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DOMINATION AND RESISTANCE IN
HERMAN MELVILLE'S CHARACTERS

por

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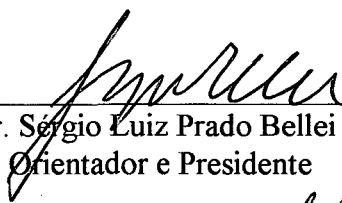
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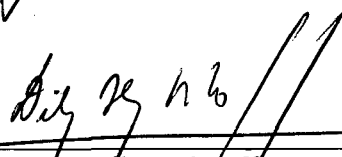


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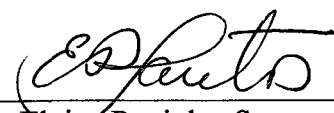
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DEDICATION

To Ivan, my husband, with all my love.

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Bellei.

ABSTRACT

DOMINATION AND RESISTANCE IN HERMAN MELVILLE'S CHARACTERS

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Melville's work is often characterized by power struggles in which forces of dominance encounter resistance. This is the case of short stories such as "Billy Budd, Sailor", "Benito Cereno" and "Bartleby, The Scrivener".

"Billy Budd, Sailor" deals with resistance to military power. Billy is a young sailor subordinated to military law on board of a war ship. He is apparently a victim of human evil, personified by Claggart, the master at arms. when Claggart accuses Billy of being a spy, Billy becomes aggressive, and accidentally, kills Claggart. The humanitarian side of the story is ignored by the captain of the ship, and Billy's punishment is death by hanging. In his execution, Billy seems to acknowledge the rule of law, but his behavior can also be interpreted as a symbol of resistance to oppression.

In "Benito Cereno", power is expressed in the relationship between masters and slaves. It is a story of a Spanish ship, which was carrying negro slaves from Senegal to Lisbon. During the trip, there is a mutiny and the negroes assume the control of the ship. As the story develops, an American ship approaches and Captain Benito manages to tell the American

captain about the mutiny. The Americans use their military power and the negroes are again reduced to their former position as slaves.

"Bartleby, The Scrivener" may be read as a case of civil resistance to economic power. The story, which takes place in Wall Street, portrays the struggle of an employee against capitalist society: Bartleby works in a law office where he is forced to act according to the productive laws of the capitalist market. His resistance, paradoxically, takes the form of passivity, as he uses the tragic-comic refrain "would prefer not to" when he is required to do his social duties. He ends up committing suicide, but he does not submit to economic power.

RESUMO

A produção literária de Herman Melville é caracterizada por disputas de poder nas quais forças de dominação enfrentam resistência. Este é o caso dos contos "Billy Budd, Marinheiro" "Benito Cereno" e "Bartleby, O Escrivão". "Billy Budd, Marinheiro" enfoca resistência ao poder militar. Billy é um jovem marinheiro, subordinado a lei militar a bordo de um navio de guerra. Ele é vítima do ódio humano, personificado por Claggart, mestre das armas. Quando Claggart, acusa Billy de ser um espião, Billy torna-se agressivo e, acidentalmente, o mata. O lado humano do episódio é ignorado pelo capitão do navio, e Billy é condenado a morrer na forca. Na sua execução, Billy parece aceitar as regras do sistema militar, porém, seu comportamento também pode ser interpretado com um símbolo de resistência a opressão.

Em "Benito Cereno", as relações de poder acontecem entre escravos e senhores. Nessa estória, um navio espanhol transporta escravos negros de Senegal para Lisboa. Durante a viagem, Os negros rebelam-se e assumem o comando do navio. Porém, um navio americano aproxima-se e capitão Benito pede ajuda ao capitão americano.

"Bartleby, O Escrivão" pode ser entendido como um caso de resistência civil ao poder econômico. A estória acontece em Wall Street e relata a luta de um empregado contra a sociedade capitalista. Bartleby trabalha em um escritório de advocacia onde ele é forçado a agir de acordo com as regras de produção do mercado capitalista. Paradoxalmente, sua resistência é passiva, usando o refrão "Eu prefiro não. ..." cada vez que fosse solicitado a cumprir suas obrigações sociais. Ele acaba cometendo suicídio, mas não se submete ao poder econômico e às regras do mercado capitalista.

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INTRODUCTION

According to Thomas De Quincey, literature can be divided into literature of knowledge and literature of power (526)¹. The first has the function of teaching, the second of moving. Although Melville's literary work mixes these two kinds of literature, contemporary readings tend to emphasize the literature of power. My objective is to investigate Melville's short stories "Billy, Budd, Sailor", "Benito Cereno" and "Bartleby, The Scrivener" in order to understand how power operates in them. The hypothesis is that Melville's short stories are primarily stories about relations of power, resistance, and non-conformity in the presence of dominance. In "Billy Budd, Sailor", Billy is victim of the tyranny of military power and resists through violence. In "Benito Cereno", the negroes resist colonial power through tactics of savagery and terrorism. In "Bartleby, The Scrivener", Bartleby resists economic power through passive resistance, practicing then a form of civil disobedience. In the present study, I shall first analyze the forms of power present in each story. Second, I will verify the strategies of resistance used to face different forms of power; third, I will compare the forms of power and the strategies of resistance used in the three short stories, situating Melville's own view of domination and resistance. I've selected these three short stories, among all Melville's amazing work, because they portray power in very different contexts: military, colonial and capitalist, and even in so different situations, power operates in a similar way, being oppressive, but not absolute.

Social and political theories of power will be instrumental for my research since Melville dealt with social issues of the nineteenth century. In general terms, power is the capacity one has of dominating or controlling another person or group within a social context. In Melville's stories, it is manifested through many forms, such as military power, colonial power and

¹ J. A. Cuddon, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms* (NY: Penguin, 1982) 526

economic power. These forms of power, however, encounter forces of resistance which destabilize domination.

Melville's tendency to write about social issues is intrinsically linked with his own experience of life. Herman Melville was born in August, 1819, descending from Thomas Melville and Peter Gansevoort, both heroes of the American Revolution. In spite of his noble origin, his family had many financial problems, and Melville started working very young. He worked as bank clerk, farmhand, journalist, deckhand, teacher, sailor on a whaler, store clerk, and ordinary seaman in the navy. He started his literary career with "Typee" in 1846, narrating his adventure in the Pacific Ocean. In the following years, Melville published "Omoo", "Mardi" and "White Jacket", which were not very successful among readers. His biggest literary success came in 1851/52 with "Moby Dick", which is considered one of his masterpieces. Melville continued his literary production, publishing short stories in magazines such as Putnam's and Harper's. In September of 1891, Melville died without fame and money. He was a writer who discussed issues ahead of his time, so his talent was ignored in life. His stories did not limit to narrate his exotic experiences at sea, but he included philosophical, religious and political considerations in his works, which were not well accepted by readers of that time.

Fortunately, in the twenty century, Melville finally reached his deserved recognition, and nowadays, he is considered one of the most brilliant writers of the nineteen century.

CHAPTER I

WHAT IS POWER?

a. Some Concepts.

Power is present everywhere and guides the vast majority of social actions. In this chapter, I shall deal with concepts of power, exclusively the ones related to human beings and their diverse social interactions, which can be called politics in the broadest sense.

On first consideration, any analysis of power in real social situations is extremely complex due to its abstract character, therefore, no absolute truth is aimed at here, but a reflection on the traditional and current trends on this issue. As it is necessary to understand the mechanisms of the past centuries to understand society today, I shall start this study by pointing out some of the great philosophers' thoughts, such as Thomas Hobbes from the seventeenth century, Max Weber and Bertrand Russel from the nineteenth century, and the contemporary philosophers George Simmel, Nico Poulantzas, Hannah Arendt and Michel Foucault.

When one thinks of power the very first idea has been that of an one-directional flow, that is, the rule of a man or a group over others. This is the concept portrayed by Thomas Hobbes in his book *Leviathan*, (translated as 'Mortal god') which refers to power mainly in terms of the state, linking it strictly to the figure of the sovereign². The sovereign should be the detector of absolute power and his vassals should obey him concerning laws disposition of property, jobs, titles of honor, and power to promote peace or war, that is, the sovereign would be responsible for all their life conditions. Thus, the sovereign should not only be obeyed, but he could not also be destituted of his position or even punished for any of his actions, as he is supposed to rule over everybody's will. The state is then guided by relations

² Thomas Hobbes. *Leviatã ou Matéria, Forma e pode de um Estado Eclesiástico e Civil* (São Paulo: Nova Cultural, 1998) 30-59.

of absolute domination and subordination. On the sphere of personal relationships, Hobbes presents another kind of power which flows from the individual personality and can be translated as any quality that makes a man to be loved or feared by others, constituting, therefore, a way of getting help and service of them. Hobbes claims that power, moreover, can be natural or instrumental. The former presents itself as the eminence of faculties, on the body or on the spirit, such as extraordinary strength, beauty, prudence, capacity, eloquence, liberality or nobility. Instrumental power, by its turn, is acquired as a result of natural power, or even by chance, constituting a way to acquire richness, reputation, prestige, friends, or still good luck. These personal characteristics give power to the individual who can act over the others, manipulating them according to his will in a relation of domination and subordination.

Still arguing in favor of power as a force of domination, the philosopher Bertrand Russel defines power not as absolute, but as the production of intended effects, that is, the more one individual achieves goals, the more power he will have over the others³. Power is then a quantitative concept. Russel suggests that power may be exercised by the manner of influencing individuals and by the organization involved. Individuals may be influenced by means of physical force (as represented by military organizations and police); rewards or punishments as means of inducement (such as in economic organizations); and also by means of influencing opinions (as in the case of churches, political panics). It is important to highlight that these forms of power are usually interrelated and they happen under three centers of power which are traditional power, naked power and revolutionary power. Traditional power is based on the force of habit and customs, it does not have to justify itself to get people's respect, as illustrated by royal power. Naked power rests upon physical coercion as a way of imposing itself usually exercised through tyranny as in a dictatorship system. Revolutionary power differs from the others because it is supported by a large group

³ Bertrand Russel, *Power: A New Social Analysis* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1975) 25-34.

of people with the same sentiments, such as a new creed or program as, for instance, the Nazi program. In sum, Russel conveys his ideas of power as a struggle between stronger and weaker individuals, establishing forces of domination and subordination.

Similarly, the German philosopher Max Weber poses the question of power in terms of domination⁴. Weber believes that any social act is permeated by structures of dominance which are revealed through the exercise of power, and his definition of power, accordingly, refers to the chance of a man or a number of men to realize their own will in a communal action even against the resistance of the other participants of the action. Power may be distributed within communities through classes, status groups and parties. The former belongs to the economic strata of society, representing a group of people with a common economical level under the same conditions of the labor market, while the second, status groups, belong to the social order of communities, deriving their power from positive or negative estimations of honor, including relations of prestige. The parties aim at influencing a communal action no matter what its content may be; they act within the social structures of domination and their leaders deal with the conquest of a community. For Weber, the exercise of power may happen in many ways, especially through economic domination and through authority. Economic power reveals itself in the market game, it is based on the possession of goods and doesn't show its domination formally, but it guides the dominated in the pursuit of their own interests. Authority, on the other hand, consists on the duty to obey independently of any personal motives. The dividing line between these two kinds of domination is very fluid, since one may complement the other, and they may exist in all kinds of relationships.

