

HERMAN MELVILLE: PILGRIM AND POET

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by
Jeanne C. Howes
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SUMMARY

Herman Melville: Pilgrim and Poet tells of a literature teacher's study of Melville's little known poetry to reach an understanding of the man whose growing importance for our time needs fuller recognition in the classroom. The preface points out the purposes, advantages, and sources of study; and the appendix presents the practical curriculum applications for studying Melville in the upper grades. A literary criticism of the poems forms the body of the paper.

The introductory chapter offers a general review of Melville's poetry as the recreative factor in his life-long quest for faith. A trip to the Near East in 1856-57 is seen as the turning point in Melville's life, because it was after this trip that the author of Moby-Dick turned from prose to poetry, from despair to hope. The four volumes of verse, and the pieces unpublished in his lifetime, span the long years between Melville's bewilderment with the problems of good and evil and his final acceptance of a heroic Christian role.

Next comes a short transition outlining the main points to be covered by the intensive study of four specific poems which follow. The study, revealing Melville's search for new art forms, examines relations to

his prose themes, symbolic interpretations, Emerson's influence, and stylistic qualities.

A chapter apiece is allotted to each of the four poems selected to trace the chronological pattern of Melville's life and art. Each marks a stage in the healing process. "The Enviably Isles," representing the early Melville, embodies romantic concepts. "The Berg," another symbol for the inscrutable whale, shows the fatalism of Melville the naturalist and a greater concern for constructivistic form. The "Epilogue" to Clarel, neo-classic in its balanced lines, strikes a sudden affirmative note to break the deadlock of a too-rigid intellectuality, as it reasserts a new feeling for humanity.

The last poem "Pebbles" is studied stanza by stanza, meaning and method, to explain Melville's final triumph--a life which can accept the necessities of law, the realities of failure and imperfection, and yet find beauty itself in the process.

In conclusion, this writer maintains, Melville achieves poetic patterns neither awkward nor illogical, but wholly coherent when properly understood in the time-space flow of rhythm. Melville's artistry, built on techniques of nineteenth century art, prefigures the expressionistic patterns of contemporary art.

Having completed the interpretation, the teacher seeks to project the meaning. She suggests readings and units which would meet student needs at various grade

levels. Poems, tales, and novels are selected to fit generally current curriculum practices; material suitable for enriching classes outside of the general English area is also included.

The bibliography includes all of Melville's writings, several biographies, and many critical readings in literature and art.