

gazer. The angels, despite their “aspects bright” (i.v. 34), can, then, be considered “starry watchers” (i.v.35) in the same sense as the Magi. If I am correct that the Star-Magi imagery forms an important structural trope in *Clarel*, then it is not surprising that Melville’s reference to the angels as “starry watchers” would suggest a further allusion to the Magi and announce this major structural trope. Indeed, the passage contains a double reference, since both the angels at the tomb and Magi at the birth “kept / Vigil at nap-kined feet and head / Of him their Lord” (i.v.35–37), construing the napkins as both shroud and swaddling clothes.

In item #3, Mr. Chamberlain considers it an “unjustified assumption that Ruth died of grief for her murdered parents.” Since Melville leaves open the choice between fever and grief as the cause of Ruth’s death, I concur with Walter E. Bezanson, the editor of *Clarel*, in his statement: “Ruth dies of grief” (p. 546). I must admit that Mr. Chamberlain, in item #2, has caught me in the error of anticipating her mother Agar’s death. But if Ruth died of grief, it could only have been for the murder of her father and the destruction of the Jewish community by the marauding Arabs; so my larger interpretation still holds.

In item #1, Mr. Chamberlain does point to a garbled sentence. The pilgrimage, of course, ends at Jerusalem, as I suggest in my reference to the Via Crucis on page 384, Bethlehem being the penultimate stop.

Item #6 simply cites a misquotation of two words in the Melville text, due to a verbal carry-over from one line to the next.

Item #12 involves a quibbling over a second of time. Derwent sees the bird and skullcap at the moment when, with a “shrill cry” (iii.xxv.121), the bird drops the skullcap it had been carrying into the ravine.

Apart from the minor, though regrettable, inaccuracies noted in items 1, 2, 6, and 12, Mr. Chamberlain’s broad attack has little foundation and can hardly support a dismissal of my conclusions as irrelevant. I would hope that students of Melville will be more concerned with my attempt to show the structural form of this dense and complex work and to illuminate its philosophic meaning.

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### Johnson’s *Rasselas* Continued

To the Editor:

I gather from Donald M. Korte’s comment [Forum, Jan. 1972] on my article entitled “The Biblical Context of Johnson’s *Rasselas*” (*PMLA*, 84, 1969, 274–81) that we have no disagreement about Johnson’s use of Bishop Patrick as a source for “images, sentiments,

and ideas” (p. 274) in *Rasselas*.<sup>1</sup> His reservations concern Johnson’s use of the “reformed” school of interpreting Ecclesiastes, the school that claims the Preacher, after directing man’s attention to heaven by showing the impossibility of finding perfect happiness in this world, exhorts him to “enjoy to the fullest the limited joys it offers” (p. 279). As I argued in the article, I agree that the ideational thrust of *Rasselas* rejects the possibility of perfect happiness in this life and is directed toward happiness in the next life. But this does not mean that Johnson asserts a negative view of the joys that are available in this life. Mr. Korte claims that “*Rasselas* himself does not reveal a gift for enjoying life.” Precisely, and as I suggested in the article, he may never obtain this gift completely, for *Rasselas*, *Nekayah*, and *Pekuah*, even near the end of the apologue, are “still dreaming of a perfect state of happiness” (p. 281). They exemplify two ideas Johnson expounds in his sermon on Ecclesiastes i.14, “I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit.”<sup>2</sup> The first idea refers to man’s failure to learn from experience: “So great is our interest, or so great we think it, to believe ourselves able to procure our own happiness, that experience never convinces us of our impotence” (ix, 395). The second refers to man’s inability to limit his imagination: “When to enjoyments of sense are superadded the delights of fancy, we form a scheme of happiness that can never be complete, for we can always imagine more than we can possess” (ix, 400).

At the end of the apologue all of the travelers “diverted themselves . . . with various schemes of happiness which each had formed” (p. 219), and as Mr. Korte claims, this is certainly “idle conversation.” But “*Imlac* and the astronomer were contented to be driven along the stream of life without directing their course to any particular port” (p. 220). Mr. Korte rightly notes that I see this passage as evidence of “positive activity” and of a “deep” commitment-to-life. The verb “were contented” recalls the positive statement (even if the positiveness is only momentary, as Mr. Korte claims) *Nekayah*, quoting *Imlac*, makes to *Rasselas*: “Of the blessings set before you make your choice, and be content” (p. 134). This statement is part of the long, positive passage that concludes *Nekayah*’s pessimistic and negative remarks on family life and marriage mentioned by Mr. Korte. Moreover, this statement echoes Bishop Patrick’s claim that the Preacher “persuades all men to be content with things present” (p. 279). The verb “driven” does indeed connote “a lack of control over one’s destiny,” but that, I think, is one of the main points Johnson is making in his insistence that man cannot make a “choice of life” in the sense of choosing a specific state or condition of life. *Imlac* and the as-

tronomer seem to understand what Johnson argues in the Ecclesiastes sermon: "To live in a world where all is vanity, has been decreed by our Creator to be the lot of man—a lot which he cannot alter by murmuring, but may soften by submission" (ix, 402). The phrase "without directing their course to any particular port" suggests not "passivity," as Mr. Korte maintains, but "submission" to the fact that "all is vanity"; it simultaneously suggests a "purposiveness" denied by Professor Korte, namely a commitment-to-life itself rather than to a specific or "particular" way of life (a port).