As well as Weber, the contemporary social philosopher Georg Simmel believes that power presents itself through relations of domination, but in Simmel's understanding, these relations

⁴ Max Webwer, *Ecônomy and Society* ed. G. Roth and C. Wittich (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978) 941-48.

are interactive and based on the paradox of dominance and freedom⁵. Relations of power cannot be summarized as the superordinate having absolute power, and the subordinate deprived of all freedom. Instead, Simmel claims that 'even in the most oppressive and cruel cases of subordination, there is still a considerable measure of personal freedom'(182)⁶. People usually do not exercise this personal freedom due to its price - punishment may be very hard in the case of breaking imposed laws. Conversely, the superordinate is also relatively deprived of his freedom, becoming a "leader and led" as defined by Simmel; for instance, a teacher is in a position of leadership in a classroom, however, he is led by the response students give him. Where there is the absence of this interaction of power, there is tyranny. Simmel points out that the interaction of power between superordinate and subordinate is based on power invested as authority and as emanating from prestige. Authority may be acquired by a person of superior significance or strength, or by the power inherent to social organizations such as state, church, schools, being characterized by the objectivity of norms and forces. Prestige, on the contrary, flows from the individual force conscious of itself getting easily voluntary followers, as in the case of some political leaders. This nuance of power blinds its followers to any kind of criticism, containing a consciousness of spontaneity, while authority, even being seen as more oppressive, permits its subordinates some criticism. Therefore, Simmel's ideas are instrumental in understanding relations of power as spontaneous and interactive.

Following a different trend, Robert Dahl's concept of power concentrates on inter-individual relations, made upon the study of power and individuals⁷. Dahl suggests that differences in political systems or in society are usually related to the way power is distributed among individuals or groups, hence, any analysis of power should identify and study the

⁵ *The Sociology of Georg Simmel* trans. and ed. Kurt H. Wolff (NY: The Free Press, 1950) 181-190.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Robert Dahl *Power*: International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences. Ed. David L. Sills, vol. 12 (NY: Crowell Collier and Macmillan, Inc., 1968) 405-415.

leaders and non-leaders within the social system. He understands power relations as causal relations, as for example, the subject A has power over B, therefore, A's behavior causes B's behavior. Dahl makes clear the difference between having power and exercising it basing his argument on the presence or absence of a manifested intention, that is if A's behavior is driven by an intention, A has and exercises power over B, however, B may also have power, but if he does not have a manifested intention he does not exercise his power.

Moving from the individual to a collective perspective, Nico Poulantzas understands power as the capacity of a group, specifically, a social class, to attain its objective interests⁸. His concept implies the division of society into classes- the dominant and the subordinate, generating this way, in Marxist terms, class struggles. A social class must be here understood as an organization which has its own social force, producing pertinent effects with the power that emanates from it, independently of its political or ideological bases. The power relations which emerge from class struggles are mainly determined by economic power, becoming complex because they form a network locating power at various levels of class practices. Therefore, these relations do not express a totalitarian form of power, on the contrary, power is constantly exercised through an interaction of forces among the classes. In a quite similar approach, Hannah Arendt links the idea of power to that of communication⁹. In her concept, power is 'the human ability to act in concert' (64), resting on the agreement upon a common course of action in unconstrained communication, to form a common will. For her part, there is no absolute power because it is not an individual, but a collective action toward a goal, becoming an important device for political liberty. Through the exercise of power, new relations and realities can be established. These new realities can be produced in terms of force, strength, authority, and violence, which have a close relation to power yet they do not have the same meaning. In her understanding, strength is an individual entity which belongs

⁸ Nico Poulantzas, *Political Power and Social Classes*, trans. And ed. Timothy O'Hagan (London, New Left books and sheed and ward, 1973) 104-114.

to the character, force is seen as the energy released by physical or social movements, authority has its unquestionable recognition by those who are asked to obey without coercion or persuasion, and violence is used to multiply natural strength, or even substitute it. One should differentiate these terms since they may produce very different effects. Arendt argues that power needs legitimacy, which relies on credibility gained in the past, and not justification, which relates to an end that lies in the future. Violence, a term often confused with power, arises when power is not legitimate, but exercised through absolute domination and fear, like tyranny. Violence can destroy power, but never create it, once power is a positive and enabling result of human collective communication, which is based on common consensus.

Like Arendt, Michel Foucault thinks of power in a positive way, but he offers another perspective on how power operates¹⁰. First of all, Foucault does not have a theory on what power is, instead, he concentrates his studies on the mechanisms and strategies of it. He does not reconstruct power historically; rather, he deconstructs power using a historical perspective, developing an "archaeology of power" which studies the discourses of truth that guide our society, not in a linear, continuous schema of development, but as sets of disruptions, discontinuities. He believes that 'at certain moments and in certain orders of knowledge, there are these sudden take-offs, these hastenings of evolution which fail to correspond to the calm, continuist image that is normally accredited' (112)¹¹. These sudden breaks in history reveal the regimes of truth that guide society. For his part, power cannot be possessed as something outside the individual, instead, power is exercised and it is constitutive of the individual. Contrary to the classical theories, Foucault rejects the simple, hierarchical approach of power as the rule of one man over the others; he suggests that power

⁹ Hannah Arendt *On Violence*, (London: Allen Lane, 1970).

¹⁰ Michel Foucault *Power and Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writing: 1972-1977* ed. Colin Gordon (NY:Pantheon Books, 1984) 108-165.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

does not come from above, as represented by the sovereign figure, but from below, being dispersed through the network of relationships which form a society Foucault opposes the traditional view of power as negative and repressive, as 'a force that says no; you shall not' (139-140)¹². He argues that this traditional negative view of power is linked to the repressive monarch system, its laws, and its prohibitions. Nonetheless, power must be seen beyond the limhs of the state since h is not able to cover the whole network of power relations such as the family, sexuality, the body, and mainly, because the state depends on this network to exist and operate. Power then must be seen as a positive and technical device in society since it produces things, knowledge, and discourses; it subjects bodies not to render them passive, but to render them active, productive. Besides this, Foucault calls attention to the intrinsic relation of power and knowledge. There is no power without knowledge and vice versa; both are bound up in the production of discourses of truth, and an important way of production of truth has been that of sciences. Strongly opposing Hobbes, who did not believe in the importance of sciences in the question of power, Foucault suggests that sciences are instrumental tools of power. For this reason, the intellectual has an important role to play in the question of power. For Foucault, there are two kinds of intellectual: the universal and the specific. The former is seen as the detector of universal truth, usually being represented by the figure of the writer, while the specific intellectual is represented by the 'savant or expert', and has been in evidence since the Second World War. This kind of intellectual is the one who joins theory to practice because he is inserted within specific sectors of society, dealing with everyday realities that make him aware of concrete problems and struggles. This intellectual has political power to the extend that his knowledge may be applied to benefit or destroy human life, as for instance, the role of a nuclear scientist in times of war, or a genetic scientist cloning human beings. In this sense, the specific intellectual may be viewed as a political threat, depending on whom he

¹² Ibid.

favors when new regimes of truth are being constituted. According to Foucault, another important aspect of power arises in terms of control through the discourses of punishment and discipline¹³. The former is represented by the torture of the body, and was operative until the eighteenth century. The body is seen as the major target of penal repression, and the condemnation of the criminal is a spectacle with the aim of imposing fear and teaching how one should behave. This kind of power is represented by the figure of the sovereign, and has as its "nodes" the king, the prince and the agents thereof. They exercised their power through visibility, that is, people knew that they had been acted upon, in what ways, and by whom. Gradually, this kind of punishment ceased to be so violent and public, and in the nineteenth century, a new economy of power arises. The punishment of the body is changed into the punishment of the soul by submitting criminals to domination, depriving them of all liberty and free choice. A whole new technology of power based on discipline is developed to produce subjected and practiced bodies, that is, docile bodies. This form of power acts through invisibility, coming from everywhere and acting on everyone, thus becoming difficult to locate, therefore difficult to resist. The tactics employed by disciplinary power consist in the training of individuals in order to make them useful and productive, using as means hierarchical observation, normalizing judgement and examinations. Hierarchical observation subjects individuals to constant surveillance in order to assure benefits for industrial production, private property and profit. This is the case of the surveillance exercised nowadays by hidden cameras in supermarkets. Normalizing judgement compares, differentiates, hierarchizes, homogenizes, excludes individuals. It can be illustrated by penal mechanisms, educational organizations, hospital institutions. Normalizing judgement has as its main tool the examinations which confer the individual a visibility through which he is

¹³ Michel Foucault *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* trans/ by Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin Books, 1977).

differentiated and judged, keeping the disciplined individual in his subjection. In this modality of power, the individual is no longer treated as a monument to be remembered as in sovereign power, but as a written document to be studied and controlled. The individual, then, becomes the result of a very effective machinery of power based on discipline over the soul; by technique, normalization, and control that go beyond the limits of the state, but are internalized by a well-trained society.

b. Economic Power.

I shall start this section on economic power dealing with Karl Marx and his ideas concerning the distribution of capital and the control of economic power, as Marx's ideas were arising at the same time that Herman Melville was producing his short stories. Even though these authors did not have any close relation, and lived in different countries, both were influenced by the social and political conflicts of their time.

Marx's ideas portray the struggle of classes of the proletariat versus the bourgeoisie in the social and economic context of society¹⁴. This class struggle is based on the premise that every form of society has been based on the antagonism of oppressing and oppressed classes (424), and that the domain of economic and social power is constantly being disputed. According to Marx, the bourgeoisie holds economic power and, by means of exploitation, reduces all human relationships to a mere money relation, which places capital as the most important goal. In order to achieve such economic goals, the bourgeoisie has created massive productive forces in the industrial area, subjecting the labor workers to a minimum wage; as Marx explains, "not only are they the slaves of the bourgeois class and of bourgeois state, they are daily and hourly enslaved by the machine..." (422). The despotism of bourgeoisie guides all social relations, including laws, morality and religion, as to act in favor of its own interests, producing thus a culture that trains the vast majority of citizens to act as an

¹⁴ Great Books of the Western World vol.50 *Marx* ed. Montimer J. Adler (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 1993) 415-435.

economically productive machine. However, the counter power of the bourgeoisie is centered on the proletariat joined as a party, as represented by the communists who fight for the abolition of private property. They pose property as the main element of class struggle, since property means capital and is the origin of social power. In bourgeois society, the human being is subjected to economic power. In Marx's words, "capital is independent and has individuality while the human being is dependent and has no individuality" (426). Opposing this relation, the ideal of communists is to stop labor from being converted into capital as money, which represents the monopolized social power in the hands of the bourgeoisie. Labor should instead be transformed into benefits for the proletariat itself, thus defeating the individuality proposed by bourgeois society. Thus, if production was centered around a vast association of the whole nation, economic power would not mean the organized power of one class oppressing another. It would mean freedom and equality among all members of society. This utopian end has not been actualized, but Marx's ideas strongly influenced a whole generation of philosophers who believed that economic power must be an action in concert, and not one ruling over the others.

