

“PAUSILIPPO”: A City Down a Hill¹

Honest and poor, faithful in word and thought,
What hath thee, Fabian, to the city brought?
MELVILLE, *Billy Budd*

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Is this the proud city?
MELVILLE, «The Swamp Angel», *Battle Pieces*

Are the green fields gone?
MELVILLE, *Moby-Dick*

Although the city has been considered a modern phenomenon, it is presented in the earliest of the world literature. Who can imagine the Bible or the classical *Iliad* and *Aeneid* without thinking of some meaningful cities? Indeed, the city has been a symbol to express people's utopia and aspirations: the Garden of Eden of *Genesis*, the New Jerusalem of the *Book of Revelation*, St. Augustine's *City of God*, Plato's *Atlantida*, Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* or Campanella's *The City of the Sun*. Each one represents the ideal community, the perfect balance, the paradise regained, i.e., a haven from the chaos the world had become. But the city, no matter how it has been designed – *polis*, *civitas*, *communitas*, *urbes*, *burh*, town, city² – has also represented the human experience, i.e., conflicting feelings, opposite views, contradicting forces in a way of approaching realities, resolving human conflicts and pursuing cultural myths. It has shaped the ambivalent significance, positive and negative, and designated a place for wickedness or a place for perfection. Since ancient times it has become a powerful metaphor in literature, reflecting and expressing the urban culture and community, its attitudes, its values, and its diverse feelings: "presumption (Babel), corruption (Babylon), perversion (Sodom and Gomorrah), power (Rome), destruction (Troy, Carthage), death, the plague (the City of Dis), and revelation (the heavenly Jerusalem)" (PIKE 1981: 6-7). As for the American culture, the city has played a very peculiar role in America's memory, representing its history of settlement, urbanization and utopia.

After reaching the New World, Columbus's or Captain John Smith's reports reinforced the European imagination already fed with ancient myths and led to hopes of achieving Paradise on Earth. America was

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² For the emergence of the *polis* see MUMFORD 1961: 119-57. For further information about meanings see KELLY 1996: 1-6.

then presented as a land of beauty, abundance and redemption, similar to what Michael Drayton (1563-1631) had already chanted in «To the Virginian Voyage»:

[...]
 Earth's onely Paradise.
 Where nature hath in store
 Fowle, Venison and Fish,
 And the fruitfull'st Soyle,
 Without your Toyl,
 Three Harvests more,
 All greater then your Wish.

(DRAYTON 1994: ll. 24-30)

The natural beauties then described, the mild weather, the existing gold and silver treasures, the natives' friendliness (at first sight) – contrasted with the oppression of the regime of the Middle Ages, religious persecutions and English Civil War chaos in the Old World – supported the hope of a new source of fulfillment and happiness on Earth. There seemed to be an elected place, the Garden of Eden which the Bible talked about. The hope in regaining the lost paradise presented in Apocalypse was closer. So it seems from this excerpt of a "Proclamation for Volunteers" for the settlement in New England, in 1628: "For your full satisfaction, know this [New England] is the place where the Lord will create a new Heaven and a new Earth in new Churches, and a new Commonwealth together" (NYDEL 1981: 241). And the Europeans looked to the other side of the Atlantic with the hope of "revert[ing] to their ancient purity and recover their primitive order, liberty and beauty" (BRADFORD 1973: 18).

When the *Arbella* anchored at Massachusetts Bay in 1630, the city as a reachable place haunted the puritan ideology. John Winthrop's sermon echoed heavily in the wilderness of the New World, where generations to come would eventually apprehend and repercut it in a mission to fulfill. His inflamed words stated the hope and achievement of those people, guided by a "political culture of a Low Church, Calvinistic Protestantism, commercially adept, military expansionist, and highly convinced [...] that it represented a chosen people and a manifest destiny" (PHILIPS 1999: xv), elected to build the City of God. In his "A Model of Christian Charity" Winthrop gave clear reason to the will to build a harmonious society combining the best of urban and rural worlds. This duality resulted in "seek[ing] out a place of Cohabitation and Consortship under a due forme of Government both civill and ecclesiasticall". It was his vi-

sion of the ideal city that would make them proud and the world wonder at: "For we must consider that we shall be as a City upon a Hill, the Eyes of all People are among us" (WHINTHROP 1924: 2:282-95). In Whinthrop's eyes, the place was like a garden, had edenic splendor and seemed to be the perfect environment for the perfect city: "We had fair sunshine weather, and so pleasant a sweet air as did much refresh us, and there came a smell off the shore like the smell of a garden" (WHINTHROP 1908: 7:47).

