides Clarel’s point-of-view in order to clarify the distinction between the two positions. “One thing was clear, one thing in sooth: / Stays not the prime of June or
youth: / At flood that tide makes haste to ebb” (4.29.61-3), the narrator observes. If time is limited, the narrator has Clarel ask, why needlessly pursue unanswerable questions? Better to spend that time pursuing satisfying ends. These lines suggest that Clarel understands his own mortality. Because of this understanding, he chooses a different manner of spending his time. Clarel’s recognition and concession echo the Lyonese’s position regarding easy and hard joys. If Clarel understands the hard joys to be indecipherably cryptic, his willingness to entertain the pursuit of physical pleasure reveals the effects of the Lyonese’s argument.

The words of Ruth regarding her father’s zealotry return to Clarel and he understands the dangers of unwavering faith. The narrator interprets Ruth’s words as a warning, claiming, “She seemed to fear for him [Clarel], and say: / ‘Ah, tread not, sweet, my father’s way, / In whom this evil spirit wrought / And dragged us hither where we die!’” (4.29.66-9). The implicit message in Ruth’s warning that unquestioned allegiance to religious belief leads to death appears harsh, but Ruth’s intention seems to reinforce Clarel’s desire. If he wishes to find a reason to abandon his spiritual pursuits, Clarel creatively remembers Ruth’s words as he wishes to hear them. According to Ruth’s warning, Clarel should “tread not” as Nathan does. Overwhelmed by a zealous “evil spirit,” Nathan condemns his own family to death. Though Ruth’s words shortly will prove to be devastatingly prophetic; Clarel’s recall seems more like a justification for his own change, though he doesn’t really need one. The narrator offers as a parenthetical aside that Clarel, only now, interprets Ruth’s former words correctly: “(Now first aright construed, he thought)” (4.29.65). Immediately following Ruth’s warning, Clarel makes his decision. According to the narrator, “Yes, now would he forsake that road—“
(4.29.70), the road in question being the road of spiritual questing. Clarel decides to forsake these quests because he “hears” Ruth’s warning regarding zealotry. Though full of faith, a zealot possesses little else.

The presence of the Lyonese lingers in Clarel’s memories of Ruth. Because of this, Clarel begins the process of synthesizing the extreme choices offered by the Lyonese in order to have a life with Ruth. As an earthly, physical alternative to the road of zealous spiritual questing, Clarel turns to Ruth and Agar. The narrator concurs: “Alertly now and eager hie / To dame and daughter, where they trod / The Dolorosa—quick depart / With them and seek a happier sky” (4.29.71-4). Clarel decides that life with Ruth and Agar will be the best. Interestingly, the choice becomes an “easier” joy, a compromise between the Lyonese’s extremes of easy (exclusively physical) and hard (exclusively spiritual) joys. The synthesis embraces the sensual pleasures applauded by the Lyonese, but the spiritual component also remains.

The potentialities in this union for Clarel bring an unforeseen levity to his travels about which the narrator remains suspicious. Though Clarel appears rejuvenated by the gratifying conclusions he reaches, the narrator imagines his choice to be whimsical and erratic. Because he cannot accept so rapid a change in Clarel, the narrator seeks the reasons for this change. Because he asks rhetorical questions, the narrator does not expect answers. However, he does implicate the Lyonese as being responsible for Clarel’s capriciousness: “The Lyonese, to sense so dear, / Nor less from faith a fugitive— / Had he infected Clarel here?” (4.29.83-5). The narrator uses recognizably loaded language. By claiming the Lyonese infects Clarel, the narrator limits the individual capacities of the student. Certainly Clarel is impressionable and this is
attributable mostly to his youth. However, for the narrator to claim only the Lyonese possesses the ability to infect Clarel reveals the narrator’s bias. He does not object to the possibility that Rolfe, Derwent, or Vine potentially infect Clarel. Nor does the narrator object to the infection that may result from Clarel’s experiences with Nehemiah, the myriad monks along the pilgrimage route, or Abdon. The narrator may fear for Clarel’s ability to choose for himself because he distrusts Clarel’s movement towards subjectivity. Perhaps the narrator reveals himself unwillingly in this situation because he seems to assume too much authority to exist in what he calls Clarel’s capriciousness. If Clarel hastily decides to abandon his spirituality in favor of Ruth, the narrator should realize that the possibility exists that Clarel, at some future time, will change his mind again.

By calling the Lyonese a “fugitive” from faith, and by claiming Clarel to be infected by the Lyonese’s influence, the narrator argues from the presumption that having faith is necessarily better than not having faith. This may be the case. But the narrator’s choice of words reveals a particular bias. By applying the fugitive label, the narrator suggests that the Lyonese intentionally flees from faith as an intolerable situation. Perhaps most damning (though it is uncertain that the narrator’s accusation extends to this point), the narrator suggests that faith exists akin to justice or a right way of life. The narrator’s assumption here is valid only from a particular point-of-view. One who accepts faith to be superior will necessarily understand another who does not hold the same perspective as incapable of recognizing the “truth” of the situation. However, in opposition to the narrator’s observation, one could argue with the same line of reasoning from the position of non-faith and reach the same conclusion: those pursuing faith are equally fugitive from the truth. The narrator’s tone seems clear. He intends to reveal the Lyonese as a
kind of rogue element, at least with regards to the narrator’s perception of the Lyonese’s blasphemy. By doing so, he attempts to foretell Clarel’s future if he cannot change his views. At least with regards to these two brief examples, the narrator betrays an agenda with regards to Clarel. He wants the young student to experience doubt because these experiences reveal the struggle that takes place within Clarel’s spiritual psyche. Once the narrator extends his concern for Clarel’s experience to the point where he seems to have a vested interest in the student’s return to faith, it becomes too difficult to see the narrator as a neutral party. Though he hides his biases rather well throughout the poem, these two examples in his word choice reveal a disconcerting trait.