Secondly, I shall concentrate on a contemporary view of the economic relations and power through the theorist Talcott Parsons, who, like Foucault, has a positive understanding of power¹⁵. In his view, power is legally constituted, and functions positively as a system resource. Its relations form a system of binding obligations, that is, a contractual relationship based on collective confidence. The point of departure for his analysis rests on a sophisticated parallel between the empirical systems of economic theory and the traditional political theory, which he believes to be directly articulated within the social system as a whole, linked through a net of interests, one depending on the other. Power then is not a particular act of

¹⁵ Talcott Parson, *On the Concept of Political Power* ed. Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society (June, 1963) 232-62.

imposition, but a generalized medium which can be exercised through various subsystems within a society which works in concert. In this study, special attention will be given to the economic subsystem of society, which places money as its main instrument of action. Money, an essentially symbolic phenomenon, serves as a medium of exchange and as a measure of value. As a medium of exchange, money works as a mode of communication between others to purchase and to sell, allowing the consumer the freedom to spend his money for any item available in the market, to choose the place and time to go shopping, and also to consider terms through which he will accept or reject the purchases, being thus never free to resist consumption. Money, as a measure of value, does not depend on the value of the precious metal, as it used to happen in primitive times, instead, the modern meaning of money is based on a symbolic value, resting on linguistic conventions, and being supported by an institutionalized monetary system, which as power, must be legitimized and inspire confidence. Therefore, economic power is represented by a whole set of institutions such as banks, and groups of interest, establishing among the members of society a relational system in which certain obligations and commitments are required in order to assure the functioning and effectiveness of its actions in favor of the collectivity. If the members of a society do not submit to such rules, they will be victims of deterrence or punishment previously set by laws. At this point, it is necessary to posit the problem of the use of coercion or consensus to achieve compliance to obligations as a phenomenon inherent to power. Parsons believes that since power interactions happen in complex and differentiated systems, and they portray binding obligations, it is through consensus or even coercion that power must mobilize resources to achieve collective ends effectively, having its actions legitimized by the level of seriousness involved in such obligations. Parsons exemplifies this relation recalling Dahl's concept of power, and he suggests that money as well as power can be placed in a general paradigm as one unit acting upon the other, bringing about a change in the other units. For

him, the acting unit of reference called 'ego' operates upon the object called "alter" ego exercises power over alter through some form of control over a situation or through the sanctions employed, which can be positive or negative. A positive sanction gives the "alter" the illusion of being in advantage, through persuasion or inducements, and reinforces the advantages of compliance to ego wishes, while a negative sanction is represented by commitments or coercion, aiming at preventing disobedience to ego wishes. However, both sanctions teach the lesson that it is not worth going against the ego, opposing the unit which is holding power. In this sense, economic power functions as a generalized medium in a complex system which ensures that obligations are binding even though compliance may be optional. One should feel the duty of compliance in the sense of contributing to collective goals and yet, to be free to obey or not. It is important to highlight that, within this system, the concept of compliance is not limited to obedience by subordinates. It is an instrument to establish a normative order, according to which economic power judges and manages this optional compliance, and also controls the productivity of the economy, making use of the necessary sanctions with the support of the political system. Thus, the control over the monetary system is integrated to the institutionalized political power; both act according to common interests.

Terms such as money and power can not be misunderstood. There is a crucial difference between power and money; the former is a continuous linear variable in a numeric scale, while the latter is measured through bases of status attributed. Money refers mainly to a variable measure of value, while political power involves the role of taking decisions as representing the collectivity, having as its main tool the use of authority. Parsons defines authority as a legitimized and organized medium of exercising power within the system of social organization - it is an institutionalized code that defines rights of participation in the power system with the aim of binding the collectivities and its relations in a normative order.

People in the higher order of authority, as represented mainly by the political and juridical staff, are responsible for the decisions, whereas the lower order authority, which are the members of society, are expected to follow. This relation seems to be based on domination and subordination, but, in fact, it is permeated by ambiguity since the higher authority members are compelled to act accordingly to avoid being opposed by the lower authority members. In spite of the apparently unequal distribution of power within the social system, the principle of equalization of power may be possible through the exercise of the right to vote, making clear once again that subsystems of power are interdependent and integrative. Parsons as well as Marx lead us to conclude that economic power can not be hold by single hands, but it must be exercised and shared by the majority of society.

b. Colonial Power

Domination as well as unbalance of power and wealth are present in all human societies, especially in situations where there is a master and a slave, as it was the case of historical colonialism, which has shaped the lives of more than three quarters of people living in the world today.

As the Oxford English Dictionary makes clear, the word colonialism is primarily understood as the policy of acquiring colonies and keeping them dependent, yet very recently it has acquired the meaning of "alleged policy of exploitation of backward or weak people by a large power". Colonialism and colonization, in other words, have become code words for any relation involving exploitation, and derive from the practice of imperialism which, according to Edward Said, means basically "thinking about, settling on, controlling land that you do not possess, that is distant, that is lived on and owned by others"(05)¹⁶. Imperialism can then be defined as the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a metropolitan center that dominates and governs a distant territory, and colonialism, consequently, as the implantation of colonies in distant territories. According to Ashcroft, the term colonial means, more

specifically in literature, a national writing and its characteristics, and furthermore, the term post-colonial covers all the culture affected by colonization until the present day⁽⁰²⁾¹⁷. I shall concentrate this section of study on power relations in the colonial period which will be instrumental in the understanding of post-colonial literatures. It is important to keep in mind that such study is based on the 'historical fact' of European colonialism, and the diverse material effects to which this phenomenon gave rise, and not as a fashionable term employed to a vast range of meanings, especially to indicate any kind of marginality.

In *"The Empire Writes Back"*, Ashcroft et al summarize the main current theories of colonial discourse, having as main representatives authors such as Edward Said, Gayatri C. Spivak, Homi Bhabha, Jenny Sharpe, among others. Ashcroft argues that the first tool of control used in the colonial period is the English language, which was helpful in constructing values such as the concepts of civilization and savagery⁽⁰⁷⁾¹⁸. The colonizing power formed a literary elite who had the control through an imperial educational system. language became the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power was perpetuated, and the reality of marginalization became established. The reality of colonialism portrayed the oppressive roles of the master and the slave; and the key feature of this oppression was the control over the means of communication, especially over writing because it involved a different and invasive orientation to knowledge and interpretations; thus, the ones who could control writing had access to power to dominate. Writing, then, should be the privilege of the masters, and the dominated were kept in ignorance. Besides, as imperial power wanted to avoid any form of insubordination, a strong sense of displacement, and a marginalizing and silencing culture were inflicted on the natives, keeping them as objects. Ashcroft explains, 'imperial conquest has always destroyed the land and often regarded the human occupants as

¹⁶ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1994).

¹⁷ *The Empires Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*. Ed. B. Ashcroft, G. Griffithy, H. Tiffin (London: routledge) 1989, chapters 01 and 03.

disposable, almost as if they were a species of exotic fauna'(82).

Gayatri C. Spivak reconstructs the native as a historically mute subject; the European agent as represented by the imperialist Sovereign Self which induces the native to collude in its own subject(ed) formation as the other and voiceless (37)¹⁹, Spivak is concerned with the exclusions made in the received historical record and intends to restore the effaced signs of native consciousness. For her part, the process of colonization was not only naked repression, but mainly, a process where the native is obliged to see himself as 'other', that is, the native is required to deny his own culture and knowledge and internalize the knowledge proposed by the master. Thus, the colonized lost their ground and their voice to imperialism, and they had to assimilate a culture that was not theirs.

Homi Bhabha, on the other hand, believes that the subaltern did speak, and his readings of the colonialist text recover the native voice²⁰. Even though the colonizer posits the colonized as a racially degenerate population in order to justify conquest and rule, Bhabha argues that the relations of power and knowledge between them are ambiguous, since the colonized can resist the dominant ideology by appropriating that culture based on their own values. Therefore, the master's discourse has already been questioned by the colonized as they are rewriting the master's discourse within their own system of cultural meanings, generating a displacement which is an answer back to the colonialist agents. This displacement then becomes a kind of civil disobedience within the discipline of civility. For sure, the colonized does not possess colonial power, however, through this re-articulation of the master discourse, its meaning is perverted and an absolute exercise of power becomes impossible. Bhabha suggests that the native can destabilize colonial power through the resources of their own

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ *The Post Colonial Studies Reader*. Ed. B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths, H. Tiffin (London: Routledge) 1989, Chapters 01 and 03.

²⁰ Ibid. *Cultural Diversity and Cultural Differences*, 206-212.

culture as mixed to the culture of imperialism, although they did not write an alternative text of their own.

Besides, Bhabha leads us to conclude that a cultural system can not be set as an absolute truth but that 'cultures are never unitary in themselves, nor simply dualistic in relation of Self to other' (207), since a cultural text is inscribed by the act of cultural enunciation which is crossed by a multiplicity of differences. This way, cultures can not be represented by the politics of polarity, but they are constructed upon an ambivalent structure of meaning and reference, generating a colonial hybrid identity which functions as a native intervention - as a powerful strategy of resistance to colonial power.

Like Bhabha, Jenny Sharpe believes in sites of resistance to colonial power²¹. According to her, the colonial subject has an ambiguous position once he reinforces colonial power and, at the same time, disturbs it. Colonial power is first reinforced by the notion of civility established, the colonizers being perceived as the emissaries of light, posing the idea of colonialism as a moral obligation which came to disseminate the light of English language and culture. Secondly, colonial power is disturbed due to the violence that exceeded the limits of the civilizing mission; the natives became slaves of an imperialist authority that, by its turn, lost its virtue.

Proposing a different view, Edward Said believes that the situation of colonialism was consolidated due to the acceptance of the colonized, as he could not articulate a strong form of resistance. Hence, the base of imperial power came from the mental attitude of the colonized, accepting subordination²². The concept of colonialism is supported by an ideology that claims that certain territories and people do need to be dominated as well as to receive their knowledge and culture, generating, therefore terms such as racism, inferiority, dependency, subordination and authority. American and European colonizers were moved by the desire of

²¹ Ibid. *Figures of Colonial Resistance*, 99-103.

²² Edward Said *Culture and Imperialism* (London: vintage, 1994).

power and economical profit, pretending to help the natives who, according to them, could improve their lives with the help of the American and European culture.

Nowadays, the ex-colonized societies still suffer the consequences of such reeducation; they portray in their collective memory a conflicting and traumatic conception of their own culture, still being submitted to the power of imperialist ideology and politics. Post colonial discourse arouse as a counter power to that ideology; nowadays, there is a discourse of suspicion on the part of the formerly colonized peoples. We are living in a period of resistance to colonialism, but at the same time we must keep a historical and dialectic interaction with the imperialist background, since culture can not be polarized but working contra-punctually with others.