The contradictory values attached to the city and the wilderness would be dissolved on American ground. Whinthrop's words designed the city plan, "at once a single settlement and the entire colony, all being part of the community of love" (MACHOR 1987: 51-52). That would be achieved by obeying God's command and building a new society, the New Jerusalem. The enterprise seemed attainable as the settlers were in "a new continent offering a new opportunity, never before equaled, to begin life anew by returning to a simpler rural past" (4). They had been offered a place to plant their cities where European evil would transform itself into American good.

This former fascination with nature continued in the following centuries as "the agrarian myth", the "pastoral ideal", "the myth of the garden", defining America as "nature's nation" (4), while lamenting in a jeremiad mode the corrupt ways of the world. But in fulfilling their aim, they could not turn their back on urbanization. On the contrary, they founded communities, towns and cities, seeking to turning the wilderness into the "Theopolis Americana, the Holy City, the streets whereof are pure gold" (MATHER 1710: 9); places of self-fulfillment and improvement, links between rural harmony and urban progress. They would persistently try to combine "the city" and "the hill", as Emerson suggests: "Let the river roll which way it will, cities will rise on its banks" (EMERSON 1960: 11:218). The city was considered not only as a potential balance between landscape and cityscape, but also "a source of economic, political, educational, and artistic advancement" (MACHOR 1987: 4), which Whitman celebrates and salutes in «Starting from Paumanok»: "I will trail the whole geography of the globe and salute courteously every city large and small" (WHITMAN 1973: 19)

The American Independence War completed the Founding Fathers' task and made past promises come true. America represented the ideal of progress in the enlarging prosperity of its edification. The young republic felt vigorous and strong, eager for success and looking forward to a promising future. As Melville states in *White-Jacket*, they were sure of their fate: "God has predestinated us, mankind expects great

things from our race; and great things we feel in our souls. ...In our youth is our strength; in our inexperience our wisdom", states Melville (MELVILLE 1992: 153). And the newness of the country combined with self-reliance eventually made its people feel successful, superior, the saviors of the world:

... we Americans are the peculiar, chosen people – the Israel of our time; we bear the ark of the liberties of the world. [...] We are the pioneers of the world [...] for we cannot do a good to America but we give alms to the world. (153)

Herman Melville was born and lived in that time of euphoria, great transformations and wonders, when the project of constructing America was being carried out under growing prosperity. The spirit of American enterprise together with the mechanical and industrial revolution were supported by the political stability of Andrew Jackson, which generated great expectancy in the country's development. Soon, trade and industry would flourish and overtake other countries, as Melville asserts in *Moby-Dick*: "how comes it that we whalemens of America now outnumber all the rest of the banded whalemens in the world" (MELVILLE 1977: 205). The desire for mobility brought about a new sense of time and distance: roads linked far-off places, the locomotive – "emblem of motion and power" as Whitman calls it – made way through the vast prairie, the steam boat travelled across the rivers. The expanding frontier seemed closer, the territory united and industrial units could be implemented.³ Being independent, the new republic transformed into "the country of the Future" because "it is a country of beginnings, of projects, of designs, of expectations" (EMERSON 1903: 1: 371). The gold rush in California and the discovery of oil in Pennsylvania bolstered the dream of an expanding, successful country. The immigrant force pouring in strengthened the national spirit, the political and cultural consolidation, and the country's messianic zeal. With the arrival of immigrants "America offered a symbolic haven and a new beginning in terms of opportunity and freedom" (CLARK 1997: 6). Those "peculiar, chosen people" were strongly determined to "go up to the top of Pisgah to view from the wilderness a more goodly country to feed their hopes" (BRADFORD 1973: 21). It was a time of excellence, progress, enthusiasm, as Tocqueville mirrors in *Democracy in America*: "The American lives in a land of wonders," "in constant movement", "feverish agitation", "a game of chance, a time of revolution, or the day of a battle" (TOCQUEVILLE 1993: 213).

³ Francis Lieber's report to the Congress in 1839 gives clear evidence of the progress achieved. See LEWIS 1975: 19-20.

