

Oedipus (ll. 1002–09), with the Christian idea of Providence, using—though not directly acknowledging—the argument presented by Lipsius in *De Constantia*. In the 300-odd small quarto pages of the 1628 additions, Felltham quotes Seneca (both the plays and the prose works) fourteen times, Tacitus twice, and Lipsius three times. And many of the attitudes and arguments that Felltham presents as his own betray the strong, though unacknowledged, influence of these and other Stoic writers.

In 1661, *Resolves* was reissued in what Felltham called “a new Forme.” If Miner’s thesis is correct, then one might expect the new pieces in this revision to be somewhat more Stoic than those of 1623 and 1628; but the reverse is true. While still Stoic in many ways (he could not reasonably be expected to throw over all of his previous thought patterns), Felltham tempers his Stoicism with considerable optimism, admitting “That the present Times are not worse then the Former” (LXXVI), and concluding that “in the general, the World is rather better then worse then it hath been.”

Stoicism more often than not appeals to people living in hard times; when times change for the better, the need for Stoic consolation fades. This is probably why Felltham and other essayists needed Stoicism in the earlier seventeenth century, but not in the later. The first third of the century was, to many thoughtful Englishmen, a time of great apprehension; and the middle decades proved their worst fears well-founded. In order to provide themselves with some equilibrium during the hard years, many sensitive Englishmen turned to Christian Stoicism. When order was restored (or at least seemed to be), their thoughts could and did dwell on happier things, and they lost some of their need for the intellectual and spiritual comforts of the Stoic attitude. The idea of progress, moral as well as material, took hold; and after 1660 few new Stoic essays of any consequence appeared, though older collections were republished well into the reign of Queen Anne.

It should be emphasized that Stoicism is a private, not a political, philosophy. In searching for Stoic influences on Restoration literature, Miner asserts that Stoics held the individual to have “obligations (Cicero’s ‘offices’) to others and, particularly, to public service” (p. 1033). This is not an accurate representation of Stoic beliefs. From Zeno to Lipsius, Stoics and neo-Stoics emphasize indifference to worldly affairs. The “offices,” which Miner believes to be Stoic in origin, actually constitute one of the major differences between Cicero’s position and that of Stoicism.

It appears, then, that “real English evidence” supports the traditional view: an interest in Stoic thought flowered in England during the earlier seventeenth century and faded from popularity soon after the Res-

toration. Granting the premise that “in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries writing was a learned enterprise based on models,” which Miner accepts as true (p. 1025), it does not necessarily follow that the most popular books exerted the greatest influence. Unless they consider internal evidence as well as frequency of publication, future literary historians might reasonably conclude that *Gone with the Wind* exerted more influence on serious American novelists between 1940 and 1960 than did either *The Sound and the Fury* or *Ulysses*.

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Notes

¹ Earl Miner, “Patterns of Stoicism in Thought and Prose Styles, 1530–1700,” *PMLA*, 85 (1970), 1023–34; John Freehafer, “A Misuse of Statistics in Studying Intellectual History,” *PMLA*, 86 (1971), 1028–29; Franklin B. Williams, Jr., “Stoic Reading in Renaissance England,” *PMLA*, 86 (1971), 1029–30.

² Space does not allow the buttressing of my conclusions regarding Felltham’s Stoicism with extensive quotations from *Resolves*. For that corroborating evidence, see the second chapter of my *Owen Felltham* (New York: Twayne, in press).

Carlyle and Arnold

To the Editor:

D. R. M. Wilkinson ends his timely article, “Carlyle, Arnold, and Literary Justice” (March 1971), with these words: “It is generally accepted that in order to improve one’s position on the academic market one must write a book, and it seems to be the prevailing belief that if one writes a book, say, on Davenant, Prior, or Macaulay, then it is one’s business to rank these writers as far as it is in one’s power to do so, with Ben Jonson, Dryden, and Coleridge, and to forget about the vital matter of getting them into a better critical and historical perspective (which is much more difficult, of course).”

As the author of one of the only two full-length books on D’avenant (as he always printed his name on all his title pages), I must enter a demurrer against Mr. Wilkinson’s too careless selection of examples to illustrate his thesis. The dominant tone of my own approach to Sir William, the unofficial laureate between Jonson and Dryden, never even implied his equality with either of them, although he was associated with them both; rather, this tone was critical and ironical.

So I now turn over to Alfred Harbage and the authors of the books on Prior and Macaulay (whoever they may be that Mr. Wilkinson has in mind) the job

of clearing themselves of the accusation of literary tumescence in their treatment of their subjects.

