

LAURA LÓPEZ PEÑA

BEYOND THE WALLS

BEING WITH EACH OTHER IN HERMAN MELVILLE'S *CLAREL*



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A Rodrigo

A mi familia

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Prologue

Timothy Marr
University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

Perhaps the most widely read of Herman Melville's literary works today is "Bartleby, the Scrivener", a sketch of an abortive attempt of a New York lawyer to make sense of an employee who "prefers not to" follow his requests. The story, subtitled "A Story of Wall Street", is full of walls: the screens that sector the law office, the bricks that serve as the only view from its window, and the prison named the Tombs that immures the solitary copyist in which he dies in vagrancy. The narrator ends his story with the exclamation "Ah Bartleby, Ah humanity!"—in part a confession of his realization that the inside truths of all humans are heartbreakingly pent up in impenetrable isolation. However, this story of Wall Street paradoxically provides avenues of connection as well as impediments of occlusion. The same language that fails to account for the strange lot of the scrivener also expresses a universal yearning for intersubjective understanding. Melville suggests in "Bartleby" that the "dead letters" of words both embody the walls that tragically divide individuals even as they ironically intimate the potential for correspondence between writer and reader on gracious literary errands of life.

Some of the reasons for Melville's centrality in the canon of great American authors are the diversity of his

writings, the planetary reach of the settings of his literature, and his democratic inclusion of characters from all around the ambit of the world. This is part of the foundation upon which López builds her important interpretation of Melville's art as a universalist project of literary production. Laura López Peña's book explores the dynamic paradoxes of intersubjective universalism by assessing a broad range of recent critical theories of human community as well as exploring the sectarian problem of communitarian or sectarian exclusion. She then examines their operations in Melville's first and most important published works of poetry, *Clarel* and *Battle-Pieces*.

López suggests that the longings of interhuman love are natural traces of the togetherness experienced between members of a diverse family to which all belong. This yearning, which she shares with Melville, embodies the political promise of democracy—a “common continent of men [sic] [...] federated along one keel” that joins varied individuals in a multilogue that dissolves the distance of difference through intimate interaction. In such a pluralist world the intersubjectivity that she calls “human beings who are-*with* each other” (after Jean-Luc Nancy) bridges division by restoring a community of forbearance that is radical in its inclusive universalism.¹

“Bartleby, the Scrivener” dramatizes how this promise remains fleeting and utopian as it is confounded by the limited profession of the lawyer's conventional charity to reach across and comprehend Bartleby's traumatic aloneness. Melville often chafed against the cruelty of a fate that created humanity of the same kin yet ruptured the intimacy of community by a series of separations that set people against themselves. López argues that one force that sunders human society into “scattered subjectivities” is humanitarian cosmopolitanism itself through the partiality and privilege of its claims to “universalism” which

simultaneously segregate others as outsiders, heathens, castaways, criminals, renegades, and exiles. Among the authorizing agencies that build walls between individuals are religious exclusiveness, racial supremacy, aristocratic elitism, national exceptionalism, and ethnic communitarianism. These provincializing ideologies render humans into what Melville calls “isolatos”, entities so removed from one another that they remain confined within the myopic boundaries into which their cultures have drawn them and by which their societies have defined them.

López has chosen one of Melville’s longest and least read works as the prism for examining the literary politics of his intersubjective universalism. *Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land* was published in New York by Harpers in 1876, the year in which the United States celebrated its centennial. *Clarel* is comprised of over 17,000 lines of verse, making it one of the longest poems in the English language. However, in an age that craved the short lyric and invented shorthand, Melville’s strenuous pilgrimage in poetry was ignored. Less than three years after *Clarel*’s only printing of 350 copies, Melville gave permission for 224 of them to be pulped by his publisher. To Harvard professor Lawrence Buell the poem remains “the great white elephant, the great unread [...] among all the major works of all the canonical nineteenth-century English-language authors”.² American writer and poet Robert Penn Warren acutely called it “a seismograph that no one looked at”.³