The narrator concedes the point regarding Clarel’s potential for future change. Whatever infection exists, Clarel reverts to considerations of his “nobler part” that pursues faith, or at least he does so through his considerations of the potential failings of the physical pursuits. When Clarel, through the narrator, asks, “What end may prove?” (4.29.86), the narrator reveals Clarel’s anxiety. He wants certainty for his choice, but he also wants to know the consequences of making specific choices. He wants to know what the outcome will be for his choice to live by sensual dictates. Clarel knows he will encounter challenges that he cannot anticipate, particularly in the person of Ruth. Though he seeks the physical union with Ruth as a means of limiting the incessant spiritual questing, he recognizes the possibility that he cannot understand Ruth completely. What appears to be comprehensible now may reveal hidden mysteries later. For example, Clarel considers Ruth to be both an “almoner to Saba’s dove” (4.29.87) and “bodeful text of hermit-rhyme” (4.29.88). At this seeming moment of comprehension, however, Clarel considers the possibility that Ruth may not be such things. He uses four
questions to contemplate the mysteries of Ruth that he imagines either are unknowable or incomprehensible at the present moment. It is unlikely that Clarel desires specific answers when he asks the questions. Instead, he articulates the possibility that his choice to pursue physical joys contains the same unknowable aspects as the pursuit of spiritual joys. Because Clarel wants Ruth to be his salvation from the abyss of spiritual pursuits, he postulates that Ruth is a comprehensible entity. If serenity comes from “knowing” something to be the case, Clarel recognizes that very little serenity may come from his spiritual questing. However, when Clarel chooses Ruth as the representative of the easy joys he wishes to pursue, he simply makes the same mistake from the opposite end of the spectrum by presuming the validity of the either/or fallacy. More clearly, Clarel assumes a human entity to be comprehensible simply because he is human also. He assumes that the gap between his own humanity and God’s divinity accounts for the difficulties inherent in the pursuit of spiritual knowledge; in this case, Clarel’s assumption is not flawed. When he assumes this gap does not exist between individual humans, however, Clarel fails to recognize what he learns from his fellow pilgrims. Simply wanting something to be the case does not make it so. Clarel should know this from his own experiences with his failed spiritual pursuits. Yet, he wants Ruth to solve his problems. It seems that Clarel still does not accept the fact that he alone remains responsible for his own understanding, as well as his own serenity.

The four questions Clarel asks reveal his slow discovery of the flaw in his projections upon Ruth. Though he wishes Ruth to be an “almoner,” a caretaker for the present; as well as the “bodeful text,” the predictor for the future; he cannot completely free himself from contemplations of Ruth’s mysteries. This concern for unseen mysteries, of course,
reveals Clarel's projections for Ruth, as much as it may anticipate Ruth's own shortcomings. However, past experience dictates to Clarel that this must be the case. He knows, for example, that understanding his fellow man remains as improbable as ever. His encounters with Vine particularly reveal such limitations. Clarel's suspicions are characteristic or at least mindful of what his past experiences should lead him to believe. Regarding Ruth, Clarel asks: 1) if she is trustworthy (4.29.89); 2) if woman herself understands her own mysteries (4.29.90-1); 3) if love's union provides its own means to destruction (4.29.92-3); and, 4) if nature foresees this destruction all the while making the draw between man and woman "natural" (4.29.94-9). Dark in tone, Clarel's questions presuppose a struggle between an evil force and a benevolent force. Similar to the conclusions he draws from the experiences on the pilgrimage, Clarel believes the evil forces to be winning. But Clarel wants to be free of the struggle with divine powers he cannot understand, particularly since the struggle pits man against his own nature. If natural "law" (4.29.102) and instinct "draw / Through sacred impulse" (4.29.103-4) man and woman together; Clarel understands that taking Ruth as his wife seems to be as much directed by fate as by his own free choice. Once Clarel recognizes this dilemma, he can make an informed choice. Though the narrator concludes the consideration without specific reference, Clarel appears willing to take his chances with Ruth. He opts for the proof of life to come through wedded bliss. Unfortunately, Clarel's attempt to answer the question "What end may prove?" comes too easily. Clarel has not unlearned all that he must unlearn before he can begin anew. By choosing a life with Ruth, Clarel simply makes an easy substitute—he is no closer to understanding the reasons for his choices. He imagines that Ruth represents a path with fewer obstacles. Regardless of his choice of
easy joys, hard joys, or some synthesis, Clarel must first understand that each choice demands deliberation in order that he may experience, evaluate, and decide for himself the relative significance that each pursuit offers.

When the action of the canto returns to the movements of the pilgrim group, the narrator cleverly cloaks in the language of metaphor a distinctly recognizable change in Clarel. Drawing the reader's attention to a physical point, the narrator observes: "Far, in upland spot / A light is seen in Rama paling; / But Clarel sped, and heeded not, / At least recalled not Rachel wailing" (4.29.110-3). The light that dims at the unspecified "upland spot" metaphorically links itself through allusion to the Biblical Rachel and each reveals a significant, though abrupt, change in Clarel. The dimming light represents Clarel's continuing fall from faith. He finds fewer and fewer examples of a benevolent God in the experiences of the pilgrimage. Clarel consciously chooses one course of life over another because he imagines that his life with Ruth can provide the fulfillment that his years of theological study and the present questing have not. As previously mentioned, Clarel makes an easy substitute. Because of this, his spiritual light dims. But more importantly, Clarel refuses to acknowledge the dimming light linked to the cries of Rachel. The narrator observes, "Clarel sped, and heeded not" because he chooses not to associate Rachel's call to her lost children to be linked metaphorically to his own spiritual lapse. He can no longer "hear;" or he chooses not to "hear;" the cries of spirituality. Perhaps he hears but does not want to acknowledge his own fugitive state, if the narrator's observation regarding the Lyonese now applies to Clarel. In his haste to find some sense of peace with Ruth, Clarel imagines he must dismiss outright the possibility that the pursuits may be linked. Clarel still does not recognize the possibility. For Clarel, the
choice remains between competing extremes because he remains unaware of the necessity of synthesis.