Nor do I think, as does Mr. Korte, that the commitment-to-life theme is ambiguous. The use of the "stream" image helps to make the theme clear, for it climaxes a pattern of water imagery used throughout the apologue to symbolize life. While contemplating leaving the Happy Valley, for example, Rasselas remembers the "flux of life" and is upbraided by the "stream that rolled before . . . [his] feet" (p. 24). Rasselas wonders once why life should not "glide quietly away" (p. 58), and Imlac, who recalls the first time he left home as his entrance into the "world of waters" (p. 42), tells Rasselas that life outside of the Happy Valley, unlike the quiet lake there, is "a sea foaming with tempests, and boiling with whirlpools" (p. 64). The water imagery, with its connotations of change and motion, emphasizes Johnson's thesis that the goods and joys of this world are transitory and therefore insufficient to produce perfect happiness. Hence the folly of directing one's course to "any particular port." This very transitory nature of earthly goods and joys, however, should point man in the direction of eternity, as Johnson makes explicit in Imlac's discourse on the immortality of the soul. Rasselas' comments at the end of the discourse make this point eminently clear: "How gloomy would be the mansions of the dead to him who did not know that he shall never die; that what now acts shall continue its agency, and what now thinks shall think on for ever" (p. 218). This passage receives further illumination from Johnson's sermon on Ecclesiastes:

When the present state of man is considered, when an estimate is made of his hopes, his pleasures, and his possessions; when his hopes appear to be deceitful, his labours ineffectual, his pleasures unsatisfactory, and his possessions fugitive, it is natural to wish for an abiding city, for a state more constant and permanent, of which the objects may be more proportioned to our wishes, and the enjoyments to our capacities; and from this wish it is reasonable to infer, that such a state is designed for us by that infinite Wisdom, which, as it does nothing in vain, has not created minds with comprehensions never to be filled. (ix, 403)

As I argued in my article, however, the "choice of eternity," made explicit by Nekayah, depends on making a "choice of life" in the sense of choosing life itself. Here the water imagery is again important, for

just as it connotes the idea of transitory earthly goods and joys, it also connotes the idea of a constant or eternal flux. This connotation is made all the more apparent when we recall that Johnson calls the Nile the "Father of Waters" (p. 7) and later has the astronomer say, "For us the Nile is sufficient" (p. 188). The Nile, according to a classical legend noted by Father Lobo,<sup>3</sup> had its source at the throne of Zeus. The eternal flux of water suggests that in this world man sees only the temporal phase of the eternal process of life, and that this process is eternal Johnson makes clear when he has Imlac assert that the soul, the principle of life, "will not perish by any inherent cause of decay, or principle of corruption" (p. 218). In effect, the "choice of eternity" is made by making the "choice of life." This double choice is foreshadowed in Imlac's memorable charge to Nekayah: "Do not suffer life to stagnate; it will grow muddy for want of motion: commit yourself again to the current of the world" (p. 157). It is also foreshadowed in Imlac's comment to Rasselas, "while you are making the choice of life, you neglect to live" (p. 135). I find nothing ambiguous about the commitment-to-life theme, nor do I think the theme is inconsistent with the circular structure of the work. This world, as the title of the final chapter implies, is projected in the apologue as a "Conclusion, in which nothing is concluded," for in this world we see merely part of a life circle that is concluded only in eternity.

Contrary to Mr. Korte, then, I do not think that the title of the final chapter "undermines any positive reading of *Rasselas*." Imlac indeed says once, "Human life is everywhere a state in which much is to be endured, and little to be enjoyed" (p. 57). But does this mean that the apologue enjoins man against enjoying that little which can be enjoyed? I think it does just the opposite. Again to quote Nekayah who is quoting Imlac: "There are goods so opposed that we cannot seize both, but, by too much prudence, may pass between them at too great a distance to reach either" (p. 134). A gloss of this passage, perhaps of the whole apologue, can be found in the conclusion to Johnson's sermon on Ecclesiastes, where Johnson argues that the man who is persuaded "all earthly good is uncertain in the attainment, and unstable in the possession" will, as he becomes modest and benevolent, also "not fix his fond hopes upon things which he knows to be vanity, but will enjoy this world as one who knows that he does not possess it" (ix, 402–03). The penultimate sentence of the apologue, "Of these wishes that they had formed they well knew that none could be obtained" (p. 221), closes *Rasselas*, contrary to Mr. Korte's thesis, not on an ironic but on a positive note of openness to life—wherever that life is to be led. The travelers may relapse, but as of the moment their fond hopes are not fixed upon things they know to be vanity, so that it is possible they, particularly

Imlac and the astronomer, will enjoy the world as persons who know they do not possess it.