López’s careful examination of *Clarel* releases it from the “dead letter” walls of isolation that have impeded readers from accessing its artistic wisdom. *Beyond the Walls* thus contributes to the important process of resurrecting Melville’s career as a major poet, which lasted three times the length of the period in which he wrote his fiction, from “the pall of incomprehension” that Willard Thorp diagnosed

in 1938 and under which his artistic achievements in verse have remained occluded for far too long.⁴ Her book reveals the biographical and historical circumstances that led to the composition of his opus in verse. López charts the twenty years of Melville's career and literary production from his own journey to the Holy Land in 1856-7, following his completion of his last novel, to the publication of his poetic meditation on that journey in 1876. During that time he transformed himself into a poet, endured the national destruction of the Civil War, and accepted a job as a Customs Officer in New York City where he worked gathering revenue as an outdoor surveyor discharging cargo on the docks. While Melville was engaged in the compositional rigors of his poetic pilgrimage, he lived his daily life on the front line of the expansion of American capitalism, where he experienced both the burgeoning vigors of commerce as well as the squalid corruptions of greed, graft, and speculation. When Melville was walking to and from the wharves of Manhattan his creative mind was populating the Holy Land with a symposium of human characters for a circular pilgrimage together of descent and return that ends in loss and separation.

Beyond the Walls also offers original commentary on Melville's prior book of Civil War poetry named *Battle-Pieces*, intersperses illuminating commentary from her thorough knowledge of Melville's oeuvre, and engages in a dialogue with other scholars who have grappled with the artistic accomplishment of *Clarel*. One of the most original aspects of *Beyond the Walls* is López's alignment of Melville's themes with the transnational eclipse of democratic promise during the years of Reconstruction and the emergence of the "Gilded Age". Melville transposes the social divisions within the United States along with European habits of imperialism and tyranny onto the Holy Land, which becomes localized as the symbolic stage for his meditations

on the human drama he documents in *Clarel* of “the arrest of hope’s advance”.

Melville’s poem transcribes the tragic divide between the potential of intersubjective universalism and the actuality of human estrangement as partisanship divides communities and religious practice strays from its ethical core. Melville tests the integrity of his characters by dramatizing their lost opportunities to choose connection over convention and by honoring their fortitude to endure with neither reward nor certitude. The careful discipline of Melville’s metrical pilgrimage leads ultimately to the lesson that words cannot embody or replace the truths they hope to communicate, and instead form Babel-like partitions that piece humans apart and silence their conversations. Out of the loneliness of human suffering emerges a shared consolation, manifest within Melville’s art, through the voicing of an existential anguish that López calls a “universal existential wail” that evokes what Alphonso Lingis calls “the murmur of the world”.⁵ Melville challenges his readers to confront the sad and shared wisdom that “naught else abides on fickle earth but unkept promises of joy”.⁶

Beyond the Walls serves as a compelling introduction to the panoply of themes and characters in *Clarel* and the heritage of critical scholarship assessing its accomplishment. Newton Arvin celebrated *Clarel’s* “crowdedness of social landscape”, claiming that “[n]owhere else, not even in *Moby-Dick* does Melville fill the stage more populously, [...] or succeed more brilliantly in giving vitality to secondary and even to incidental figures”.⁷ These characters include such diverse figures as a black Jew from southern India, an Albanian Muslim mercenary, a disillusioned Swedish idealist, a Jewish geologist, a Confederate veteran descended from Indians and Catholics, a Yankee convert to Zionism, and the only character given a full name: Señor Don Hannibal Rohon del Aquaviva, who lost

a leg and an arm fighting in Mexico. López shows the restless but convivial American skeptic named Rolfe, a “messmate of the elements”, to be most representative of Melville’s philosophy of “manysidedness”. Rolfe embodies how the refractions of Melville’s polyphonic poetic voice musters a multifaceted meditation on human vagaries throughout the circuit of its “pilgrimage”. The genius of humanity is registered by practicing a genial forbearance that acknowledges an interiority to others while realizing that, though it cannot be seen, it but must be respected at the cost of being blind.

López shows Melville’s works and poetry, in particular *Clarel*, to be an ethical testing ground—between literary characters as well as between author and reader—that she calls “a space of political and ethical (im)probabilities”. The loquacity and persistence of Melville’s own literary voice, even when framed in the form of poetic verse, embodied his hope that diversity can be sustained in dialogue. However, the rigor of his poetic meter also challenges the reader’s access to its philosophical deliberations. Her study reveals Melville to be a sophisticated contemplator of political ethics in his dramatization that the creativity that connects people with each other in sustaining ways also figures forth the imagined fantasies through which their hopes for communion are frustrated.