As the last consideration on colonial power, I shall mention in a very simplified way Hegel's logics of opposition which portrays the ideal of human relationships and can be very useftil in dealing with colonial power²³. Hegel used the abstract sphere of human consciousness to explain the reality of human relations. According to him, self consciousness exists only in being acknowledged, and it happens as an infinite process, apart and at the same time, known, even though it is not a distinct process. Self - consciousness is double faced - it portrays itself and the other, the master and the slave. Master is the part of consciousness of being for itself which is tree due to the submission of another consciousness, the slave. The latter is the consciousness of itself that remains linked to the other, through the satisfaction of the master in the working relations. As well as in the human mind, these relations can be applied to social life: as in modem times, the relation of master and slave is transposed to the political sphere of society, especially when capitalism was born. Hegel then suggests that as the master and slave act in concert in every one's mind, it is not reasonable to have a society

²³ G.W.F. Hegel. *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Trans. By V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977) 104-138.

divided in two classes; there should be a society based on free consensus and the effective suppression of the master and slave relation. There should be a society where every form of domination was eliminated and everybody would be treated equally, since we all have the same reasoning. Being aware of Hegel's thought, domination of one over the other should have no place, and colonial relations would lose their meaning.

c. Military Power

According to Galbraith, submission to power can be considered very effective when it is voluntary and generates a sense of virtue, as it is the case of military power²⁴. In this case, relations of power happen even though the individual is not aware of being controlled and conditioned to obey, instead, the individual accepts submission not as a conscious act but as a normal, natural manifestation of behavior. This conditioning does not permit any "normal" citizen to question military power. The ones who do are considered "dissidents" and have a price to pay.

Military power is based on sources such as property and organization and discipline, and it achieves its goals due to compensatory power and conditioned power. Compensatory power derives from the military property and the submission obtained due to the profits offered, as it is the case of gun industries. Also, compensatory power benefits from the belief that military institutions mean defense to the whole country; because of this, many scientists, engineers, workers and communities submit and contribute to the functioning of its machinery. Yet, the most effective instrument of military power is conditioned power which is based on organization and discipline. Conditioned power keeps a rigorous disciplinary control of the procedures and also of any information about its system, revealing only what is necessary to the social conditioning. Besides, it provides the exclusion of community in the discussions about the military functioning, proposing that the technical complexity of military staff is not

²⁴ J. Kenneth Galbraith, *Anatomia do Poder* (S.Paulo: Livraria Pioneira Editora, 1983) 163-170/

accessible to lay people, becoming thus incontestable and consolidating its effectiveness. On the other hand, military power is not absolute since the means employed are not so attractive. When death may become a collective civil experience, even conditioned power loses its effects. Therefore, the counter balance of military power rests on the effort that civil citizens spend to question and to clarify the procedures employed and their validity.

Foucault helps us to understand the historical roots of military power. According to him, the disciplinary systems at work since the eighteenth century posit the soldier as 'something that can be made out of a formless clay, an inapt body, the machine required can be constructed, and this conditioning could be turned silently into the automatism of habit'(135)²⁵. The aim of discipline in the military system was to produce "docile bodies" which could be trained and subjected according to their needs - in a relation of docility-utility that was supported by coercion. The strategy to establish discipline is defined by Foucault as a political anatomy of detail. A meticulous observation of details and political awareness of small things provided a complete form of control and use of men - the distribution of spaces, the control of activities, the organization of groups, and the composition of forces created a well-disciplined team of men obeying a superior power, in this case the military. The distributions of spaces was delimited; each individual had his own space so that he could be known, mastered and used more effectively. The control of activities happened due to very strict time tables. As Foucault puts it, 'time penetrates the body and with it all the meticulous controls of power'(152) such as the imposition of physical gestures and positions as 'holding their heads high and erect; standing upright, without bending the back... sticking out the belly, throwing out the chest and throwing back the shoulders'(135), defining the relations that the body must have with the object it manipulates - treating human beings as "body-machines". In military organizations, these body-machines were organized in hierarchical groups, isolating

²⁵ Michel Foucault *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison* trans. By Alan Sheridan (Londo: Penguin Books, 1977).

the recruits from the veterans; opening separated military schools for the armed service; and classifying the soldiers in various levels with different graduation in their tasks. All these groups were joined as a composition of forces, that is, every single body was 'constituted as a part of a multi-segmentary machine'(164); so, the forces grouped represent power to the institution. The military institution operates from the control and exercise of individual bodies to the use of specific forces to the most complex multiplicities. All these military practices were based on the politics of preventing civil disorder, and maintaining power on the "fight hands".

d. Resistance

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the very first definition of resistance is the action of using force to oppose something, as it is the case of armed resistance, or, in a general sense, it is the opposition or dislike to a plan or an idea. Consequently, as a result of the presence of resistance, as suggested before, there is no relation of absolute domination or absolute subordination. Resistance to power has the role of providing the test by which one can measure relative power, where parties conflict over an issue, serving as a counter-power device. In what follows, I shall concentrate on passive resistance, which is also called civil disobedience. Passive resistance consists in refusing to obey the demands or commands of a government or occupying power, without resorting to violence or active measures of opposition, with the usual aim of forcing concessions. It is often translated into terms of civil disobedience, serving as a protest, a symbolic violation of a law, rather than as the rejection of the system as a whole, and it is legally punishable. By submitting to punishment, the civil disobedient hopes to set a moral example through non-violent actions that will provoke the ones holding power into meaningful political, social or economic change. Activists of civil disobedience justify their conducts by virtue of a super human moral law, and have their philosophical roots in the Western thought as represented by Henry David Thoreau.

Thoreau argues in favor of civil disobedience whenever a government fails to govern effectively²⁶. For him, government should be nothing more than the mode which people have chosen to execute their will - instead of being abused and perverted before people could act through it. Thoreau's example of civil disobedience is not against government itself but against the way it works. He insists that the citizens must be aware of the commands and decisions taken, and not only resign their conscience to the legislators. Concerning law, Thoreau claims that the respect for it is imposed upon citizens not according to legitimate right or justice, but due to expediency of corporative interests that make use of citizens as if they were mere machines. The state, as represented by government or by its laws, treats the citizens as clay to be made into useful and obedient servants. When the citizens are enslaved by an unjust government, and oppression and robbery are organized as a political strategy, the right of revolution is legitimized. However, the citizens are so well trained by the state to follow their 'duty of submission to civil government as it were the will of God, that they end up believing that once established a government should be obeyed'. Such citizens are ignorant of their own condition of slavery because, even complaining about state abuses, they are unable to do anything against it. Therefore, under the name of order and civil obedience, citizens pretend to act according to right moral values, but what happens in fact is that wrong becomes acceptable and becomes the normal pattern of behavior. Thoreau strongly criticizes those who do not approve government in their speech, but act as to support and to give allegiance to that same staff, thus becoming obstacles to the real reformers of society. The latter are wiser enough men who can make a difference in this system, acting thus in concert with their moral values, and assuming that injustice must be resisted even though just by a minority. For Thoreau a just man and his principles can not conform to an unjust government- if one is consciously free even prison is a better place to live in, Thus, refusing allegiance to

²⁶ Henry David Thoreau *On the Duty of Civil Disobedience in The Portable Thoreau*. Ed. Carl Bode (NY: The Viking Press, 1964) 109-139.

such government and resigning its unjust benefits are acts that can transform a powerless minority into a meaningful symbol of resistance. 'A minority', says Thoreau 'is powerless while it conforms to the majority; it is not even a minority then, but it is irresistible when it clogs by its whole weight'(10). Acting according to right moral values gives the citizens freedom, while obeying the state represents slavery; men should not submit living against their nature but be brave enough to resist that system and to face the consequences of disobedience such as lack of protection to family and property. Thoreau believes that it would cost less to the citizen than the suffering of not having freedom. The sense of conformity that exists in certain citizens seems to be the easiest way of surviving in society, yet it limits the person under the domain of the state, denying his own voice and his own condition of a free person. Those citizens should be aware that a just government has the right they concede to it, and that the base of the state should be the welfare of citizens because it is from citizens themselves that the power and authority of the state derive.

Thus, the basic arguments of passive resistance propose that submission to injustice is worse than death, and refusing allegiance to it is the best way to resist and make a difference in that system.

In short, after the concepts and types of power so far presented, we can understand power as a force that produces things in society; it may be positive or negative, depending on how it operates. Power becomes negative when it acts in one directional flow, depriving the citizens of their freedom, and reducing them to objects of their history. On the other hand, it is a positive force when new discourses of truth are established through the interaction between domination and resistance.

In Melville's short stories "Billy Budd, Sailor", "Benito Cereno" and "Bartleby, the Scrivener", power functions as a positive force, generating profound changes in Melville's characters. These changes only happen when domination is questioned, and resistance takes

place.

CHAPTER II

"BILLY BUDD, SAILOR"

In this chapter, I shall study Melville's latest short story "Billy Budd, Sailor". First, I shall concentrate on the historical background of the novel, and second, I shall deal with its analysis, focusing on the power relations that permeate the whole story, which can be translated into terms of domination and resistance. The former happens when Billy Budd is submitted to instituted power, and the second depends on Billy's natural power.

a. Sources and Criticism.

At the end of the eighteenth century, the American Navy and Melville himself were haunted by the American Civil War and by the constant mutinies at the British sea. In 1886, this rebellious atmosphere encouraged Melville to write a poem about an old mutineer sailor who was waiting to be executed. It was called "Billy in the Darbies", and was originally intended to be included in a volume of seapieces. However, Melville decided to²⁷ write a prose preface to the ballad, and after a long time of work "Billy in the Darbies" grew into the short story "Billy Budd, Sailor". This short story arose from profound meditations on moral and philosophical issues occasioned by historical events, showing Melville's disillusionment with society and justice.

Melville's short story "Billy Budd, Sailor" was set exactly in the times of the famous mutiny in the British Navy in 1797, and it was in part based on the events of a mutiny on the American naval ship called Somers in 1842²⁸. According to the final version of the story, it takes place on board of a war ship called Bellipotent, where the rules of discipline and

²⁷ Herman Melville *Billy Budd, Sailor. An Inside Narrative* ed. by Harrison Hayford & Merton M. Sealts, Jr. (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1962) 1-39.

punishment prevail. The story narrates the life of a young and naive sailor who suffers false charges against him and, by accident, kills a superior. This unfortunate happening leads Billy to be submitted to the judgement of a martial court where he is condemned to death in the name of order and discipline. "Billy Budd, Sailor" is a story in which justice is a problematic concept, related to both military law and human justice.

The short story took five years to be written, and, according to Hayford & Sealts, the manuscript of the novel must be perceived as involving a development in three stages²⁹. In the first stage Melville started "Billy Budd, Sailor" having in mind a short composition of five or six pages about a sailor on the eve of his execution. This was very different from the final version of "Billy Budd, Sailor": Melville presented a sailor older than the Billy of the novel, and he was not the foretopman, but the captain of a gun's crew, which was an appropriate position to a mature man. The historical setting was not specified, but it was wartime and the ship was already designed as a seventy four feet model. At this point, Billy was conceived as a sailor guilty of mutiny who was condemned to be hung.