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#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> All quotations from *Rasselas* are from the R. W. Chapman edition (Oxford: Clarendon, 1927).

<sup>2</sup> All quotations from the sermon on Ecclesiastes are from "Sermon xii" in *The Works of Samuel Johnson, L.L.D.* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1825), ix.

<sup>3</sup> See Johnson's translation of Father Lobo's *Voyage to Abyssinia* (London, 1735), p. 208.

#### The Structure of *Wuthering Heights* Continued

To the Editor:

Pleased as I am to meet with an insight largely in accord with my own views, I feel that Robert E. Burkhart [Forum, Jan. 1972] is only too modest to limit the application of his schema to my essay. His ideas have a value and suggestiveness quite apart from mine and ought to be pursued more extensively than they are here. I believe he might wish to add two peripheral and defective, but symmetrical, love relationships to his schema—that between Frances and Hindley in the first generation and that putative one between Cathy and Lockwood in the second—both involving the insertion of a fairly weak and ordinary outsider into the novel's genealogical web of Earnshaw and Linton. And I would propose extending the schema to include the relationship between Heathcliff and Isabella. Beyond these suggestions, however, I shall not consider the extension and wider application of Mr. Burkhart's structure but merely mention how his remarks reflect upon my own essay.

I agree that his schema supports my contentions that no single character in the novel possesses a point of view endorsed by Emily Brontë and that, relative to Heathcliff and Catherine, the other characters of the novel seldom receive their rightful share of consideration and weight from its readers. I agree that all the characters must be considered before the distinctive conceptual balancing and jousting of *Wuthering Heights* can be appreciated. But I do see one aspect of Mr. Burkhart's schema as possibly an implicit challenge to my presentation: the symmetrical structure that he rightly sees and describes might well be taken to indicate that *Wuthering Heights* possesses a lucid, harmonious meaning, whereas I argued that the novel's several patterns (among those that I noted were the severe genealogical symmetry, the marriage triangles, and the arc from Hareton Earnshaw 1500 to Hareton Earnshaw 1802) were enigmatic and teasing rather than satisfactorily significant. In other words, I argued

that it is impossible to translate the clean geometrical shapes embedded in the novel into clear meanings answerable to the novel as a whole.

I think that the pattern that Mr. Burkhart nicely discerns is another such beguilement, which leads to only partial meaning and away from the chaotic "wuthering" at the heart of the book. I could be wrong. But I shall leave it to Mr. Burkhart, or someone else more perceptive or less prejudiced than I, to pursue his suggestive schema to its full extent of significance.

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#### Huckleberries and Humans

To the Editor:

In re James L. Colwell's "Huckleberries and Humans" (*PMLA*, Jan. 1971), there may be particular significance in Mark Twain's shifting from *Eschol* to *Mulberry* as a first name for Colonel Sellers. *Escol*, *Eschol*, and *Eshcol* are three variant ways of transliterating the Biblical Hebrew word for a "bunch of grapes," in general, and specifically for that huge bunch of grapes carried back, along with samples of the fig and the pomegranate, to the Children of Israel in the desert by the scouting party they sent ahead into the land of Canaan. See Numbers xiii.23, 24, where the incident is cited to explain the name of the wadi spelled *Eshcol* in the English of the King James version.

Possibly Mark Twain or Charles Dudley Warner remembered that vivid picture accompanying that name from Sunday School days, when, as in *Tom Sawyer*, Bible verses were exercises for memorization. Perhaps it may better be inferred that Mark Twain mentioned his problem about the name to his Hartford pastor friend, Rev. Joseph Twichell, who would be the person in his acquaintance most likely to recall the Biblical associations and the meaning of the troublesome name. Whether Twichell heard the name as *Escol* or *Eschol*, it would have registered the same, since he would have known that in Hebrew S and SH are both represented by the same letter Shin, C and CH by the same letter Kaph (only in modern times are their different sounds distinguished by adding a differentiating single dot to the letter). Twichell may also have suggested the transition from grapes to mulberry via the fig of that passage in Numbers xiii, because he would have been well aware of the association in the Greek Testament between *sykon*, fig, and *sykomoros*, fig mulberry.

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