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Melville's *Clarel*

To the Editor:

Stanley Brodwin's article on *Clarel* (May 1971) contained a number of inaccuracies and distortions. Without intending to engage in interpretive dispute I would like to cite the following:

1. "Part iv concludes the pilgrimage at Bethlehem for Easter with a symbolic ending on Ash Wednesday" (p. 376).¹

This sentence with its syntactic obscurity perhaps contains a typographical error. But if it really means to say that the pilgrimage ends at Bethlehem on Easter it is incorrect. The pilgrimage ends at Jerusalem, where it began. *Clarel* remains in Jerusalem from Ash Wednesday to Whitsuntide, when the poem ends.

2. "Clarel leaves on his pilgrimage after the murder of Nathan and Agar by marauding Arabs . . . At the end of the poem *Clarel* returns to find Ruth dead of grief" (p. 376).

Only Nathan, not Agar, was killed before *Clarel's* departure. Upon returning to Jerusalem *Clarel* comes upon the funeral party of Agar and Ruth. Whether they died from fever or grief is unspecified: "'How happened it? speak! The fever—grief: / 'Twere hard to tell'" (iv.xxx.94–95). We learn, however, that "The life was reft / Sudden from Ruth" and that Agar died "out of her mind" (iv.xxx.106–08), which suggests that Ruth may have succumbed to fever and Agar to a combination of fever and grief.

3. "This broad summary of the plot reveals Melville's tragic vision. On one level, the brutal and irrational passions of men destroy the only possible redemptive value men have in their relations with one another: love" (p. 376).

This statement rests upon the unjustified assumption that Ruth died of grief for her murdered parents. But only one of her parents, Nathan, was murdered, and Ruth may actually have died of fever. It is not really clear, then, that the destruction of love is due primarily to "the brutal and irrational passions" of the marauding Arabs.

4. "The contrast between the genuine star of salvation and modern man's Heaven of 'feeble' stars provides a structural trope that also points to the characters of the 'starry watchers' who accompany *Clarel*, particularly Derwent, Rolfe, and Vine" (p. 377).

Here, as more explicitly elsewhere, Mr. Brodwin treats Derwent, Rolfe, and Vine as modern Magi and thus as "starry watchers," i.e., watchers of the star of

Bethlehem. But in the passage cited, "starry watchers" refers not to the Magi but to the angels in Christ's tomb, "when they kept / Vigil at napkin feet and head / Of Him their Lord" (i.v.35–37). The angels in their dazzling brilliance are likened to stars; they are "starry watchers" in a completely different sense from the Magi.

5. "Melville proleptically structures this theme by introducing the 'Star of Wormwood,' an apocalyptic image of the destruction that descends on man after the opening of the seventh seal . . . The doom is fulfilled when the fanatical Nehemiah sleepwalks to his death into the Dead or 'bitter' Sea" (pp. 377–78).

This passage contains both a misquote and a gross distortion. In Revelations viii.10–11 the phrase is "the name of the star is called Wormwood," not "Star of Wormwood." In *Clarel* the relevant passage is as follows: "It is the star / Called Wormwood. Some hearts die in thrall / Of waters which yon star makes gall" (ii.xxvi.22–24). To apply these lines, spoken by the misanthrope Mortmain, to Nehemiah is misleading in the extreme. Nehemiah, having tasted the waters of the Dead Sea and found them sweet, is specifically exempted from thralldom to the bitter waters and their star. His death, though not without ambiguity, is attended by a beatific vision of the New Jerusalem.

6. "The devil, however, has told the Monk that death is 'the cunningest mystery: / *Alive thou'lt not know death; and, dead, / Death thou'lt not know*'" (p. 378). [My italics.]

This is another misquote. It should be ". . . *Alive thou knowst not death,*" etc. (ii.xviii.122–24).

7. "Through the Devil, Melville is meditating on the fact that spiritual uncertainty must always be part of man's predicament" (p. 378).

It is not a fact but an inference, and there are characters in *Clarel*, e.g., Nehemiah, Derwent, the young priest at Bethlehem, for whom it is not even that.

8. "Either man must have absolute knowledge, or life loses its meaning and death becomes the only reality, yielding at least the grace of annihilation. This position permeates the Book of Ecclesiastes—one of Melville's favorites—and is Camus's existential starting point in *The Myth of Sisyphus*" (p. 379).

In a footnote Mr. Brodwin reinforces the reference to Camus by quoting from *The Myth of Sisyphus*: "There is but one truly serious philosophical problem and that is suicide." Granted that there are affinities between the moods of Ecclesiastes, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, and particular passages in *Clarel*, to equate them in this way without elaboration amounts to little more than name-dropping. There are, furthermore, at least two differences worth noting between them: (1) neither in Ecclesiastes nor in *Clarel* is the desirability of suicide overtly debated, as in Camus, and (2) in both Ecclesiastes and *Clarel* there is constant reference to God,