And "the hunter that never rests! The hunter without a home!", "the unreturning wanderer", as Melville calls the American (MELVILLE 1982: 1301, 1316), would go on in his quest for the lost paradise. His mission was to freely transform the wilderness into a garden, the New Jerusalem, where pastoral landscape and urban progress, as well as individual liberty and social interest, could be balanced.

The increasing growth of the city, however, was contradicting American values and beliefs, being inimical to the Founding Fathers' ideals and intentions. The steam boat, the expanding frontier and the railway system eased the concentration of labor force and the boom of industrial units. As a result the speed of urbanization seemed threatening: immigrants poured into cities, class conflict burst out, daily routines changed, fears brought uneasiness, the individual felt alienated from the support provided by the traditional society. The evils of the city were awakening and soon they emerged: The evolution from "provincial" to "commercial" and later "industrial" development largely overtook the image of the claimed new city against a pastoral past: "In building our cities we deflowered a wilderness" (MUMFORD 1997: 1:73). The newly rich Americans ran the risk of losing their picturesque land and the rural America was becoming an industrial state: farmers became factory workers; the democratic spirit, capitalistic imperialism; egalitarianism, slavery and wage labor. America was turning into "a heterogeneity that pluralism did not always reconcile" (JEHLEN 1986: 4). The joys of nineteenth-century city life enthusiastically celebrated by Emerson and Whitman were disappointedly transmuted into destruction and distortion, fragmentation and loss, emptiness and silence. As a consequence, diversity and mistrust led the Americans to seek safeness in the past, reinforcing the nostalgia for memories as in this Melvillean passage of "John Marr":

The remnant of Indians thereabout – all but exterminated in their recent and final war with regular white troops [...], the bisons, once streaming countless in processional herds [...], had retreated, dwindled in number [...]. Such a double exodus of man and beast left the plain a desert, green or blossoming indeed, but almost as forsaken as the Siberian Obi. Blank stillness would for hours reign unbroken on this prairie. "It is the bed of a dried-up sea". (MELVILLE 1976: 171)

Some more examples can be collected in Melville's works: alienation and impotence, showing the inhabitants of Manhattoes "tied to counters, nailed to benches, clinched to desks" in *Moby-Dick* (MELVILLE 1977: 93-94); the missing *Temeraire* in "Temeraire" (MELVILLE 1976: 59);

the fragile *Cumberland* struck by the steeled *Merrimack* in "Bridegroom Dick" (179); greedy sentiment in "Gold in the Mountain" (247); abuse and oppression by those "who toiled not, dug not, slaved not" in *Mardi* (MELVILLE 1982: 1204); monotony and routine in "blank-looking girls" with "blank hands, all blankly folding blank paper" in "The Tartarus of Maids" (MELVILLE 1962: 192); vanity and power in "The Bell-Tower"; immurement and exclusion in *Bartleby*; self and fall in *Billy Budd* (MELVILLE 1985). The city was no longer a congregational symbol with biblical sense, rather a secular, attractive but depressive place, as it appears in *Moby-Dick*:

The town itself is perhaps the dearest place to live in, in all New England. It is a land of oil, true enough: but not like Canaan; a land, also, of corn and wine. The streets do not run with milk; nor in the spring-time do they pave them with fresh eggs. (MELVILLE 1977: 126)

The instability caused by a fast changing world scarcely recognizable inspired reassurance in impressiveness and permanence of ancient urban forms, more importantly, involving divinity. After Champollion had deciphered the Roseta Stone, the far past was much more yearned.

In October 1857, Melville set off for a seven-month voyage to Palestine and Continental Europe, carefully noted in his *Journal*. His preoccupation with the ancient world went with the times. He recognized that a journey toward otherness would help to discover what is revealed and also what is concealed, as well as comprehend the present in the past. His experience and garnerings abroad were later the seeds for a considerable poetic production: his long poem *Clarel* (1876), several poems left unpublished at his death, and those composing *Timoleon* (1891) – the last volume privately published in his lifetime – mainly the collection of poems "Fruit of Travel Long Ago", where he celebrates art and space in Italy, Greece and Egypt.