The failure of *Clarel* to earn the readers it deserves is one measure of its aborted potentiality. Melville himself consigned *Clarel* to oblivion, claiming that it was “eminently adapted for unpopularity”, and it has repulsed or estranged audiences over the years.⁸ The fact that a young Spanish female scholar in the twenty-first century so intimately reengages this neglected poem by a nineteenth-century American male author is itself a tribute to the intersubjectivity of Melville’s universalist art. *Beyond the Walls* is also testimony to López’s own responsive struggle

as a reader to surmount the silence of distance and remain open to the invitation of Melville's verse and the human wisdom it communicates. López's capacious sensitivity to the ways that Melville's words invite empathic relations transacts the potential she finds at the core of its expressive labors. Her own writing carries forward this ethical responsibility to its readers as an integral part of its intellectual charge. The insurmountable challenge to the heart is to not become entranced by the dictates of culture so as to remain capable of being moved by feeling the call to join together across the chasms of conventions and of words.

López's response to Melville's literary expression embodies the "Humanities" in the way that dramatizes how the engagement of the reader bonds with the text to open the potential of its promise for intersubjective sharing. Helen Vendler, another Harvard professor of poetry, sensitively appraised *Clarel* as "one of the lasting documents of American culture" which "deserves to be better known".⁹ *Beyond the Walls* helps us to know *Clarel* better by providing evidence for Robert Penn Warren's assessment that Melville's poem is "a fundamentally necessary document of our human experience".¹⁰ Both *Clarel* and *Beyond the Walls* ultimately express how literature matters and why the humanities communicate lasting significance even through its tragic reminder of the intersubjective potential we fail to manifest.

¹ Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*, Eds. John Bryant and Haskell Springer (1851; New York: Pearson Longman, 2007), 123.

² Lawrence Buell, "Melville and the Question of American Decolonization", *American Literature* 64 (1992): 230.

³ Robert Penn Warren, "Introduction" to *Selected Poems of Herman Melville: A Reader's Edition* (New York: Random House, 1970), 46.

⁴ Quoted in *Selected Poems of Herman Melville*. Ed. Hennig Cohen (1964; New York: Fordham University Press, 1991), xii.

⁵ Alphonso Lingis, *The Community of Those Who Have Nothing in Common* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 69-106.

⁶ Herman Melville, "Sketch Eighth: Norfolk Isle and The Chola Widow" from "The Encantadas" in *The Piazza Tales and Other Prose Pieces 1839-1860* (Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern University and Newberry Library, 1995), 153.

⁷ Newton Arvin, *Herman Melville* (New York: William Sloan Associates, 1950), 276.

⁸ Herman Melville, Letter to James Billson, 10 October 1884, in *Correspondence* (Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern University and Newberry Library, 1993), 483.

⁹ Helen Vendler, "Desert Storm—A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land", *The New Republic* (December 7, 1992): 42.

¹⁰ Warren, 12.

Introduction

They were nearly all Islanders in the Pequod, *Isolato*es too, I call such, not acknowledging the common continent of men, but each *Isolato* living on a separate continent of his own.

Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*

The present volume claims intersubjective universalism as the ethico-political project articulated in Herman Melville's 1876 narrative poem *Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land*. It follows studies on Melville's global consciousness analyzing the capacity of the author's works to reflect a democratic understanding of humanity beyond the dividing parameters of nation/ality, ethnicity, social class, religious beliefs, cultural background, gender, and orthodox definitions of sexuality. To name a few, some of these studies are: Grejda's *The Common Continent of Men* (1974), Hamilton's "On 'Live in the All' Once Again" (1983), Bryant's "'Nowhere a Stranger'" (1984) and "Citizens of a World to Come" (1987), Sten's "Melville's Cosmopolitanism" (2001), Marr's "Without the Pale" (2005), Waugh's "'We are not a nation, so much as a world'" (2005), Gibian's "Cosmopolitanism and Traveling Culture" (2006), Lyons's "Global Melville" (2006), Kaplan's "Transnational Melville" (2010), and Obenzinger's "Herman Melville Returns to Jerusalem" (2010). These excellent examinations of the egalitarian (Grejda), cosmopolitan (Bryant, Gibian, Marr, Sten), transnational (Kaplan), global (Hamilton, Lyons), or