In the second stage, what arose out of the original material was quite surprising. The protagonist Billy became an young and innocent boy, whose only defect was to stutur under stress. Melville delineates Billy as a naive merchant sailor required at a British war ship called Indomitable (in the last version, Bellipotent), at the king's service in the latter years of the eighteenth century. Also, a perverse antagonist called Claggart was created. He is defined as the master at arms who feels an innate hatred of Billy. Through these two characters, the author establishes a relation of good and evil, the former represented by Billy and the latter by Claggart. Evil confronts good when Claggart falsely accuses Billy of conspiring for mutiny. As Billy is good and innocent, he becomes so atonished by the charge against him that he impulsively strikes his accuser on the forehead, and kills him. In this stage, the historical

²⁹ Ibid 1-39.

frame is clear. It took place in the revolutionary era, right after the Great Mutinies at the Spithead and at the Nore which were occasioned by naval abuses. These mutinies were very significant to history because they originated important reforms in the British Navy. In the short story, especially in chapter three, Melville is clearly inspired by historical facts, basing his narrative in Robert Southey's "Life of Nelson" (New York: 1855) and the six volume *Naval History of Great Britain* (London: 1860) by the historian William James³⁰. Melville mentions the historical happenings as well as his own view of the Great Mutiny in the British Navy, giving special emphasis to the description of Captain Nelson in the mutiny at Trafalgar.

In 1889, as he was beginning the third stage of his novel, Melville decided to review his writings and give more emphasis to the character Captain Edward Fairfax Vere. Melville provided an introduction to Captain Vere as well as an inward analysis of his character. This stage showed Vere as a military disciplinarian who had unquestioning devotion to duty and no consideration for his men or heroism. Vere believed that a strict disciplinary conduct should be taken in order to avoid mutiny, even at the cost of sacrificing an innocent man. At the same time, Vere seems to be extremely human when he considers Billy as a son. Yet, Melville posits Vere as a representative of patriarchal power, as he punishes his supposed son Billy Budd. Thus, ambiguity makes Vere's behaviour a matter of discussion. His complexity of character portrays a man hardened by military training, who tries to hide the flow of human feelings which is inside himself. Another character, the surgeon, was created at the third stage. The surgeon raises the question of Vere's sanity and the suspicion of Billy's euthanasia. He suspects Vere's mental conditions because of his unusual and excited behaviour after the crime, expressed in his desire for secrecy and his urgency in condemning Billy. The usual procedure would be to put Billy in confinement, and wait to judge Billy ashore, in a martial

³⁰ Laurie Robertson-Lorant. *Melville: A biography* (Boston: Massachusetts press, 1996) 584-597.

court. The surgeon also raises doubts about Billy's death. The lack of movements in Billy's body when he was hung suggests that he could have died seconds before being hung, his death being then a kind of euthanasia.

Furthermore, the sailor Billy Budd becomes a legendary hero, and the sentimental poem "Billy in the Darbies" is moved to the end of the book. In this poem, Billy says good bye to his friend "Bristol Molly" and remembers Taff, a friend who had a destiny like his own. Billy questions the justice of his sentence when he asks "But aren't it all shame?", and he seems to face his death as he was dreaming or then going to rest. The balad evokes the reader's sympathy, showing Billy as a hero, and proves that justice is a much better alternative than the military expediency that killed him.

In those several stages of development, Melville produced 351 manuscript leaves, and he was still revising them at the time of his death on September 28th, 1891. After Melville's death, his wife Lizzie kept the manuscripts of "Billy Budd, Sailor" in a safe place. After her death, in 1906, Melville's granddaughters Eleanor and Fanny became the custodians of the papers. Finally, in 1924, "Billy Budd, Sailor" was first published posthumously, and it was very well received even though some critics claimed that the short story was an unfinished work. The novel was edited by Raymond Weaver in Volume XIII of the Standard Edition of *Melville's Complete Works* (London: Constable and Company), and latter corrected by him in *The Shorter Novels of Hermann Melville* (New York: 1828).

The problem of editing Melville's manuscript was to define exactly what the author meant, since his handwriting was very difficult to understand, many insertions were not clear, and the pagination was not exact, generating, therefore, an edited text that was not completely accurate. Weaver published Melville's novel as an edition for the general reader, without inserting every detail of the manuscript. In fact, Weaver made a lot of intentional changes in the manuscript. He took as his duty to correct and improve the text, producing erroneous

readings of Melville's novel. In 1948, another edition of *Billy Budd* was published by F. Barron Freeman³¹. Freeman edited the manuscript as a literal transcription with every detail exactly as Melville put it on the paper, including the revisions. This edition is very accurate, however, it does not make a coherent, easy and uniform narrative to general readers. Freeman's edition can be considered more standard than Weaver's, although neither could be considered completely accurate and satisfactory since both contain many errors. In 1953, Miss Elizabeth Treeman prepared corrections in a pamphlet of *Corrigenda* which accompanied the book for sale, yet all texts printed in anthologies were corrected versions of Freeman or Weaver.

Finally, in 1962, Harrison Hayford and Merton M. Sealts Jr. worked on an independent transcription of the manuscript. It is a researched and reconstructed text which tries to reproduce, analyze and date all Melville's notes. This transcription seems to be the most reliable edition of Melville's novel, since it shows many pages of Melville's original manuscript with its revisions made on pencil, revealing Melville's own uncertainty about what he was writing.

Herman Melville was only consecrated as a brilliant author in this century. From 1920 on, there was a kind of revival in the interest for Melville, and the forgotten author of the nineteenth century became one of the most important names in the canon of American literature. Thus, thirty years after his death, Melville finally reached success, and "*Billy Budd, Sailor*" became known. It had important consequences for its interpretation and evaluation. From 1920 until the Second World War, "*Billy Budd, Sailor*" was seen as a novel portraying a conflict between good and evil with an autobiographical tone. From 1946 on, the criticism focused on *Billy Budd* as an ironic protest against the repressive structure of society.

³¹ Herman Melville *Billy Budd Sailor An Inside Narrative*, ed. by Harrison Hayford & Merton M. Sealts, Jr. London: The University of Chicago Press, 1962).

However, not all recent critics have been ironists. "Billy Budd, Sailor" is a very rich short story which admits various interpretations; saying that tragedy and irony are exclusive terms to its analysis is to oversimplify Melville's masterpiece.

Regarding Melville's inspiration for "Billy Budd, Sailor", sources and materials such as history (especially in the American Naval history), episodes in literary works, and also Melville's personal experience at sea were used. The subtitle of the novel "an inside narrative", led critics to believe that the actions of the novel were projections of the author himself. Kaplan (1957), however, suggests that the title refers to the work itself, and Melville used the term 'inside narrative' to show what really happened in a particular ship and the career of an individual sailor from the point of view of someone inside the ship³². Kaplan's explanation seems to be more accurate, since it is ratified by statements made in the manuscript in which Melville makes clear that the story is restricted to an inner view of the facts happened on board the ship.

According to Laurie Robertson Lorant, Melville wrote "Billy Budd, Sailor" to reveal his conception of the political world as a place 'where institutionalized violence is infinitely more civilized and subtle, and hence more dangerous than physical brutality'³³. In her understanding, Melville believed that the ruling class dominated the others, and deprived them of their spiritual freedom through rigorous procedures of discipline and law. Therefore, his last novel would be a response to a society ruled by instituted power: the fragile Billy destabilizes instituted power to the extent that his position of victim transforms him into a hero.

b. Instituted Power.

In order to have a historical perspective for the discussion of the short story "Billy Budd, Sailor", I shall here summarize the history of instituted power as the punitive and disciplinary

³² Ibid. 134.

³³ Laurie Robertson Lorant *Melville: A Biography* (Boston: Massachussets Press, 1996) 595.

systems at work in the eighteenth century, taking as theoretical basis Foucault's ideas on power³⁴. According to Foucault, instituted power can be classified in two forms, namely sovereign power and disciplinary power. The former was present in the eighteenth century, and was exercised through tactics of physical punishment. Its central figure was a visible agent (usually the king) who acted upon people through the imposition of laws, justice, economic control. Its main strategy was the public execution. Public executions happened as a kind of spectacle - the criminal was brought up to the presence of the public where he should confess his crime and suffer the designed punishment. The ritual of punishment was supported by a complete military apparatus: the theatrical executions contained cavalry of the watch, archers, guardsmen, soldiers, and all the impressive resources of army in order to show the force and power of the laws. This mechanism was embedded in a legal system which was supposed to represent the truth, although this truth could only be the sovereign's. The tactics employed by the legal system in the judgements aimed at imposing fear over the population and preventing them from involvement in rebellion. Thus, public executions served as didactic tools - the ones who disobeyed the king, would be punished. Public executions were not only judicial, but also political rituals in order to reinforce the power of the sovereign; punishment was not an act of establishing justice, but of reactivating power.

Disciplinary power, on the other hand, is no longer based on physical torture, but on domesticating bodies and souls. It is diffuse in its operations, and controls everyone through an invisible gaze, imposing the sense of obedience and duty to the subjects of power. These are constituted by hierarchical positions, as it occurs in military systems such as in the navy (this is the case of *Billy Budd*). The disciplinary system employs the strategy of training individuals to be obedient and productive, without considering human feelings. Instead, the

³³ Michel Foucault *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of Prison* (London: Penguin Books, 1991).

individuals are submitted to a whole set of rules to normalize and make them submissive and useful, and their bodies and souls are then the objects and targets of power.

In "Billy Budd, Sailor", these two forms of power are interrelated, since the sovereign power is applied in the punishment and disciplinary power operates in the military context³⁵. The forces of power are represented by the characters Captain Vere and Claggart, the master at arms. Melville defines Claggart as a man with obscure and suspicious origins, but with a high capacity of command. Claggart, being a superior officer, used his power to oppress and trouble his subordinates, especially Billy Budd. Billy's innocence was what first moved Claggart it produced feelings of evil and antipathy that led him to persecute the sailor, ironically named the 'Handome Sailor'. Claggart observed every action of Billy, trying to find any fault with him, including his jokes. When, for instance, the sailors were eating and Billy spilled his soup, Claggart remarked: "Handsomely done, my lad! And handsome is as handsome did it, too! "(454). Claggart finally used his power and invented an intrigue: he accuses Billy of being a spy. Claggart's destructive use of his power caused his own death because the sailor, taken by sudden panic, struck him dead. However, Claggart's power operated institutionally after his death; as Billy killed a superior, he also lost his own life through his condemnation to be hung.