The final image of the canto continues to employ metaphor as a means of revealing Clarel’s disintegrating spirituality. As devastating as the narrator wants this to be for Clarel, it becomes a “positive” loss with regards to Clarel’s unlearning. The narrator describes the sky and the stars in the closing lines of the canto. Though the pilgrims continue their progress towards Jerusalem, “The valley slept—/ Obscure, in monitory dream / Oppressive, roofed with awful skies / Whose stars like silver nail-heads gleam / Which stud some lid over lifeless eyes” (4.29.148-53). Just as Clarel consciously refuses to acknowledge the cries of Rachel that the narrator suggests he hears, a symbolic lid closes on Clarel’s faith. By closing his ears to the cries of faith; by choosing the fugitive life with his selection of Ruth; Clarel entombs himself in the hopes that his physical relationship will provide the meaning he imagines his life otherwise lacks. From the narrator’s perspective, Clarel’s choice and the consequences of the tomb limit the possibility of his salvation.

For the external reader willing to understand Clarel’s choice as the final phase of unlearning his spiritual ties, one sees hope in the canto’s closing image, but not hope as it has been understood to this point. When Clarel hopes that his spirituality will return throughout the pilgrimage, he looks for the physical means to replace his spiritual loss.

Wyn Kelley observes the imagery in this scene inverts the Romantic sensibilities of American Transcendental notions of nature. For Kelley, the city, not nature, holds the possibility for Clarel’s renewed faith. The city possesses the spiritual; nature, obviously, the natural. The former promotes, in the context of the poem, an internal, private searching; the latter promotes a public and social searching. The city has the power to save because it stresses time on a human scale whereas nature has the power to destroy because it stresses time on a geological scale. Even regarding the possibility that faith, ultimately, evades Clarel by the end of the poem, Kelley observes: “Although the spirit may elude one, the overwhelming evidence of faith is as moving in its way as direct divine inspiration would be; and it is all that human beings have” (Kelley 27).
By unlearning all of his spiritual attachments; by returning to a kind of blank slate; Clarel affords himself the opportunity for a self-directed construction of spirituality. He looks, at this point, for an appropriate synthesis because it will be one based on his past experiences with spirituality. His reconstruction of spirituality will be on his own terms, not those dependent upon the authority of ancient texts, themselves dependent upon myths and legends of the past. Until he has similar experiences with the physical component, however, Clarel does not have the capacity for synthesis. He must experience the physical component and have reason to abandon these experiences before he can comprehend the physical joys as something other than an idealization. Clarel’s naïve abandonment of spirituality for Ruth and the possibility of salvation through her suggest that something dreadful must befall Ruth in order for Clarel’s experiences to be based upon something real. Only at this point of loss will Clarel most completely experience the process of unlearning that will allow for his subjective determination of life. But, Clarel’s decisions regarding his choice of life will never simply exist as unalterable constants, like easy and hard joys. Nor will Clarel’s choice of life be limited to a single pursuit. He will pursue easy joys and hard joys at various times. But he will also pursue joys that are syntheses of the two. In order to define himself satisfactorily, Clarel will need to find an acceptable synthesis of the many pursuits of the past that have given him pleasure and contentment. Through the synthesis, Clarel will find the means to experience life as fully as possible. He will not feel one pursuit necessarily excludes another pursuit. Rather, he will need to find the synthesis that most readily allows him to satisfy the many shades of spiritual and physical longings.
During “The Valley of Decision” (4.30) canto, the pilgrims return to Jerusalem. One last discovery remains for Clarel before he enters the gates of Jerusalem. By deciding to redirect his course of life towards Ruth, Clarel potentially limits future anxieties like the ones he encounters during his spiritual pursuits. The Hebrew grave-diggers represent the final obstacle which Clarel must confront and overcome, to the extent that it is possible, in order to unlearn all of his assumptions about life. The previous canto reveals Clarel’s final disillusionments with the authority of spiritual matters. “The Valley of Decision” details the destruction of Clarel’s last hope for solace. When he discovers Ruth and Agar, Clarel curses his fate and questions the existence of a God capable of allowing such individual suffering. Without hope for spiritual salvation or solace in a physical union, where, Clarel seems to ask, does man find meaning in life?

The foreshadowing of Ruth’s death comes in “The Night Ride” and “The Valley of Decision” cantos. Clarel remembers Ruth’s warning against following her father’s zealous ways (4.29.67-9). The focus of the warning comes from the concluding word. Ruth implies death to be the only result of such actions. If Clarel interprets the warning to be for himself only, he misunderstands the force of the warning. He believes that by avoiding the path of zealotry he may avoid Nathan’s fate. However, Ruth’s warning needs to be more broadly applied. Because Nathan chooses to bring the family to Jerusalem, he condemns them to death. Ruth’s fate is already determined. Even if Clarel consciously chooses not to follow Nathan’s path, he cannot save Ruth. Nathan’s choices determine her fate. Clarel interprets the warning too narrowly, concluding that he should not pursue the hard joys of spiritual enlightenment. The following couplet from the narrator allows such an interpretation: “Warblings he heard of hope in heart, /
Responded to by duty’s hymn” (4.29.75-6). Instead of understanding the stakes of the communication through deliberate consideration, Clarel merely “heard” the “warblings.” Then, Clarel “responded to” this brief warning. The prepositional phrases contain the motivation for his quick action. Because of the “hope” lodged in his “heart,” Clarel imagines a dutiful responsibility. Though the “hymn” responsible for his dutiful feelings remains unspecified, Clarel concludes the duty to be towards the union of man and woman. He responds to Ruth’s warning in a manner befitting his current spiritual state. He seeks resolution and fulfillment for the sense of emptiness he feels at his dissipating faith. Because Clarel wants a quick and easy answer for his current crisis, he does not give Ruth’s warning its due attention.