globally conscious (Waugh) aspects of Melville's works have been enabling to this volume's analysis of Melville's *Clarel* as universalist. So have been existing studies exclusively dedicated to the lengthy and complex *Clarel*, a poem which continues to be one of the most unanalyzed of Melville's texts despite growing interest in Melville's poetry recently: Knapp's *Tortured Synthesis* (1971), Kenny's *Herman Melville's Clarel* (1973), Short's "Form as Vision in Herman Melville's *Clarel*" (1979), Hayford, MacDougall, Parker, and Tanselle's critical study in the Northwestern-Newberry edition of *Clarel* (1991), Goldman's *Melville's Protest Theism* (1993), Obenzinger's *American Palestine* (1999), and Potter's *Melville's Clarel and the Intersympathy of Creeds* (2004). Walter Bezanson's work on *Clarel* deserves a separate mention, as it is perhaps the most important foundation to all scholars who have ventured into the poem.

Unlike many of the previous studies, however, this volume moves away from a conception of Melville's global project as cosmopolitan or internationalist, in that, both cosmopolitanism and internationalism endorse a vision of world community which, despite being grounded on a global affiliation with "the world" and "humanity", also retains a strong adherence to nationalism and patriotism, on the other hand restrictive of such global feeling. Thus, my critical regard adds to those of scholars who have considered that cosmopolitanism and internationalism continue endorsing a nationalist agenda that does not dismantle but, on the contrary, upholds—in the same way that multiculturalism—the very powerstructures of the nation-state which have recurrently been oppressing to certain groups of citizens and non-citizens, at different times in history, and continue to be so in the present. Martin Heidegger best exposed this paradox when he claimed that "[n]ationalism is not overcome through mere internationalism; it is rather expanded and elevated thereby into a system" (244). In our present day and age, the result

of this cosmopolitan/internationalist outlook has consisted of little more than supranational institutions, internationalist in scope but deeply grounded on, and protective of, national interests. These institutions have so far been fruitless in their efforts to grant basic international human rights in face of particular nation-states' abuse of power and violation of human rights (I write this introduction as a new military incursion into Gaza is being carried out by Israeli military forces, who have already killed over 600 Palestinians in less than a week, the majority of them civilians, while the UN and the rest of the world remain impassive, and while not even borders have been opened to allow refugees out of Gaza). In front of this present situation, it is important to turn to Herman Melville's work. Living and writing in a large part of the nineteenth century (he was born in 1819 and died in 1891), a period of growing nationalisms, "nation" and "nationhood" construction, and of the sovereignty of the nation-state,¹ Melville was critical of nationalisms and even exposed a global consciousness transcending cosmopolitanism or internationalism. This consciousness is already present in early novels such as *Mardi* (1849): "Take all Mardi for thy home. Nations are but names; and continents but shifting sands" (1300). Melville's critical regard for cosmopolitanism is most evident in his last published novel *The Confidence-Man* (1857). This global consciousness, in my view beyond cosmopolitanism and internationalism, is constant in Melville's oeuvre, including his late poetry, which transcends notions of identitarian and/or communitarian, even nationalist, parameters often undermining the very global claims both cosmopolitanism and internationalism profess.

This study aims to demonstrate that the 17,863 line-long² *Clarel* articulates a universalist project that breaks through the inter-human walls (im)posed both by individualism and by traditional forms of communitarianism

based on rigid conceptions of identity (e.g. nation-state, ethnicity, culture, class, religious affiliation, gender, sexuality) which enforce one-sided thinking and monologic views of the world. In a special way, it analyzes the ethical and political potentiality of intersubjectivity to abridge (or not) inter-personal separation and develop (or not) more democratic human relationships. Recurrently, Melville placed the possibility or impossibility of universalism in the possibility or impossibility of intersubjectivity, yet, far from falling into an idealism which the author himself criticized as naïve in some of the characters he created, Melville's exploration was permanently torn between the democratizing potentiality the author located in interpersonal relationships, and the bleak realization that human beings might never materialize such democratic project. The thesis of this study, thus, is that *Clarel* is a universalist poem which investigates not only the necessity and potentialities, but also, and most importantly, the challenges, difficulties, and obstacles preventing the actual development of intersubjectivity and, consequently, of universalism. In this respect, I claim that *Clarel* gives continuity to Melville's recurrent exploration throughout his literary production of the possibility and the impossibility of democratic human relationships, and of the dangers, beauties, and interconnection of intersubjectivity, universalism, and democracy.