Captain Vere also represents a force of domination over Billy. He is described as a man of high qualities such as nobility of spirit, self-control, rapidity in making decisions, and a high sense of duty to the king combined with the skills of a competent sea officer. He was seen 'as an officer mindful of the welfare of his men, but never tolerating an infraction of discipline'(444). As it was, Vere was the detector of power to rule over every action on the ship. However, his relation with Billy Budd was based on contradictory feelings. On the one hand, Vere was a very sensitive human being who had an active intellectual life, appreciating

³⁵ All the quotations of the short story "Billy Budd, Sailor" were taken from *Great Short Works of Herman Melville* ed. by Warner Berthoff (NY: Harper & Row, Publishers Incorporated, 1969)

especially philosophy books. His sensitive mind became aware of Billy's peculiar personality, leading him to create an emotional link toward Billy. This is revealed in two important moments of his life: after their private talk before Billy's death, and before Vere's own death. In a particular interview, Captain Vere himself communicates to Billy the decision of the court for his death sentence. Melville does not make clear what happened exactly in that interview; but Vere's character seems to be very susceptible to Billy's personal charisma. The captain abandons his austere military conduct, and, moved by sudden passion, thinks of Billy as a son: 'He was old enough to have been Billy's father'(490). Vere leaves the interview in such agony that his suffering is more intense than Billy's. Vere shows an inner conflict: the condition of the king's representative is stronger than his condition as a human being. Again, before Vere's own death, the figure of the sailor is remembered with passion and despair, as he 'was heard to murmur words inexplicable to his attendant: Billy Budd, Billy Budd" (502). These very personal feelings towards Billy had been of love and affection. On the other hand, Captain Vere's hidden passion for Billy was not stronger than his inner sense of duty to the king. To preserve authority and discipline, regardless of ideals of justice, he acted in order to assure Billy's punishment and to avoid any act of mutiny. Indeed, he personified the figure of the king as soon as he decided to judge Billy on board the ship, right after the accident. The usual procedure would be to place Billy in confinement and postpone the judgement until they would rejoin the squadron. However, Captain Vere's anxiety to punish made him call for a trial and judge the young sailor right there. Captain Vere was not touched by Billy's naive behavior, but moved by objectivity, speaking through the sovereign power he represented: 'Do these buttons that we wear attest our allegiance to nature? No, to the King.'(486). As this quotation shows, even knowing about Billy's good natured character, Captain Vere puts his duty to the king above all human emotion and even above justice. As he himself concludes: "Budd's intent or non-intent is nothing to the purpose"(487). Captain Vere's only purpose is

that of proceeding under the law of the mutiny act, in order to establish discipline and prevent rebellions.

Hence, Billy is nothing more than a didactic tool used to strengthen the power of the sovereign. Captain Vere strongly argued that the violent killing of a superior at sea required prompt infliction of the penalty. The other sailors would otherwise feel confident to defy the king, as it happened at the Nore: 'they would think that we flinch, that we are afraid of them- afraid of practicing a lawful rigor singularly demanded at this juncture, lest it should provoke new troubles'(488). For Captain Vere, a clement sentence would have practical consequences to discipline and, in order to convince the other judges, he mentions the historical happening on board the Somers in 1842, in which three mutineers were executed at sea while still not many days from home. Billy's execution would not only mean an act of punishment but mainly a demonstration of the rituals of discipline. According to Foucault, 'the aim was to make an example, not only by making people aware that the slightest offense was likely to be punished, but by arousing feelings of terror by the spectacle of power in which anger would fall upon the guilty person'³⁶.

Another aspect concerning Billy's subjection to instituted power regards the secrecy of his judgement. The secrecy which surrounded the crime was aimed at keeping the issue exclusively under disciplinary control so as to avoid any manifestation of sympathy or motives for similar actions. As Foucault argues, the penal investigations used to establish the truth of a crime based on secret and written legal proofs. These could be direct or legitimate (as provided by witnesses) or indirect and conjectural (provided by argument). The proofs constructed in secrecy might produce the truth even in the absence of the accused, yet, they could eventually be confirmed through the confession of the accused, though the law did not require it. In Billy's case, his judgement proceeded in complete secrecy: 'the maintenance of

³⁶ Michel Foucault *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of Prison* (London: Penguin Books, 1900) 58.

secrecy in the matter, the confining all knowledge of it for a time to the place where the homicide occurred, the quarterdeck cabin; in these particulars lurked some resemblance to the policy adopted in those tragedies of the palace which have occurred more than once in the capital founded by Peter, the Barbarian'(480)³⁷. Billy's judgement was carried out by Captain Vere, and two other lieutenants who based their penal investigation on direct (Vere's witness) and indirect (Vere's arguments) proofs produced exclusively by Captain Vere. The result was Billy's condemnation. The veracity of the judgement was not confirmed by Billy's confession, which is ambiguous: "I am sorry that he is dead. I did not mean to kill him Could I have used my tongue I would not have struck him" (482). As a matter of fact, Billy did not sign the truth of the preliminary investigation, yet, he was subjected to the domination of a system that produced its own laws and had power to kill in the name of the king.

c. Natural Power.

Sovereign and disciplinary power are instituted forms of power and act as tools of domination. However, Billy Budd manages to resist this system due to what might be called natural power. His natural power is manifested through the nobility of his spirit as represented by his innocence, by his physical strength, and by the nobility of his death.

What first conferred power to Billy was his extraordinary physical appearance. His image was a mixture of beauty and strength, giving him all the qualities of a champion. Melville even compares Billy's image to that of the Greek sculpture of Hercules, due to his heroic and strong posture. Such strength made him very valuable to the Navy, which called him to serve in the position of foretopman. This position well agreed with Billy, since he had been picked out for youth and activity, and he had a great disposition. His position is, in fact, a very strategic one: it meant the power to observe and to denounce. Billy could observe everything that was going on in the busy world of the decks below and, furthermore, he was responsible

³⁷ Peter the Great of Russia (1672-1725), founder of St. Petersburg (1703).

to avoid any enemy attack. Billy's position, however, allowed him to be the subject of surveillance, not its object, becoming at that moment a powerful member of the ship.

Another source of natural power comes from Billy's innocence, which formed a kind of 'halo' around his person. Aged twenty one, without family, and extremely good-hearted, he was seen as a sweet and pleasant fellow'(433) who never gave reason of offense to anybody and was always ready to help. His charismatic personality associated to his prudent behavior gave Billy power over his friends - he was loved by all. When Billy was being victimized by Claggart, his friend Danker was ready to help and advised him against Claggart: 'Baby Budd, Jemmy Legs (meaning the master-at-arms) is down on *you*'(453). Billy did not take into consideration such advice due to the extraordinary innocence that made him blind to any kind of human malice. Naively, he believed that Claggart always had a pleasant word for him. His innocence was such that it prevented real knowledge of the world- Billy had no experience with human vices, therefore, he did not understand them. His lack of knowledge protected him to the extent that he was not conscious of his unjust fate. He did not seem to be aware of the tragedy that afflicted him; even knowing of his sentence of death, he did not feel that irrational fear of it, a fear more prevalent in highly civilized communities than those so-called barbarous ones which in all respects stand nearer to unadulterate Nature'(494). Billy's barbaric nature as well as his innocence motivated the chaplain's interest, and he begged for Billy's salvation. In fact, Billy's indifferent reaction to prayers led the chaplain to conclude that his innocence would suffice "He felt that innocence was even a better thing than religion where with to go to judgement"(495). The priest felt that he could not impose any dogma to such a soul. Billy's innocence canceled, to a certain extent, the effects of domination aimed by instituted power. He died without panic or regret, as pure as a saint.

The nobility of Billy's death proved to be detrimental to his punishment: he was supposed to die as an example against mutiny, instead, he dies as a hero who fought against despotic

power. Foucault explains that, in a historical perspective, the ritual of public executions required the criminal to consecrate his own crime through his last words, by proclaiming the blackness of his offenses. As a result, the effects of this requirement used to be equivocal, and the last words of a condemned used to attract sympathy as a reaction against the abuses of power. According to Foucault, 'the condemned man found himself transformed into a hero by the sheer extent of his widely advertised crimes, and sometimes the affirmation of his belated repentance'³⁸ (67). Hence, the public expressed empathy towards the criminal who was proclaiming the suffering everybody had in every day life. Billy Budd had to follow the complete ritual of execution, having the chance of speaking before being hung. At that moment, Billy does not confess any crime. Surprisingly, his last words were: "God bless Captain Vere"(497). As an answer, Billy got a resonant sympathetic echo that came from all the crew of the ship: "God bless Captain Vere"(497) - as if Billy's Soul was in everybody hearts and eyes. From that moment on, Billy became a hero, the motif of fables and poems - a symbol against an arbitrary form of power which subjected bodies and souls. When he died, Billy gave proof of a strength that no power had succeeded in bending: the strength of nature, represented by his own innocence.

As a final manifestation of Billy's singular power of resistance, there are the persistent doubts related to his death: it seems that Billy died naturally seconds before being hung, as if his heart had simply stopped by free will. This suspicion arose due to the very strange immobility of Billy's body right after his hanging: "no motion was apparent" (497). There was no spasmodic movement, and the specialists pointed to the amazing fact that sovereign power probably killed an already dead person. Billy's heart stopped by his own free will.

Billy's death ultimately defied instituted forms of power and punishment. "Billy Budd, Sailor" portrays very complex relations of domination and resistance. Domination happens

³⁸ Ibid. 67.

explicitly all through the story and it is characterized by the instituted forms of power which subject bodies and souls. Resistance, on the other hand, reveals itself implicitly, through the manifestations of Billy's natural power. As these two forces destabilize each other, the power of the sovereign fails to assert itself and the reader is forced to respond ambivalently to the exercise of sovereign power.

CHAPTER III

"BENITO CERENO"

The short story "Benito Cereno" focuses on relations of power as represented by domination and resistance. These relations are characterized by colonialism and the exploitation of negroes by European settlers. First, I shall concentrate on the sources and criticism of the short story, and then I shall discuss relations of domination and resistance in the text.

a. Sources and Criticism.

Melville wrote "Benito Cereno" during the winter and spring of 1855. It was published in Putnam's magazine in three installments in October, November and December of the same year. The story is a protest against racism, as it reflects the reality of slavery, and it was written in a time of incited abolitionist sympathies throughout the United States. "Benito Cereno" portrays slavery in a very peculiar way: the negro slaves were active and powerful and they subjected their white masters during a long period of the story, even though they ended up being dominated and killed.

The source for Melville's story was discovered by Harold G. Scudder³⁹. It was based on the historical report "Narratives of voyages and travels in the Northern and Southern Hemispheres", published in 1817 by Captain Amasa Delano, an ancestor of Franklin D. Roosevelt. Amasa Delano (1763- 1823) was an American sailor who spent his whole life at sea. At fourteen, he enlisted in the colonial army, and he first went to sea in 1779. In the following years, he traveled to the West Indies and South America. In 1790, Delano was the second officer on the *Massachussets*, the largest ship built in the United States at that time. At this point, he started writing his narratives. On chapter eighteen, in which "Benito Cereno"

³⁹ Information about the source of Benito Cereno is based on *Benito Cereno A handbook* ed. by Seymour L. Gross (California: Wadsworth Publishing company, Inc., 1965)71-98.

was based, Delano reports his adventure on Santa Maria Island. According to the historical narrative, Delano was at sea for one year and a half commanding a merchant ship called Perseverance. The situation at his ship was difficult: "We had not made enough to amount to twenty dollars for each of my people, who were all on shares"⁽⁷³⁾⁴⁰. Besides, a large number of his crew had vanished at places they stopped, and the remaining majority were outlaw convicts. Though facing all these problems, Captain Delano conducted his ship with discipline and organization. On Wednesday, February 20th, 1805, early in the morning, Captain Delano observed a sailor coming into the bay of Saint Maria island, where his ship was boarded. Delano and his crew approached the ship. It was a Spanish ship, coming from Buenos Aires and was about four months out of port with slaves on board. The ship was called Trial, and it was carrying about seventy two negroes of all sexes and ages, owned by Don Alexandro Arandas. The ship Trial left from the port of Valparaiso to Callao, Lima, in the month of December. As soon as Delano noticed the Spanish ship, he took his whale boat and approached the visitor ship. He boarded and met its commander, Don Benito Cereno. As the Spanish were in great need, Delano offered them water, fish, pumpkins and bread. The American captain spent a whole day there, and he saw many suspicious happenings. The negroes were free on the deck and Don Benito seemed to have few control on what was going on. A black boy, for instance, hurt a Spanish boy with a knife, yet, Don Benito did not consider it a violence, but a sport. Don Benito explained that his ship had had hard times with storms, sickness, and he lost many of his men. As Delano learns about their misfortune, he feels sorry for them: "it could not but impress me with feelings of pity for their suffering"⁽⁷⁵⁾. Delano also remarks that he could not talk to Don Benito alone, since his devoted black servant was always with them. At the moment of the departure of the American captain, Don Benito, surprisingly, jumps into Delano's boat and reveals that his ship had been controlled by