According to Wyn Kelley, in Melville's last poems, sketches, and *Billy Budd*, the meaning of the city changes direction. In former works Melville presents the city as a wicked place to escape from, and nature as the ideal, redemptive world to immerse in (KELLEY 1996: 11); later, Melville focuses on the 'citized man', and "[t]he city in a meaningful form seems to have disappeared" (272-73). It seems so, indeed, but, in my opinion, he has not. After long years of lonely writings and devotion to poetry, Melville challenges his readers to notice the "cunning glimpses" around;⁴ what is more, he advises them to "spare the avid glance", claiming deeper insight for his writings.⁵

⁴ This phrase comes from "Hawthorne and his Mosses": "in this world of lies, Truth is forced to fly like a sacred white doe in the woodlands; and only by cunning glimpses will she reveal herself" (MELVILLE 1962: 44).

⁵ This line belongs to the poem «The Attic Landscape» (MELVILLE 1976: 234).

In order to turn from Italy to Greece, Melville selected the poem "Pausilippo" (with the sub-title "Naples in the Time of Bomba"), initially intended to be section V of "Naples in the Time of Bomba".⁶ Here Melville makes a meaningful triangle of proper names. "Bomba" refers to Ferdinand II of Bourbon, unpopular, absolutist king of Naples who ruled from 1830 until 1859, whose evils were largely diffused in the American press. He got his nickname for having the town of Messina fired by fort cannons in the 1848 uprising during the *Risorgimento* (POOLE 1989: 71).⁷ According to Valery (1852), Pausilippo, correctly 'Posillipo', may come from the Greek pausis tes lupis (*pausis tes lupis*), meaning 'cessation of pain' (74).⁸ Naples comes from the Greek nea polis (*nea polis*), meaning the 'new city' that Greek settlers founded on Italian ground in ancient times. On the one hand, *polis* names an independent community where the first democracy was born; on the other, the "new city" is an ideal that Americans have always pursued. So, under Naples lies a strong symbolism Melville meaningfully cries out in silence.

The proper names in the poem play a meaningful role as they pave the way to some associations with America, which Melville cannot help but write about. Among others, Melville has room to reflect on his own country and time while apparently dealing with Italian themes. And Bomba was fashionable. Indeed, he could draw close parallels between both countries: after the industrialization of the early nineteenth century, which devastated the Italian landscape, the Italian liberal revolutions supporting the *Risorgimento* and the fall of monarchy fought the Bourbon absolutism and struggled for a united and independent Italy; America had already felt the flavor of independence, but was feeling the contradictory effects of an aggressive, expansionist, capitalistic, and industrial spirit of the post-Independence era. These were the roots for the breaking out of the Civil War (1861-65) involving liberty, human rights and political union, the horrors of which Melville mirrored in *Battle Pieces* (MELVILLE 1976). Besides that, Melville could not resist moving to the cradle of the Western civilization at a time when the stones were engendering rediscoveries and revealing a new positivism (FOUCAULT 1966: 14, 380). For the young America, the past was mainly a way of representing the "*différence*" (CERTEAU 1975: 100). And Melville agrees: "No past time is lost time" (MELVILLE 1982: 874).⁹ In the case of Naples, its far and near historical past calls up the far and near American history, suggesting a projection into the future. In other words, past comprehends present and past and present predict future; or, as T. S. Eliot remarkably put it in *Four Quartets*, "Burnt Norton":

6 Two manuscripts of "Pausilippo", the elder in pencil (having '1848' crossed out under the main title) and the latter in ink are deposited at the Houghton Library, Harvard University. The poem here dealt with follows the printing in *Timoleon* (MELVILLE 1976: 232-34). There are two other poems about Naples not included in *Timoleon*: "At the Hostelry" and "Naples in the Time of Bomba" (MELVILLE 1924: vol. XVI). There is some evidence to conclude that Melville had first thought of "Pausilippo" as section V of "Naples in the Time of Bomba" (POOLE 1989: xli-xliii).

7 The *Risorgimento* was the revolutionary movement for the unification of Italy and the end of the absolutist Bourbon dynasty. Most American intellectuals, Melville included, supported it. The last Bourbon, Francis II, whom Melville calls "Naples' Nero" in "At the Hostelry", only reigned for 2 years and was overthrown in 1860 (POOLE 1989: xvii-xviii, 28, 38).

8 Posillipo is the hill at the Bay of Naples. Melville offers five wrong spellings in his *Journal* (1971: 179-80, 181, 185, 188, 236). The name was printed 'Pausilippo' in *Timoleon* although it had more correctly been spelt 'Pausillipo' in Melville's manuscript (POOLE 1989: 74). Smith and Shetley also refer to the Greek etymology and suggest the meanings "easing pain" (SMITH 1994: 202) and "end of care" (SHETLEY 1986: 127).