By “The Valley of Decision” canto, Clarel becomes so engrossed by the idea of returning to Ruth that he chastises himself for leaving her in the first place (4.30.11-32). He imagines, “the lines he writ / Upon the eve before the start / For Siddim, failed, or were unfit— / Came short of the occasion’s tone” (4.30.20-3). Recalling “the lines he writ,” there does not seem to be any failure on Clarel’s part for which he should concern himself. The letter and the ring are appropriate tokens of Clarel’s affection and condolences. Forbidden from participating in mourning by Jewish ceremonial law, Clarel chooses an acceptable means of passing the time, particularly as the sites he expects to encounter on the pilgrimage serve the very purposes for his trip to Jerusalem. The tone of the lamentation seems more curious than the lamentation itself. Clarel’s guilt here suggests that there will be no means to assuage these feelings. Clarel believes he “came short of the occasion’s tone” and the implicit fear underlying this belief is the

68 Clarel refers to the “Tidings” (1.42) canto, in which the narrator notes: “But first of all, he letters sent / Brief, yet dictated by the heart— / Announced his plan’s constrained intent / Reluctant; and consigned a ring / For pledge of love and Ruth’s remembering” (1.42.83-7).
inability to rectify the situation. Clarel, however unconsciously, knows a chasm exists between his intention with the letter and ring and its result. If Clarel suspects Ruth to be waiting for his return, he realizes that any miscommunication can be made right at the reunion. However, if Clarel suspects something to have befallen Ruth during his pilgrimage, his grief at the letter’s failure is appropriate. He will not be able to make amends for the failure. Such an interpretation makes the narrator’s claim to Clarel’s “revulsion” (4.30.7) particularly appropriate. Clarel intuits something to be amiss and he fears the return to Jerusalem.

Djalea recognizes the Hebrew grave-diggers from afar. Clarel’s fears are validated by Djalea’s revelation—he will not have the opportunity to amend any miscommunication with Ruth. As the narrator observes the “broidered scarf, love’s first chance gift” (4.30.67), Clarel’s hope for easy joys dissolves. If Ruth was to be his salvation from aimlessness, Clarel confronts his greatest crisis of the poem. If he no longer believes in spiritual pursuits and his hope for physical union lies before him in a shallow grave, Clarel risks stasis and the deteriorating capacities of his unwillingness to act. Confronted by this possibility, Clarel reacts accordingly, casting blame on all available agents: God (4.30.86); the Jews and their ceremonial laws (4.30.90-2); the “‘blind, blind, barren universe!’” (4.30.93). Distraught by the circumstances, Clarel even succumbs to the temptation to claim his presence would have saved Ruth and Agar had he been allowed: “‘Had I been near, this had not been’” (4.30.96). Though Clarel’s romantic claims seem admirable, there is no basis for such claims. Clarel no more possesses the ability to prevent such occurrences than he does the ability to foresee such occurrences. Though Clarel wants and needs his statement to be true because it allows
him to maintain his hope for his own future, Ruth's death, as far as Clarel can tell, symbolizes his own death. If Clarel sees Ruth to be the only means for his wanderings to stop, her death reveals just how few options remain. Clarel has dismissed the validity of hard joys and Ruth's death prevents the experience of easy joys. For Clarel to make any progress he must recognize the need for synthesis—he must find an acceptable and valid sum by fusing the two aforementioned "failures." Hard joys and easy joys may not serve his purposes, but some compromise between the two must be found.

Before Clarel comes to the realization regarding synthesis, he offers a final condemning curse of faith. Though overly dramatic, Clarel's curse acknowledges his understanding of Ruth's earlier warning, as well as providing a point of reflection for the somber "Dirge" (4.31) canto. Though his recognition comes too late, Clarel appreciates the comfort that comes from it nonetheless: "'And here's the furl / Of Nathan's faith: then perish faith—' 'Tis perjured!—Take me, take me, Death! / Where Ruth is gone, me thither whirl, / Where'er it be!'" (4.30.102-6). Though Clarel's appeal for reunion with Ruth seems most prominent, it is necessary to appreciate the appeal for what it suggests without dismissing its sentimentality. Clarel, at this moment, desires a reunion with Ruth, but he knows invoking Death to be as fruitless a gesture as his earlier condemnation of God. He knows, rationally speaking, that Death will come for him at some future time. If he chooses to continue his belief in an afterlife, Clarel knows his reunion with Ruth to be inevitable. However, when mocked for his dramatic appeal by the Hebrew grave-diggers, Clarel understands his new synthesis point. He may no longer have the assurance of spiritual guidance; and he may no longer have the physical solace of Ruth; Clarel does possess, however, the capacity to recognize that these particular
losses do not signal his individual end. Nor does it seem to extinguish his hope that the future holds unforeseen positive possibilities, not merely suffering.