This volume's approach to *Clarel* is determined by a conception of Melville's texts that is influenced by Mikhail Bakhtin's notions of polyphony, heteroglossia and dialogism. Although Bakhtin refers specifically to the novel (and, more specifically, to Dostoevsky's novels) in his articulation of polyphony and heteroglossia, and despite the fact that *Clarel* is a poem, Bakhtin's theorizations of polyphony and fiction can be applied to the analysis of Melville's 1876 text. As a matter of fact, Bakhtin himself acknowledges that the significance of polyphonic thinking "extends far beyond the

limits of the novel alone" (3). Bakhtin associates polyphony to multivoicedness, defining polyphony as "[a] plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses" (6), and connecting it to dialogism: "*The polyphonic novel is dialogic through and through*" (40).³ He conceives signification as a dialogic process that emerges from the interactions of the author, text, and reader, each of them inscribed within their particular social and historical contexts. In this process, Bakhtin claims, the author is not a "monologic" (88) source of meaning but "acts as an organizer and participant in the dialogue without retaining for himself the final word" (72). Bakhtin's dialogism may be connected to Melville's "Manysidedness" (*Clare*/ 3.16.236), a Melvillean term denoting a capacity for plural thinking that stems from the dialogic exposure to, and interaction with, a multiplicity of human beings and/or the worldviews these represent, and which is directly connected to the universalism the poem articulates.

In this respect, *Clare's* universalism emphasizes the plurality by which it is itself necessarily constructed, as well as the mutual constituency, mutual dependency, and actual inseparability of the particular and the global, blending at the interpersonal level. It is actually at the intersubjective level that the particular and the universal merge by the getting together of two or more individuals who are necessarily different. The difference of these individuals not only lies in their diverse, specific, life-experiences, sociopolitical and economic contexts, and maybe national, ethnic, sexual, etc. identities, but also, and most importantly, in the fact that they constitute different and unique complex subjectivities irreducible to such contexts and identities: both representatives of their particular singularity and complexities and, at the same time, of the larger picture of humanity. Melville's articulation of universalism is, hence, grounded on intersubjectivity,

seemingly in tune with Hannah Arendt's 1955 remark that "the world [...] can form only in the interspaces between men in all their variety" (30-31). The present volume, thus, analyzes how *Clarel* sets off to portray the democratizing possibilities of this intersubjective creation of "the world" triggering the development of a plural thinking that breaks through the rigid frontiers of one-sided⁴ imaginations and community-based worldviews. It is at this interpersonal level, *Clarel* shows, that ways of thinking and relating, both transcending and challenging egocentric mindsets and behaviors, as well as rigid conceptions of community, might be either developed or completely cancelled.

Also influenced by Bakhtin's view is the approach to literature of this volume, based on the belief in the necessity to consider literary artifacts as both products of those human beings who created them and of the contexts in which they were produced. This study, therefore, highlights the importance of examining the authorial dimension and the material conditions of literary texts, for, as Dennis Berthold has noted on Melville's 1876 poem, "*Clarel* exists in a particular time and place in its genesis, composition and setting" (*American* 231). So are characters "contingent individuals" (232) in that they address issues determined by particular historical, political, social, economic, and personal contexts. This volume, then, considers Melville himself, in his capacity as creator of literary polyphonic spaces, as well as the context in which *Clarel* is inscribed, valuable sources of information, which are enabling, not limiting, to readerly interpretations past and present. It conceives the reading process as an intersubjective relationship between author, text, and reader (and of readers with other readers), texts themselves "never speaking unless spoken to" (Melville "A Thought" 238).