Time present and time past
 Are both perhaps in time future
 And time future contained in time past.

(ELIOT 1963: 189, ll. 1-3)

«Pausilippo» rises between Naples and Bomba, i.e., between hope and despair, attraction and rejection, Eden and hell. It seems to echo a resonance of Shelley's «Adonais», dedicated to Rome: "at once the Paradise, / The grave, the city and the wilderness" (SHELLEY 1966: xlix:1, 2).¹⁰

The poem begins with the narrator approaching Naples Bay and describing the impressive scenario revealed to his eyes. The view strikes him at first sight. It looks like a self-journey into an unexplored territory resembling the fabled Garden of Eden.

A hill there is that laves its feet
 In Naples' bay and lifts its head
 In jovial season, curled with vines.
 Its name, in pristine years conferred
 By settling Greeks, imports that none
 Who take the prospect thence can pine,
 For such the charm of beauty shown
 Even sorrow's self they cheerful weened
 Surcease might find and thank good Pan. (ll. 1-9)

9 Statement inferred from the dialogue between Media and Babbalanja in *Mardi*: "No pastime is lost time.' Musing a moment, Babbalanja replied, 'My lord, that maxim may be good as it stands; but had you made six words of it, instead of six syllables, you had uttered a better and a deeper'"(MELVILLE 1982: 874).

10 Shelley also composed «Ode to Naples» (1820), published in 1824, showing his enthusiasm by the proclamation of a Constitutional Government at Naples. In strophe I Shelley calls Naples "Metropolis of a ruined Paradise / Long lost, late won, and yet but half regained!" (SHELLEY 1966: 398).

The place is shown in exuberant beauty and abundance, as a peak of wonder and perennial good inspired in the name of the hill: "Pausilippo, Pausilippo, / Pledging easement unto pain." (ll. 46-47). The primitive conditions promise a peaceful living, freedom from fear, absence of tensions and a flowering life. The harmonious beauty of the hill projected onto the first stanza design enhances a close relationship between man and nature, as some personifications let guess: "laves its feet", "lifts its head", "curled with wines". The beauty also pays tribute to Virgil, who is said to be buried there. Melville refers it in "Naples in the Time of Bomba": "I mused on Virgil, here inurned / On Pausilippo, legend tells –"(MELVILLE 1989: 53).

The indifference attached to the name "Naples" ("Its name.../ ...imports that none") ironically and intentionally recalls the American city settling "in pristine times": the narrator ventures into Naples Bay as Puritans did into Massachussets Bay, and he is fascinated by an impressive landscape as the Pilgrims were in sight of Virginia, questing after the lost paradise in order to build a new

city of God. And as the Greek settlers found a place where to rise a *nea polis*, the Americans found the New World where to build a "new city". So, the new *polis*/city assumes the meaning of a new experiment, both individual and collective, the hope for a new beginning, a New Jerusalem, configuring a phenomenon and a symbol America is so familiar with.

The hill is the first significant reference the poet makes and the first vision he offers. Its words are on the peak of the poem and its design on the verge of the lines. Allotting the stanza layout visual purposes, the poet turns it significantly relevant (FRYE 1957: 258). The hill is also the first direction he takes in the poem. His pioneering sensibility meets Bradford's desire to reach the top of Pisgah. But as in colonial times, he finds out the place is taken: there are two faces he cannot help noticing:

Toward that hill my landreau drew;
And there, hard by the verge, was seen
Two faces with such meaning fraught
One scarce could mark and straight pass on. (ll. 11-13)¹¹

Then, from the fertile, edenic scenery of the hill the reader passes to the suffering, disturbing city atmosphere at its base. From backwards in the early city we are pushed forward to the time of Bomba. The welcoming place that once generated a *nea polis* has become a space for lament and sorrow. In the former *agora* where the time folk used to assemble there is now room to pain and loneliness:

A man it was less hoar with time
Than bleached through strange immurement long,
Retaining still, by doom depressed,
Dim trace of some aspiring prime.
Seated he tuned a homely harp
Watched by a girl, whose filial mien
Toward one almost a child again,
Took on a staid maternal tone.
Nor might one question that the locks
Which in smoothed natural silvery curls
Fell on the bowed one's thread-bare coat
Betrayed her ministering hand. (ll. 14-25)

An overtly long line enhances a "strange immurement long" – a resonance of *Bartleby's* closed world – and some adjectives stress the disenchanted place: "hoar", "bleached", "still", "doom depressed",

¹¹ In the first draught there is another line: "I bade my charioteer rein up" (POOLE 1989: 91; SHETLEY 1986: 128).