Clarel most closely approaches the status of hero in his triumphant realization that endurance exists as a suitable synthesis point and guide for his own subjective evaluation of life. In a speech worthy of any modernist hero, Clarel claims: "'Spurn—I'll endure; all spirit's fled / When one fears nothing.—Bear with me, / Yet bear!—Conviction is not gone / Though faith's gone: that which shall not be / It ought to be!'" (4.30.114-8). Clarel chooses to endure because he knows endurance does not exclude the hope that things may change. He chooses to challenge his own powerlessness not as an indication of his need for guidance, but as an acknowledgment of his own limitations. Instead of searching for consolation for these limitations in the form of spirituality or physical union, Clarel confronts the freedom implied by his recognition of powerlessness. He may choose to be anything he wishes to be; he may find solace wherever he chooses to find solace. But he will do so on his own terms, according to his own definitions of validity. Neither choice depends upon any socially accepted construction. Though his claims to conviction suggest he remains hopeful for the future possibility of being persuaded to believe; Clarel qualifies these beliefs by acknowledging his lack of confidence in the system of belief itself. Conviction remains; faith does not, at least for the present. Choosing to endure, Clarel accepts that living, without regard to its quality, becomes the greatest success, hinting as some critics have noted at the poem's early confrontation of the absurd dilemma.

The pilgrim group returns to Jerusalem as the sun rises on Ash Wednesday. With the end of the pilgrimage, the pilgrims themselves go their separate ways leaving Clarel
alone to contemplate his future. The narrator notes the sympathy Rolfe, Vine, and
Derwent feel for Clarel's loss, stressing, "each was loth,— / How loth to leave him, or to
go / Be first" (4.32.9-11). However reluctant, each realizes he can do nothing to ease
Clarel's grief. Recognizing his own strides towards independence and subjectivity,
Clarel would not be able to accept the efforts of his fellow pilgrims. Clarel's grief,
unfortunately, is his own and he must make of it what he will. For any individual to
relieve him of his grief through word or deed would diminish the authority of Clarel's
claims to endure. His suffering, in this instance, must remain—it can be his only
companion. The narrator understands this distinction, highlighting Clarel's isolation in a
brief, but powerful observation. The quatrain applies to the pilgrimage in toto, but most
specifically to Clarel's chosen condition. Regarding the remaining individuals of the
pilgrim group, the narrator observes: "Friendly they tarried—blameless went: / Life,
avaricious, still demands / Her own, and more; the world is rent / With partings"
(4.32.13-6). Each pilgrim must lead his own life, regardless of a social group's seeming
capacity, for instance, to dictate otherwise. The groupings, no matter their duration, must
dissolve at some point. At the dissolution, the individual remains alone, for better or for
worse. The partings, in this sense, are physical. But they may also be spiritual or
emotional. The narrator alludes to change, both as an external and internal phenomenon,
as the focus of Clarel's endurance.

The remainder of the poem presents an early picture of Clarel enduring. Though
noting a great deal of time passes in the final three cantos, Clarel remains mostly silent.
He utters only three lines, not much dialogue for the roughly fourteen weeks that
transpire between the return to Jerusalem on Ash Wednesday (4.30.145) and the
conclusion of the poem on Whitsuntide (4.34.22). The narrator draws attention to Clarel’s earliest passage of time by contemplating his reasons for remaining in the city. To highlight his didactic intentions, the narrator asks: “But, since all are gone, / Why lingers he, the stricken one? / Why linger where no hope can be?” (4.32.16-8). The reason for Clarel’s lingering can only be his choice to endure. Though suggesting an inquisitive reader “Ask grief, love ask” (4.32.19) in order to discover these answers, the narrator intends that only Clarel’s grief and love can answer these questions. There is no means to address the grief and love of another. As such, the narrator implies, though empathy defines an individual’s humanity, that nothing more specific can be gained from the inquiry. By personifying grief and love, the narrator inadvertently undermines his own point. Grief and love do not exist as external entities to which an individual may turn. The examination is internally driven. The individual capable of these internal examinations may discover on his own what an external agent could not possibly offer. The discoveries come only from the ability to sustain the prolonged effort, all the while recognizing the possibility that nothing will be discovered.

Clarel endures through the remainder of the “Passion Week” (4.32) canto while he witnesses the rituals of pilgrims and friars as Easter approaches. Clarel witnesses in silence, more comfortable when contemplating the significance of the rituals for the present believers than actively participating. The narrator describes Clarel’s activities in general terms until he considers Clarel’s vision at sundown on Good Friday where he sees the dead walk before him, amongst them Nehemiah, Celio, Mortmain, Nathan, Agar, and Ruth. When Clarel sees these former friends, he witnesses a kind of procession of his unlearned beliefs and hopes. Nehemiah’s blind faith; Celio’s haunting doubts;
Mortmain’s betrayed faith in man; Nathan’s zealotry; Agar’s symbolic promise of the maternal care Clarel never had; Ruth’s promise of physical union as an escape from spiritual wandering; each represents an interior obstacle Clarel overcomes in order to reach his present state. By confronting these internal crises over the course of the poem, Clarel risks the solemnity of the pilgrims and friars he now observes. Though his process of unlearning recreates him, Clarel does not shy from acknowledging the fear that lingers once he confronts these past experiences. Each experience, as represented by the individual, contributes to his present condition and present choice. Through difficult situations like the present vision, Clarel learns to test his resolve regarding endurance. He knows the challenge posed by endurance is far greater than simply claiming a course of action in the midst of emotional turmoil. The decision to endure comes from the recognition of Ruth’s death as a fulcrum in his life. Either he chooses to subject himself to the whims of fate or he chooses to confront these same whims with dignity. Clarel’s first challenge since the claim to endure comes from the procession of the dead and his fears as noted by the narrator highlight the commitment to endure. Without knowing “Where, where now He who helpeth us, / The Comforter?” (4.32.103-4), Clarel exhibits his desire to endure even without resolution to the question. Whatever comfort Clarel finds will come from the willingness to subject himself to dismay as a test for his capacity to endure.