⁴⁰ Ibid. 73.

the revolted negroes since December. Delano offered to capture the Spanish ship, and so he did. He sent two whale boats with his best men and guns. They took over the ship killing eight negroes in the battle. After that, Captain Delano fixed all the necessary equipment in the Spanish ship, and both ships sailed in company, arriving in Conception on February 26th. There, Delano delivered the ship to Don Benito and all the valuable objects it had been brought on board the *Perseverance* for safe keeping. Delano asked no reward: we detained no part of this treasure to reward us for the services we had rendered" (80). Don Benito Cereno did not thank or reward the Americans for their valuable help. instead, when the local viceroy ordered Benito to pay Delano for the service rendered, Benito refused, Leading the viceroy to conclude that "he never had seen or heard of any man treating another with so much dishonesty and ingratitude as he had treated the American (80). The real Don Benito was an ingrate and a coward. When he was in danger he promised Delano half the worth of his ship as rightful payment for being saved, but when he was safe, he refused any payment and added that Delano was a pirate. In the source, Don Benito is heartless and savage, being very violent with the slaves after Delano recaptured his ship. In Melville's version, this malicious man was changed into a fragile man who died shadowed by the image the negroes. Melville extends the original source from about 14.000 to about 34.000 words, rejecting elements of his sources, and admiring others which came from the process of ; own poetic ability. These changes aimed at highlighting the differences between the New World sealer and the Old World slaver, the former represented by the American Amasa. Delano and the latter by the Spanish Don Benito Cereno. In Melville's story, Delano's ship was named "Bachelor's Delight" and the Spanish ship was named "San Dominick". The original date was changed from 1805 to 1799 so that the name San Dominick and the year of 199 evoked memories of the revolution in Santo Domingo⁴¹. It was a slave rebellion whose leader was the Haitian patriot Toussaint

⁴¹ Laurie Robertson Loran *Melville: A biography* (Boston : Massachussets Press, 1996) 351.

Louverture, president of the first black republic in the New World Melville implied that the Africans were patriots as they wanted to return to Senegal, where they could be free of colonial control. Melville also added a number of fictional symbols such as the ship's shrouded figurehead, with the words 'follow your Leader', the slave named Atufal, who was a king in Africa and used to appear to Don Benito chains to beg freedom. Also, Melville created the scene of Babo shaving Benito, the negroes cleaning the hatches, the gordian knot that Delano could not undo, the oakum pickers, lunch at the Spanish ship, and Don Benito's death in a monastery.

The story is a third person narrative told from Delano's point of view. After Delano and men dominated the Spanish ship, the historical narrative shifts to a legal point of view which represents the voice of the Spanish colonizers. The Africans are voiceless. Their suffering is not considered. Even when their owner, Don Alexandro Arandas, lets them free the deck of the ship, it was not human kindness, but pure interest for more profits. If the Africans were well treated, there would be a lower death rate among them, and, consequently, more profits for their owner. when Delano took over the slave ship, the same happened. The Americans restrained themselves from hurting or killing the Africans "not because they are kind, but because they plan to claim the cargo and wanted it to be undamaged"(350)⁴². In the historical version of the story, the Africans are subjected by the power of the colonizers; however, Melville manages to make the voiceless negroes alive in the reader's mind. The author expressed his position against slavery through allegory, and his narrative portrays a wealth of detail, most of it visual or auditory, which created an impression of excitement and terror, stimulating the readers to imagine bizarre scenes. Even though Melville did not write clearly against slavery, he induced his readers to reflect about this issue and to consider the negroes

⁴² *Benito Cereno A Handbook*. ed. by Seymour L. Gross (California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, Inc., 1965).

as human beings with feelings, capacities and desires. In Melville's tale, the negroes are put in the same level of the whites, hence, the author challenges his readers to adopt an anti-colonial position, although they are not conscious of it.

In Melville's "Benito Cereno", some elements are recurrent⁴³. For instance, the microcosm of the tale is a ship, as in *Billy Budd* and *Moby Dick*. At sea, men meet unknown terrors, and on land things are clarified and submitted to judgement. The theme of good versus evil is present in "Billy Budd, sailor" as well as in "Benito Cereno".

"Benito Cereno" refers to human relationships based on evil and good, slavery and freedom. These concepts may be closely related to colonial power versus the power of the blacks. Colonial power, as represented by white Europeans, seems to be the holder of power, but it is destabilized to the extent the nature of slavery is discussed. Guy Gardwell argues that Captain Delano is the center of revelation⁴⁴. Delano perceives human suffering in the negroes' situation even though he does not consider them as equal to whites. Through Delano, Melville shows that the world is not neatly dichotomized as good and evil. He argues that the negroes are not pure evil since they are able to love each other. Thus, Melville deals with existential problems, among them the nature of freedom and slavery, questioning the validity of one group being subordinated by the other.

Nicholas Canaday Jr., on the other hand, focuses on Captain Delano as an agent of colonial power who acts through authority⁴⁵. He understands Delano as a man used to exercise his power through authority without being questioned by his crew. Therefore, Delano assumes automatically that all captains aboard would have the same authority over their ship and crew. It makes him blind to the situation aboard the *San Dominick*. Delano is thus limited by his

⁴³ *Melville's Bartleby and Benito Cereno Notes*. ed. Mary Ellen Snodgrass (Lincoln: Cliffs Notes Inc. 1999)58-64.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*. Guy Gardwell: Amasa Delanos's Plain Good Sense 99-103.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* Nicholas Canaday Jr. Captain Delano and the Problem of Authority 104-106.

authoritarian behavior, which makes him unable to perceive reality. Besides, Canaday points out the difference between authority and power. Power is based upon naked force. The negroes, for instance, got power to act over the Spanish after their successful revolt. Authority, on its turn, derives from law: Don Benito has the authority to command a ship due to naval law. If power and authority are not exercised in concert, it will result in chaos and disorder, as it happened on board the *San Dominick*. Captain Delano is successful because he joins authority and power.

Following a different trend, James E. Miller Jr. concentrates on evil versus good, claiming that Captain Delano is a version of Melville's classic protagonist: a sincere and noble man in his basic nature⁴⁶. He is a maskless man who is always ready to help the others. Delano can perceive and deal with evil in a practical and effective way, for example, when he promptly recaptures the Spanish ship. Don Benito, on the contrary, is a masked man who presents one face to society and another to himself. He is weak to face danger and unable to accept his human fate. He hides himself behind a mask of pride which ends up revealing his own weakness and decay. Babo pretends to be innocent and servile, but he is in fact led by intellect and evil. Thus, Melville's central theme is appearance versus reality. Concerning the question of power, masks can hide different levels of power which act beyond appearances: the honest Delano would represent the oppressive colonial power while the evil Babo would represent the enslaved negroes fighting for freedom.

Arguing in favour of black power, Charles I. Glicksberg believes that "Benito Cereno" reveals the prejudices of the entire culture of that time⁴⁷. Through Captain Delano, Melville shows the hypocritical righteousness that moved that society: negroes should be treated kindly if they were devoted to the needs of their masters. Through the colonial narrative, Melville

⁴⁶ Ibid. James E. Miller, Jr: *Amasa Delano*, Realist 107-110.

⁴⁷ Ibid. Charles I. Glicksberg: *Melville and the Negro Problem: Benito Cereno*. 116-120.

argues against slavery and in favour of equality among races.

Joseph Schiffman also focuses on the question of racism in "Benito Cereno"⁴⁸. He affirms that slavery is the origin of evil. Babo's evil is a consequence of a world of prejudice, subjection and lack of freedom. Delano, one of the central figures of colonial power, considers the negroes as subhuman beings, who are happy as slaves. Don Benito, on the other hand, is aware of the "horror of slavery and of its power to destroy owner, trader and slave"(127). Schiffman suggests that Melville treats the negroes as individuals who have the right to be free.

Warren D'Azevedo and Alle Guttmann suggest that Babo is a powerful character in the tale⁴⁹. The negro mutineer was seen, at first, as a docile servant, however, by the end of the story he becomes an intelligent and determined human being who fights against a moral Wrong. He wants to free himself and his people from slavery and return to their country. Guttmann concludes that Babo was the plotter from first to last, making clear that colonial power is the oppressor and black power should resist subordination.

Marjorie Dew also deals with the question of power and slavery in the text. She analyzes Melville's reconstruction of the original characters, taking into consideration Melville's position against slavery⁵⁰. For her, Melville enlarges Amasa Delano's role, creates Babo and transforms Benito Cereno. The real Don Benito was a monstrous man, while in Melville's work, he becomes a silent, tremulous, and sensitive man, shadowed by loneliness and death. The negro servant, called Mure in the source, is named Babo, and he becomes the center of the story. Babo symbolizes the irrational man, a primitive human being who

⁴⁸ Ibid. Joseph Schiffman: *The Slavery Issue in Benito Cereno and Racism in Benito Cereno* 120-127.

⁴⁹ Ibid. Warren D'Azevedo: Babo and the Destruction of the Stereotype; and Allen Guttmann; In Defense of Babo. 139-146.

⁵⁰ Ibid. Marjorie Dew: *Benito Cereno: Melville's Vision and Re-vision of the Source* 178-184.

exercises power over ordinary men. He refuses to submit to white power, and, when judged, dies without speaking a single word. Delano is the ordinary man: ordered and well satisfied with things. For Dew, Melville's intent is not to compare good and evil, but to compare average sensibilities and uncommon sensibilities. Average sensibilities, such as Delano's, can perceive reality superficially. Uncommon sensibilities, such as Babo's, can understand reality in deep, and even act over it. Melville also calls attention to human lack of communication and human blindness in relation to each other. Human blindness happens because people concentrate on appearances, as Delano did. The one who can see beyond appearances can understand reality and live like a true human being, seeing the others as equal.

Richard Harter Fogle argues that the story deals with knowledge rather than power. He calls attention to Captain Delano's lack of knowledge about humanity⁵¹. For him, Melville portrays Delano's struggle to comprehend the actions on board the *San Dominick* as characterized by good and evil. There, reality is a mystery that he cannot read. His struggle is full of ambiguity: he is not a fool, yet, he is blind to reality, lacking the perception of evil. Throughout all the story, there is a sense of uncertainty, which only disappears at the very end, with the revelation of truth. Fogle argues that Melville's symbols are complex, based on the ambiguity of white and black. For him, the negroes use the whiteness to control the Spanish, as they reveal a white human skeleton which could be related to the whites' death and decay. Whiteness moves the negroes to evil, but evil comes not from their nature, but from their suffering. They have been oppressed by white men and by an unjust social order. In sum, Fogle compares the episode aboard the *San Dominick* to the Gordian knot, which is too complicated. Delano could not untie it. Blind by colonial power, Delano realizes oppression, yet, he can not deal with it.