"Dim face", "silvery curls", sounding as a jeremiad over the corrupt ways of the world. The man tunes a harp and the girl sings an ode. The place is "at once the site of alienation and the site of human efforts at community" (SCOTT 1994: 333), where they voice a lament for unreturnable time, lost beauty and human injustice.¹² The man is Silvio Pellico, "the quelled enthusiast", an Italian hero in the revolutionary fervor of the 1840's recently set free who supposedly wrote a patriotic ode (SMITH 1994: 203).¹³ Some biographical reflexes can be gathered in this stanza (ll. 26-37), since Silvio's story applies to Melville's as far as their contemporaries' injustice is concerned.¹⁴

A rosary of unhappy events follows: "inklings", "clandestine arrest", "construed treason; trial none; / Prolonged captivity profound, / Vain liberation late", making a sequence of unbearable injustices. It reminds us of Melville's words about the hero in «Timoleon», "crowned with laurel twined with thorn" (MELVILLE 1976: 207). In revealing Silvio's story, "part recalled", the poet shows a kind of democratic fraternity that the new era did not share at all.

Silvio flees from the city and heads "hillward", as the last remedy for happiness; however, as he "turned" away, the hill's redeeming power becomes a query expanded in the subtle conditional of the next stanza:

Pausilippo, Pausilippo,
Pledging easement unto pain,
Shall your beauty even solace
If one's sense of beauty wane?

Could light airs that round ye play
Waft heart-heaviness away
Or memory lull to sleep,
Then, then indeed your balm
Might Silvio becharm,
And life in fount would leap,
Pausilippo!

(ll. 46-56)

Formerly embodying a heavenly place where fresh winds blew, memory dreamt, pain was eased and re-birth occurred, the hill has meanwhile gained splintered meanings that new times have installed. Indeed, times when "man and nature seemed divine", as referred to in "C—'s Lament" (MELVILLE 1976: 224) are but past, natural beauty is no longer perceived, the landscape unable to relieve pain, nature no longer sympathetic with man.¹⁵

12 The passage bears resemblance to "The Aeolian Harp" in *John Marr* where the harp wails "shrieking up inward crescendo — / Dying down in plaintive key!" (MELVILLE 1976: 195).

13 Silvio Pellico is celebrated in other Melvillean works: *Clarel* (l. xxviii), *The Confidence-Man* (ch. 21). A suppressed section of "Naples in the Time of Bomba" narrates "the excursion to Posillipo where Silvio Pellico is seen" (POOLE 1989: 74).

14 The idea of the hero isolated by the dominant culture of the time is also conveyed by the poem "The Enthusiast" in *Timoleon* (MELVILLE 1976: 223).

15 According to Shetley, the place of the poem in the sequence means a farewell to the notion of a humanized nature, of sympathy between man and landscape", of wordsworthian influence (SHETLEY 1986: 127).

The hill remains in the background, "Evoking [t]here in vision / Fulfilment and fruition –" (ll. 61-62), but no longer trustful and thus refused by Silvio: "Not mine, nor meant for man!" (l. 63) The hill that once took the Greek settlers is a dream, after all. On its top there is no *Acropolis*, the divinity has vanished as the temple has left no trace. The powerful, optimistic vision is not effective revelation, as Melville noted in his *Journal*: "At Posilipo found not the cessation which the name expresses" (MELVILLE 1971: 119). The promise lying in its name is cried out, echoing in the poem:

But I've looked upon your revel –
It unravels not the pain:
Pausilippo, Pausilippo,
Named benignly if in vain! (ll. 71-74)

In the last stanza the echo fades and the narrator resumes his description. In the former *agora* silence reigns: Silvio is quietened, the poet is hardly perceived, as Melville promises in the preface of "At the Hostelry": "keep where I belong that is to say in the background" (MELVILLE 1989: 1). Ambiguity, injustice, unpredictability wander the city; the sense of abandonment haunts it; the alienating urban scene pervades the stanza; only the murmur of the water is audible from the shore. Again some personifications are scattered, this time indifferent to human pain: "languid tone", "lapped the passive shore", "bland untroubled heaven / Looked down". Contradicting the optimistic view of the nineteenth century, neither the deity, nor money coming from the "ore" are a relief for human suffering.