Clarel continues his self-test through the observations of the Easter rituals. As the pilgrims conclude their rituals, Clarel watches the procession of believers depart. The narrator describes the scene “As ‘twere a frieze” (4.34.26), noting the various shapes and sizes of pilgrims united by common beliefs. In the “Via Crucis” (4.34) canto, the narrator
connects the paths of the pilgrims returning home to the path Christ walked on his way to
the crucifixion. Both the pilgrims and Christ adhere to the dictates of nature with regard
to following their respective paths. For the pilgrims, the paths leading home radiate from
Jerusalem much like spokes from the hub of a bicycle wheel. As the hub connecting the
spokes, Jerusalem remains central, both physically and spiritually speaking. However
different the pilgrims; whatever paths they walk away from Jerusalem; each walks as
guided by faith. Though these same paths hold pain, suffering, and death, as evidenced
by the example of Christ and the Via Crucis; the individual who walks the path
participates in the maintenance of tradition in a two-fold manner. Simply by walking the
path, the individual maintains the usefulness of the path. From a spiritual perspective, the
individual uses the path as the road to and from Jerusalem while participating in
pilgrimage. The path symbolizes the faith of the adherent. Whether Christ actually
walked this particular Via Crucis becomes an unimportant detail with regards to faith.
The legend claims the story to be true. For the faithful, the existence of the legend, as
maintained by tradition, provides enough evidence. Truth-value supercedes actual truth.

Clarel’s presence on these paths complicates matters. He claims his own faith is
dead, but he participates in the ritual anyway. In a way, Clarel’s presence suggests a
grand act of faith, but it is difficult to determine the extent to which Clarel recognizes his
actions as such. Neither Clarel nor the narrator provides enough evidence from which to
draw an informed conclusion. But, it seems clear that Clarel understands his presence in
Jerusalem to be connected to his insistence on his capacity to endure. Because of his
choice to endure, Clarel transforms his vision of Jerusalem as the symbolic representative
of all that he has lost, but also as the representative of all that he must endure. He curses
faith and God, but only as outbursts, his immediate emotional reaction to the horror of Ruth's death. Clarel wants to believe again; he simply must learn how to do so.

The process of relearning becomes Clarel's particular cross to bear. If the narrator observes correctly that all the pilgrims of the frieze are "Cross-bearers" (4.34.43), Clarel becomes part of the group. Though a distinction needs to be made between the faithful and Clarel, each works to discover how to live. The faithful find life to be more bearable when their suffering and pain can be viewed as meaningful, as part of an unknowable design woven by a benevolent God. Clarel does not hold this view. But his loss of faith does not make his condition unique. If all persons are cross-bearers, Clarel's condition is no more sympathetic simply for the clarity and the detail provided. The narrator may not specify the pains of doubt as suffered by the unnamed pilgrims. But this does not mean the pains do not exist. In fact, without specific information, one as likely concludes the pilgrims suffer from doubt as he concludes the pilgrims do not suffer. Clarel is not like the other pilgrims insofar as he cannot truly be called a pilgrim. His status as pilgrim exists only in the most embryonic stages. Clarel remains emotionally balanced between the Comforter and Erebus (4.32.104). He possesses all of the requisite parts; he needs only to manage them more recognizably.

Because he has yet to understand how this may be done, Clarel stands apart from the departing pilgrims. The narrator notes Clarel to be "lagging after" (4.34.45) the others before asking, "who is he / Called early every hope to test, / And now, at close of rarer quest, / Finds so much more the heavier tree?" (4.34.45-48). Tasked to prove, to test his beliefs, Clarel discovers by the end of the pilgrimage that he has no proof. The assumptions regarding faith and life which made life bearable before only highlight the
present loss. These are the results of Clarel’s unlearning. He lags behind the pilgrim train because he does not belong as a part of it. But he also lags behind because he has no place to go, no home to which he might return. Clarel’s home, for now, must be Jerusalem. He remains physically separate because of his spiritual separation. Until he discovers how to live without either faith or Ruth, Clarel willingly condemns himself to endless search. Though silent for some time, Clarel offers three brief lines as commentary on his present condition, being the product of a society driven by the promises of modernity. The narrator notes Clarel, “murmurs in low tone: / ‘They wire the world—far under sea / They talk; but never comes to me / A message from beneath the stone’” (4.34.50-3). The fact that the narrator calls Clarel’s statement a murmur is as significant as the words he speaks because the murmur implies the statements to be indistinct or uncertain. Clarel’s choice to murmur suggests his own apprehension in revealing these statements. There are at least two interpretive possibilities: he chooses to murmur either because he fears hearing himself make the disheartening claim or he does not yet know how to live beyond this acknowledgment. If he fears making the claim audibly, Clarel maintains hope that things will change in the future. The message he hopes to hear from beneath the stone may reach him; his faith may return. If the murmur reveals Clarel to consider his condition to be without hope, his return to Jerusalem is appropriate. Only there will Clarel find the means to believe otherwise. If he seeks faith, he must reside at the inspirational source; he must reside where faith flourishes.

Clarel’s words stress the two great losses he experiences during the pilgrimage. Though modern technology makes communication possible over great distances,\(^69\) Clarel can no longer “hear” the call to faith made by Christ or the call to marriage with Ruth.

\(^69\) Bezanson notes the completion of the Atlantic cable to be Clarel’s reference (Clarel 839).
The inability to hear the call of faith stresses again Clarel’s belief that faith is dead for him. As such, he fears the impossibility of rejoining the fold. But these fears and traumas provide the most fertile tests for Clarel’s hope to endure. If he can manage to overcome these burdens; if he can return to faith in some unspecified future or realize the possibility of a physical union with another woman; Clarel’s triumph becomes one of his own will. Because of his decision to pursue subjective truths, Clarel becomes wholly responsible for his own successes and failures. He may have no support in his enterprises, but his discoveries and successes will be his own. Before the somber tone of the concluding canto, Clarel exhibits courage and dignity in the face of odds insurmountable if for no other reason than Clarel’s inability to comprehend the challenges before him. Clarel accepts that life goes on, just as the narrator suggests: “But though the freshet quite be gone— / Sluggish, life’s wonted stream flows on” (4.33.75-6).