The present study's analysis of *Clarel* is preceded by considerations which are of importance to my interpretation of the poem. Chapter 1 provides an articulation of Melville's intersubjective universalism from a theoretical perspective. This theoretical articulation is based, on the one hand, on the theoretical possibilities opened up by poststructuralism in its rethinking of individual and collective identities, its problematization of monolithic Meanings, and its avowal of more fluid and plural forms of conceiving human subjectivity and human relationships; and, on the other hand, on the theorizations on community, subjectivity, intersubjectivity, universalism, politics, and ethics by contemporary thinkers such as Arendt, Bauman, Buber, Butler, Derrida, Laclau, Levinas, Nancy, Spivak, or Zerilli, among others. Chapter 2, in turn, offers an analytical overview of Melville's rejection of cosmopolitanism in his literary production. Most importantly, it exposes Melville's works' constant exploration of the potentiality of intersubjectivity to the creation of democratic relationships beyond the walls of individualism and communitarianism, yet the neutralization of such potentiality by human beings determined by their fears, egocentric behaviors, one-sided thinking parameters, and, ultimately, their imperfect natures in which, as Rolfe notes in *Clarel*, "Evil and good they braided play / Into one cord" (4.4.27-28). The chapter also joins the debate on Melville's (non-)religiosity or religious views, examining the representation of religious dogma, God and religious feeling in Melville's works, which, I argue, moves away from a religious view of morality toward a secular conception of ethics. Chapter 3 constitutes an introductory chapter to the book's analysis of *Clarel*. It exposes the material conditions in which *Clarel* was created, together with the significance of Melville's 1856-57 travel journal for the 1876 *Clarel*, and the critical reception the poem elicited both at the time of

its publication and throughout the 20th century to the present.

After these initial considerations, the volume proceeds to analyze the political dimension of Melville's 1876 poem. Intended as a general description of *Clarel's* universalist project, Chapter 4 provides an overview of the poem's recurrent images of human beings that are part of larger or smaller crowds yet whose individuality and specificity the text likewise emphasizes and struggles to retain. This chapter also notes *Clarel's* use of walls—both physical and psychological—as central motifs, arguing that the poem moves beyond these dividing barriers so as to articulate a universalist understanding of human beings and humanity that escapes the parameters of community and identity. Chapter 5 turns to the notion of “pilgrimage” for the analysis of Melville's explicit connection of form and content in the very subtitle of the poem. Examining *Clarel's* depiction of a journey of unlearning by means of the poem's problematization of fix Meanings, the chapter studies *Clarel's* careful construction of dialogism and plural thinking as mechanisms that develop its universalist project, and how the poem proposes different levels of pilgrimage and pilgrimaging which serve the unlearning journey as they foster independent critical thinking. A central section of Chapter 5 centers on dialogism and the role of dialogue construction (or destruction) in the (non-)de-transcendalization of monologic “Truths” and creation of plural thinking. In particular, I defend the character of Rolfe as an example of a manysided nature, since, unlike other characters, he is capable of continuously intermingling opposites and of an unremitting critical thinking without taking up a (self-)destructive mania. Besides Rolfe, the plural thinker and diver⁵ in the poem, the chapter also approaches textual mechanisms by which such plural thinking is constructed (the palm cantos in Part 3) or not

developed (the conviviality cantos also in Part 3 of the poem). Eventually, it analyzes how poetics is placed at the service of Melville's universalist project in *Clarel*. The following chapter, Chapter 6, provides a more sociopolitical and historical approach to the poem in relation to the particular context of postbellum United States, a context which, I argue, *Clarel* evokes and evaluates with severity. In this respect, the chapter turns to *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War*, the volume of poems on the U.S. Civil War Melville published in 1866, at the close of the conflict. It claims *Battle-Pieces* as a continuation of Melville's universalist project and as a political text conveying some moderate hopes at the close of the war which are completely vanished in *Clarel*. Thus, the chapter analyzes *Clarel* as expressive of the disillusionment with postbellum U.S. Melville may have accumulated in the ten years separating the publication of *Battle-Pieces* and that of *Clarel*. It regards the poem as a ferocious critique of postbellum American democracy which is interestingly connected to a more global critique of democracy and progress. In this respect, the chapter claims that the poem turns Jerusalem and Palestine into contexts with both specific and global resonances serving Melville's literary analysis. It also defends that the U.S. is echoed in the Holy Land: Melville exploits the mythical connection between America and the Holy Land only to offer a fierce critique of the myth of exceptionalism, question the construction of both Palestine and the United States as "exceptional" lands favored by the divinity, and problematize the conception of America as "promised land". The following two chapters center on walls and separation, both physical and psychological, as established by communitarian identity-based formations (Chapter 7) or by individuals (Chapter 8). Focusing on inter- (and also intra-) community divisions, Chapter 7, thus, emphasizes how Palestine acts in the poem as a scenario that serves the purpose of, on the one hand,