* * *

The city as a recurrent image in Melville's works is a peaceful judgment. Somewhere in his narratives and poems we come upon a city, its sights, its observers, its dwellers, always with a sense of newness, meaning and discovery, claiming representation in the urban culture (BERGMAN 1995: 3). Underneath there is a conflict between the pastoral tradition and the urban phenomenon in response to the growth of cities and the distinction between city and country. Yet, as Kelley states, there are non-consensual opinions about Melville being anti-urban or a social writer (KELLY 1886: 12), but it is always "possible to speak of his responses to nineteenth-century politics and culture" (13).

The ideal of diversity rooted in the Romantic principle of plenitude together with a sense of superabundance about natural resources developed the idea of multiplicity, which plunged the nineteenth century into overwhelming fragmentation. The streets of cities crowded with lonely dwellers paved the way to "the discovery of the self through encounter with the unfamiliar" and allowed the confrontation with diversity, leading to what Greenberg calls *Splintered Worlds*. (GREENBERG 1993: 1-8, 20).

Presenting the city throughout his works as dismal, indifferent, painful, cruel, closed or desolated, Melville does so in a subversive form in relation to his contemporary culture: he "undermine[s] his reader's expectations and subvert[s] the conventions of mainstream culture" (KELLY 1996: 14).

The triangle designed in "Pausilippo" – the hill, the (new) city and the human being – configures the doorway through which Melville confronts his contemporary America with itself through encounter with the unfamiliar. Melville creatively and subtly reconstructs the idea of Manifest Destiny and the branches born thereafter. He inverts the archetypal idea of "city upon a hill" by contrasting Whinthrop's dream with the real Naples, i. e., by standing between the nostalgia of finding a New Jerusalem and the reality of reaching a new Babylon.

In the beginning there is the hope in reaching a new Eden in a *nea polis* where the pastoral vision and the urban reality could be reconciled; in the end, neither a Greek *polis*, nor Mather's *Theopolis Americana*, nor the fusion of opposite poles turn up: there is a hill, but no temple on the summit; there is a summit but no one ascends it; the ideal of the whole held in the *polis* has become a fragmented mosaic in the dreamt new city; the place attracts, yet, it repels; what is more, the city lies at the base, not envisioned on the top of the hill. It is like Hopper, a valley Melville refers in his lecture "Travelling", "which however fair and sheltered, shuts him [everyman] in from the outer world" (MELVILLE 1934: 726).¹⁶

Again, Melville wants to reach both the black and the bright sides of the real. He re-formulates the tortoise of "The Encantadas" and mirrors an inverted image of the city.¹⁷ He deconstructs the mythical promise of "a city upon a hill" and re-presents it at the bottom of a hill, as a place where opportunity is not granted, rather submitted to chance.

The trip to Naples opens itself to solitude and suffering, but also to quest, identity and otherness with memory playing an

16 For this and the other two conferences Melville held in 1857-1860, "Roman Statuary" and "The South Seas", see SEALTS JR. 1970; and MELVILLE 1971.

17 Melville says in «The Encantadas»: "the tortoise, dark and melancholy as it is upon its back, still possesses a bright side; [...] Enjoy the bright, keep it turned up perpetually if you can, but be honest and don't deny the black. Neither should he, who cannot turn the tortoise from its natural position [...] for that cause declare the creature to be one total inky blot. The tortoise is both black and bright" (MELVILLE 1985: 137-38).

important role. As Fitzgerald says in "My Lost City", "All is lost save memory, [...] So, perhaps I am destined to return some day and find in the city new experiences that so far I have only read about. For the moment I can only cry out that I have lost my splendid mirage. Come back, come back, O glittering and white!" (FITZGERALD 1962: 33). The "shore" in line 76 is a place both of arrival and to departure. However "passive" it is, it inscribes the path to a new voyage, an irresistible desire for a new beginning somewhere in another city. The urban complexity is after all a challenging field, an open text offered to the poet's imagination and art:

We shall not cease from exploration
 And the end of all our exploring
 Will be to arrive where we started
 And know the place for the first time.

(ELIOT 1963: 221)

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