Turning his back on Mt. Olivet, Clarel returns to Jerusalem. The narrator offers these final lines: “Dusked Olivet he leaves behind, / And, taking now a slender wynd, / Vanishes in the obscurer town” (4.34.54-6). Either Clarel disappears into Jerusalem’s “obscurer” parts, those not well known; or he returns to a city that is “obscurer” than previously considered during a time of faith. From either perspective, Clarel’s challenge is great. His commitment to discovery seems to be grand, but so are the odds against him. But, if hope does not remain in Clarel, it is difficult to understand his willingness to toil endlessly and without the prospect of discovery. Clarel must possess hope that he will find the truths within himself that will make his life meaningful. This assumption intends to comfort the reader even if it does not comfort Clarel. As Clarel vanishes into
Jerusalem, he parallels Coleridge’s Wedding Guest at the conclusion of “Rime of the Ancient Mariner.” Clarel certainly will awake the next morning a sadder and a wiser man. But, these emotional developments and intellectual discoveries provide the impetus for the change he so desperately deserves.

The Epilogue

Critical opinion of the Epilogue differs greatly. Because Leon Howard argues the drama of the poem to be more psychological than philosophical, he notes the Epilogue to provide an “emotional satisfaction” (Howard 307) rather than any discovery of Platonic Truth. For Howard, Melville, not Clarel, comes to accept the difficult reality that doubt and uncertainty do not necessarily constitute reasons for despair (309). Ronald Mason agrees with Howard. He argues that an act of faith alone, regardless of the improbable resolution of doubt as the result, works more towards easing internal conflict. As such, he interprets the Epilogue to be Melville’s triumph, not Clarel’s (Mason 242). James E. Miller, Jr., believes the Epilogue does not stress hope as much as it encourages an acceptance of the “human burden” (Miller 217), those limitations on head and heart that must find meaningful ways of dealing with a seemingly meaningless void. Kenneth Requa does not interpret the Epilogue as optimistically. Requa argues Clarel will continue his circuitous search without the hope of finding anything of value. He claims, ultimately, “Clarel’s pilgrimage has no goal” (Querci 17) if his journey only searches. Margaret Jennings notes the narrator’s use of the subjunctive tense to be a “feeble” (Jennings 55) sense of hope. Stan Goldman argues the Epilogue serves as a summation of the competing voices throughout the poem. Hope stresses the internal divinity of the characters while acknowledging the imminence of God (Goldman, “The Small Voice of
Finally, James Duban examines the theme of “manaolana,” the Hawaiian concept of endurance, the so-called “swimming thought,” as the dominant image of the Epilogue (Duban, “From Bethlehem to Tahiti” 476). Duban’s emphasis becomes the image of the swimmer rising from deep waters of investigation and thought. The endurance exhibited by the swimmer suggests for Duban a faith against all odds. From this position, Duban argues the Epilogue contains hope that is central to the positive rendering of the poem’s overall theme. And Bezanson, at the conclusion of his exceptional supplement, notes: “Melville encoded into his long, essentially disconsolate poem a thread of hope for Stoics like himself. The concluding octet which follows offers a much wider hope, not for the narrator, but for the young seeker, Clarel” (Clarel 840).

These examples serve only as an exhibition of the competing interpretive strands regarding the Epilogue. One understands the differences of opinion. Structurally, the line lengths in the Epilogue differ from the line lengths in the rest of the poem. Thematically, the pessimism and despair that characterizes most of the pilgrimage seems quickly replaced. The narrator’s tone differs in his approach to Clarel. Though always invested in Clarel’s progress, the narrator in the Epilogue seems content to offer the likelihood that Clarel will find contentment. Though he masks his assertions in subjunctive conjugations, the narrator gives hope for Clarel, however reservedly. But the reserve on the part of the narrator does not interfere with insightful interpretation of the Epilogue. Hope does not need to be forceful. The slightest possibility functions as capably as the most forceful inevitability. The battle will continue to be waged between faith and science, as noted by the narrator, because hope does not entirely depend on the validity of either of the competing promises for truth. Clarel shows his unwillingness to
lose all hope by his choice to remain in Jerusalem. That choice alone represents an act of faith greater than any he performs previously. He believes in his own ability to find the subjective truths he seeks. From this perspective, the narrator's subjunctive constructions reveal affirmations more than suspicions. "Even death may prove unreal at the last, / And stoics be astounded into heaven" (4.35.25-6), if Clarel maintains faith in himself. Clarel exhibits his stoicism over the poem's final cantos, the nearly fourteen weeks in which he observes the actions of the faithful pilgrims without offering comment. The message has yet to reach Clarel from beneath the stone, but he does not need this message in order to continue his search. The message, like Clarel's other ideals of spirituality and physical union, exists only beyond his ability to hear. Otherwise, Clarel searches without a reference point. The impossibility of acquiring the kind of knowledge which makes spirituality and faith "easy" ensures the continuation of the pursuit. The same is true for physical union, particularly regarding Ruth. Clarel's memories of Ruth constitute an idealization. Though he may achieve a substitute union, Clarel will never achieve the union with Ruth. The impossibility of acquiring the kind of knowledge, and serenity, offered by Ruth ensures the continuation of the pursuit.