analyzing segregationism, and, on the other hand, investigating the necessity yet difficulty of transcending such sectarianism. This chapter particularly approaches religious communities and also nationalism (frequently connected with religion) and gender submission, as well as the suppression of the individual within the community. The chapter ends with an analysis of the poem's emphasis on gates as connecting spaces, yet also as potential massy walls, and its portrayal of a universal human cry that transcends any existing walls aiming to confine it. Moving from community to inter-personal walls, Chapter 8 analyzes *Clarel's* pilgrimage as an exploration of the possibility or impossibility of interpersonal relationships, and the potentiality of intersubjectivity for the creation of more responsible and democratic interpersonal relationships. Analyzing different instances of egocentrism, monomania and one-sidedness, the chapter focuses on how characters defeat the possibility of intersubjectivity at the very door of togetherness, choosing instead to remain locked in their egocentric natures and, frequently, often (self-)destructive, one-sided, monologic thinking parameters. Finally, Chapter 9 is intended as a conclusion to the volume's analysis of *Clarel*. Particularly focused on the final cantos of the poem, the chapter defends that *Clarel* expresses a painful lament at humans' failure to materialize universalism and transcend segregationism, individualism, and interpersonal walls. *Clarel* moves characters (and readers) beyond the oppressive walls of Jerusalem, a city that in the poem becomes symbolic of inter-human walls, and embarks the young Clarel and his fellow travelers (readers included) in a journey through sandy deserts. Also significantly, Melville eventually returns his characters to the oppressive and violently divided walled city of Jerusalem. This decision to end the pilgrimage in Jerusalem may perhaps be indicative of Melville's painful realization that the interpersonal walls blocking the potentiality of universalism are too well-

interiorized by human beings, who continuously undermine their own possibilities of togetherness and perhaps also happiness. By Part 4, the desert has invaded the global city of Jerusalem, now a scenario of universal pain and a city of separate human wails whose actors are deaf to one another's, of aloneness, and of interpersonal gulfs without bridges. This painful conclusion, however, does not necessarily mean the end of Melville's belief in the potentiality of intersubjective universalism, which human beings, Melville laments, are too limited, imperfect, selfish, to bring to reality. Despite the difficulty of the task, Melville seems to indicate that the incapacity to participate in its construction neutralizes neither the importance of intersubjective universalism nor its democratizing potentiality. *Clarel* is an important work to unfold Melville's lifelong political project, and to give expression to the political voice of the so-called "late Melville", often considered—when considered—as having no political voice at all.



Dome of the Rock, Jerusalem, 2009
Dennis Berthold

¹ See Hobsbawm 1990.

² This is the result of my own counting of the lines of the poem: 4,783 lines for Part 1, "Jerusalem"; 4,627 for Part 2, "The Wilderness"; 4,267 for Part 3, "Mar Saba"; and 4,186 for Part 4, "Bethlehem".

³ Unless otherwise specified, italics in all citations correspond to the original.

⁴ Melville uses the terms "one-sided" or "one-sidedness" recurrently, for example, in *The Confidence-Man* (1857). He generally makes use of the dash in the word "one-sidedness" but not in the term "manysidedness". The present volume follows Melville's criterion, interpreting his use or non-use of the dash as a willingness to reinforce the adherence to monologic meaning, and, therefore, imposition of thinking barriers, denoted by the term "one-sidedness" and its derivatives, on the one hand, and the dialogism, connective nature and transcendence of thinking barriers emphasized by "manysidedness". A similar criterion has been adopted when using the terms "inter(-)personal",