An unaddressed distinction with regard to Clarel possibly acquiring the knowledge he seeks, either spiritually, physically, or through synthesis like endurance, comes from the same subjunctive claims made by the narrator. These claims undermine Clarel's subjective interests in favor of a more objectively recognizable end. Each of the narrator's subjunctive claims concern themselves with the knowledge to come from the experience of death. In each, the narrator hopes the experience of death will reveal the "answers" to the questions of man's existence. Because the narrator cannot know the
results of the experience of death, he constructs his statements carefully. "[D]eath may prove unreal at the last" and Clarel may discover "death but routs life into victory" (4.35.34), but the narrator offers no certainty to Clarel. The narrator does want Clarel's discoveries, in both instances, to "prove" (4.35.25; 4.35.34) a particular point. One way or the other, Clarel's discoveries potentially offer the narrator answers. But, if the answers only come with the experience of death, Clarel possesses no means of transmitting these answers to another individual. The narrator's observations are either amazingly naïve, if he wishes for Clarel's discoveries to be made available to himself or others; or amazingly sophisticated, if he constructs the subjective pursuit of knowledge and truth as an objective quest. The former consideration seems obvious. The latter, however, deserves a closer look.

By suggesting the possibility of Clarel proving anything with regards to the experiences of death, the narrator alludes to these proofs potentially offering an objective body of knowledge from which all persons can benefit. Proof, in fact, seems to imply an objective concern. A mathematical proof, for example, reveals the means of discovering how one quantity relates to another. As such, the solution becomes an objective piece of knowledge that contributes to the greater understanding of mathematical relationships. Clarel's potential discoveries with regards to death would benefit all individuals with questions relating to spirituality or existence. The problem of transmitting Clarel's discoveries halts the likelihood that the narrator imagines a contribution to a collection of objective truths. Rather, the narrator subtly implies Clarel's discoveries to reinforce, ultimately, his own subjective ends. Whatever Clarel discovers, he will discover through his own investigations, according to his own construction of values. If Clarel is capable
of such focused efforts, he, like the “crocus,” “swimmer,” and “burning secret” (4.35.29-31) of the poem’s final lines, will triumph through endurance.

Conclusions

Like much of Melville’s canon, Clarel offers no resolution for the difficulties and challenges presented by the text. In the case of the poem, any effort on the part of the narrator to summarize or conclude the primary focus of the poem—self-discovery through tragedy—weakens the underlying message regarding the futility of searching for objective answers to subjective questions. The external reader cannot demand Clarel discovers something by the poem’s end so that he benefits by proxy. Though the social forum of the pilgrimage intends to suggest the communal and universal nature of the answers being sought, the individual pilgrim cannot value discoveries he does not make on his own. Debates and discussions simply provide the arena for the individual discovery of subjective perspectives relative to the communal definition of “truth.” Without exception, each pilgrim offers his subjective perspective as a means of persuading others. Equally without exception, no pilgrim convinces another regarding how he should view the issue under consideration or how he should live his life. Whether these failures suggest an inherent flaw in communication; an unshakable stubbornness in man; the inability of intellectual and rational applications to serve spiritual and emotional needs; or some combination of the three; the unfortunate realization remains that these factors continue to have an influential role in life’s pilgrimage. Over the course of the poem, Clarel learns to unlearn, to distrust, his former beliefs. His experiences force him to confront the reality that he cannot know anything, at least as regards its objective truth. His reverence towards reading as a means of
revealing his reverence towards Christian legends and mythology deteriorates as he accrues physical experiences that balance, though seldom reinforce, his spiritual experiences. Clarel develops during the pilgrimage; he becomes a more complete character. As his complexity develops, however, his capacity for belief diminishes. Clarel at the end of the poem differs greatly from Clarel at the beginning. Clarel is sadder and wiser by the time he disappears into Jerusalem’s streets and deserves empathy for his condition. He comes to Jerusalem looking for answers, but finds only questions that he does not yet know how to address. This makes Clarel’s condition by the end of the poem similar to the external reader’s condition by the end of the poem. There are no answers, only the hope of future discoveries.

Hope, however, makes no promises. Clarel knows this to be true. His return to Jerusalem, the city he only associates with loss, symbolizes his commitment to the search for, not the discovery of, answers. Stressing process over product, Clarel becomes a romantic idealist, but his idealism has been present and notable all along. His choice to remain in Jerusalem suggests Clarel desires to discover who he is and how to live as himself. These two discoveries supercede all others. But the discoveries pale in comparison to the process by which he comes to these same discoveries. Clarel’s accumulating experiences during the poem point him in a specific direction with regards to the focus of his reverence. At the beginning of the poem, Clarel’s reverence exists for external objects, whether texts or legendary sites from which the texts develop. By the end of the poem, Clarel’s reverence exists for the experiences of the pilgrimage. His shift in perspective reveals his maturation. The experiences to come in Jerusalem, regardless of the seeming futility, cannot resign Clarel to stasis. By accepting the responsibility for
discovery to be his, Clarel trusts the experiences to come without a preconceived concern for results, direction, or product. Clarel need not understand the “purpose” for his actions in order to acknowledge their value. Clarel’s investigations will be exercises in experience, nothing more. Through the process of unlearning, Clarel accepts a new system of valuation. He does not demand that his discoveries possess value outside of themselves. At the beginning of the poem, Clarel looks to physical objects as the means of reinforcing spiritual beliefs—his search presupposes a specific goal and the goal is the most important discovery. By the end of the poem, Clarel recognizes that discovery is an exploratory and hopeful process, one that is its own reward. As such, process and goal merge into one enterprise. Clarel ensures his own triumph when he walks back into the obscurer parts of Jerusalem because he no longer accepts the distinction between question and answer. The two merge once Clarel’s concerns switch to internal discoveries. Because he unlearns his dependence upon external proofs that come from external agents, Clarel prepares, at the poem’s conclusion, for his greatest challenge: the discovery of himself.
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