⁵¹ *Melville, A. Collection of Critical Essays*. ed. by Richard Chase (NY: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1962) 116-124.

Still following the dichotomy of blackness and whiteness, Harry Levin suggests that Melville's literary work is based on the kind of blackness which derives from human evil⁵². In "Benito Cereno", Captain Delano, a typically innocent American, "finds himself inadvertently drawn into the evils of the old world"(189) which is shadowed by slavery and corruption. Thus, the rebellion that happened on board the Spanish ship is the response of "nature itself which outraged by slavery, authorizes the vengeance of the enslaved"(190). Levin says that the negro rebellion was nothing more than the output of a society based on darkness. In this tale, Melville lets the reader conclude that brotherhood among races is much better than evil and prejudice.

All critics discussed here present Melville's characters under different perspectives, suggesting Melville's ambivalence as a writer. However, critics agree that no human relation can be classified as absolute: good versus evil, whiteness versus blackness, domination versus subordination. Then, relations of power are never final. Colonial power may subject the negroes to a certain extent, but resistance is possible and the negroes can exercise power over their oppressors.

b. The black masters.

Melville's "Benito Cereno" is a powerful anti-colonial piece because it defies the established order of domination and subordination Melville deconstructs the colonial relation of masters and slaves, and creates an amazing story where the negroes become masters and the white masters are changed into their slaves.

Melville opens this short story evoking a dark picture: "everything was mute and calm,

⁵² Harry Levin *The Power of Blackness* (NY: Alfred A Knopf, Inc., 1976)165-200.

everything' was gray"(01)⁵³. Uncertainty and melancholy draw the scene, and the image of birds skimming low over the water suggests that tragedy is eminent : "shadows present, foreshadowing deeper shadows to come" (01). These shadows, representing darkness, are the sign of slavery and horror that will be introduced in this story. At first sight, Captain Delano compared the Spanish ship to a monastery with black monks on board, drawing thus a dark picture. The darkness is reinforced by the appearance of the ship itself It does not have any identifying flag, revealing neglect and decay in its structure. Its figure head is covered by canvas, suggesting it is masked, and could be hiding a mystery. The foggy imagery in which the ship is involved seems to uncover unknown dangers. These dangers are revealed when the Spanish are victimized by the negroes. In "Benito Cereno", the negroes are powerful and resist colonial power. It happens first when they express their intellectual power, and then when they control the Spanish ship, using terrorism to acquire power, and, finally, when they exercise power over Don Benito's soul.

To start with, the negroes do not accept their condition of slavery and servitude easily. They conceive themselves as free human beings and they want to be treated as such. In the old World, the Africans used to be considered unsophisticated animals who had no self will and no intelligence. They should obey and serve the white Europeans who were superior due to their color and culture. In "Benito Cereno", Melville presents the negroes in a different perspective. The African negroes are highly intelligent, love their freedom and do not accept domination, instead, they resist and fight. They reveal themselves not as servile animals, but as determined human beings endowed with both a will and the right to freedom. Melville presents the negro Babo, who is the strongest character of his tale. Babo is the one who holds power on board the San Dominick. He is led by intellect, and conducts all the plot of the story on board the ship. As the negroes want to return to their land, they plan a rebellion. Babo is

⁵³ All the quotations from the short story "Benito Cereno" are taken from Benito Cereno Handbook, Part one.

the head master of this rebellion. Because the negroes have some freedom on the slave ship, they organize themselves and overtake the ship. Babo's brilliant intelligence, his organization and strength drove the negroes to kill their owner Don Alexandro Arandas so as to show that they had no owner. Melville deconstructs the relation of white master and black servants: Babo becomes the commander of the ship, and Don Benito his subordinate. In the presence of the American, Babo creates the illusion of Spanish power. He presents himself as the devoted servant of Don Benito and does not leave the Spanish alone even for a second. Babo is successful in his disguise that he deceives the Americans to the point of being compared to a saint: "the servant wore nothing but wide trousers.. they were clean, and confined at the waist by a bit of unstranded rope, which, with his composed, deprecatory air at times, made him look something like a begging friar of St. Francis"(12). in reality, Babo is not good at all, but he is intelligent enough to make his evil intentions to be confused with good ones.

Babo also proves to be intelligent due to his literate condition. He can understand the Spanish language which makes possible his plan of rebellion. in this sense, the negroes become more powerful than the Spanish because they can use the Spanish language as a device of domination. The negroes, for instance, write under Aranda's skeleton 'Seguid vuestro jefe' (follow your leader), (04) with the purpose of frightening the Spanish. Later on, Babo again uses language to express his power. When the American captain captured him and he is judged, he uses the language of silence: 'Seeing all was over, he uttered no sound, and he could not be forced to. His aspect seemed to say, since I cannot do deeds, I will not speak words'(69). Once more, Babo shows his superiority and does not submit to the power of a white court. His proud silence proved that he did not regret fighting for freedom. Indeed, the negroes are not moved by evil itself but by the desire of freedom. They are victims of the evil of the whites, who want to subject them. In "Benito Cereno", the negroes themselves want to rule over their lives, which is, in fact, their natural right.

Atufal is another example of the superior capacity of the negroes. He was a king in Senegal, who had strong patriotic feelings, and did not submit to colonial power. Atufal does not abandon his people in need: he is ready to fight to assure their liberty. He plays an important role in the rebellion, using his giant physical appearance to impose fear and control the Spanish.

The black women on board the San Dominick also participate in the rebellion. They used their culture to strengthen the negro rebellion. They expressed their feelings through a melancholic song in their own language, which incited men to fight, showing their pain of being slaves and their desire to return to Senegal: "But, in one language, and as with one voice, all poured out a common tale of suffering; in which the negroes, of whom there were not a few, exceeded the others in their dolorous vehemence"(04).

In their fight for freedom, the negroes proved to be intelligent as well as cruel. They used tactics of terror to impose and keep power over the Spanish. During the trip from Senegal to Lima, the negroes did not wear fetters because their owner, Don Arandas, considered them tractable. Thus, negroes living in better conditions would be healthier, consequently, more profitable. On the seventh day after leaving the port, the Spanish were surprised by a sudden negro rebellion. The negroes killed eighteen Spanish men who were sleeping, and kept the others alive and tied. From then on, the negroes were the holders of power on board the San Dominick, and the Spanish became their subordinates. When the Americans approached the ship, they were deceived and were led to believe that Don Benito was the real ruler on the San Dominick, seeing the negroes as docile and servile. In fact, the negroes exercised their power implicitly through tactics of horror.

Firstly, the negro Babo, who was their leader, threatened to kill the other Spanish, throwing them alive and tied to the sea if his people were not obeyed. They wanted to be taken back to Senegal. The Spanish, represented by Don Benito, accepted, but with the

condition of stopping to get more water and provisions. The negro Babo commanded then a spectacle of savagery and horror. He decided to kill their owner Don Alexandro Arandas to be sure of their liberty. Don Alexandro was killed at night. His body was taken upon decks and was not seen for four days. The Spanish only knew what happened to Aranda's body when Babo showed them a skeleton which had substituted the ship's proper figure. The negroes stripped off Aranda's flesh, and showed his skeleton as an implicit suggestion of cannibalism. This suggestion, however, is just a way of looking at the skeleton. Melville does not make clear the practice of cannibalism among the negroes, but what happens upon decks remains obscure. The bones shown could also be read as the mere product of a strategy. The skeleton would serve as a warning to all the Spanish who could oppose the negroes as it was used to teach a lesson: "keep faith with the blacks from here to Senegal, or you shall in spirit, as now in body, follow your leader"(60). Babo forced all the Spanish to see the skeleton and he asked them to recognize the whiteness of the bones. As the Spanish saw the skeleton, it was suggested that death was their future if they did not obey. Hence, as Sandborn argues, "the skeleton is nothing more than a device, an emblematic object consciously intended to produce a certain effect on its audience"(180).

Besides, in order to strengthen the threat of black power, the negroes used visual devices. Six old negroes, for instance, remained on the decks cleaning and polishing their hatches. At times, they stopped and "two and two they sideways clashed their hatches together like cymbals with a barbarous din"(05). In reality, it was not a game, and they were ready to use the hatches at Babo's signal. This theatrical exhibition of hatches was directed to two audiences: the Spanish and the Americans. For the former, it evoked the panic of being victims of such hatches as it happened to Don Arandas. For the Americans, who were blind to reality, it represented a harmless practice as if they were playing. The negro Atufal, in chains, is another visual device used by the negroes. Atufal stood before Don Benito every two hours

to beg his pardon. He appeared in chains, but the Spanish knew it was a threat. The chains could be easily dropped and used on the whites. For the naive American, it was just an unnecessary cruelty imposed by the Spanish captain.

Another meaningful visual device is presented when Babo shaves Don Benito. when Delano is visiting the San Dominick, Babo plays the role of a devoted servant and conducts Don Benito to a spectacle of horror. At three o'clock, Babo announces that shaving time has come. Don Benito feels terrified with such words: "it is *now* master"(35). He has to subject himself to Babo's will and follow him. Delano is invited to see the scene, yet, he suspects that there is something wrong. To the naive American, being shaven with such punctuality in the middle of the day seemed very strange. However, he follows them. Don Benito's nervousness is clear when Babo chooses the sharpest razor and puts a Spanish flag round Don Benito's neck. Babo then starts shaving him. Suddenly, and on purpose, Babo cuts Don Benito's throat with the razor, drawing blood. Ambiguously, Babo says: "see master- you shook so- here's Babo's first blood"(39) suggesting that the action could be repeated. After that, Babo cleaned Don Benito's blood with the Spanish flag, suggesting that other Spanish men could die. These intentional acts were meant to terrify the Spanish, and to show that the negroes on board were in control. Melville deconstructs the symbol of the colonizers, the Spanish flag, so that it becomes an object that denies white power, thus reinforcing the negro strategies of domination. In this situation, the American is completely deceived. For him, Babo is a trustful servant, and Don Benito's panic comes from the weakness of his spirit.

Savagery and primitivism are here confronted with civilization, the former being ultimately victorious. Still, the negroes proved to be powerful even though they were dominated by the Americans. They became the masters of the San Dominick, and of Don Benito's own soul. Throughout the story, the negroes exercise their power to the extent that they overpower the Spanish Captain. Captain Delano does not understand the negro rebellion,

but, from the first moment, he sees Don Benito as a man of "debility, constitutional or induced (by hardships), bodily and mental"(07). Don Benito, in Delano's view, acted as if he was physically and mentally sick. Delano describes him as a restless man, nervous and with weak voice and appearance. Besides, Don Benito's attitudes were reserved and he did not look friendly, treating the American with coldness. The general image of Don Benito was that of a fragile man who was unable to make decisions and to command a ship. Rather than bravery and strength, Don Benito inspired feelings of pity and compassion in Captain Delano.

Delano does observe that he had no actual control of the ship: "I know no sadder sight than a commander who has little of command but the name"(14). Indeed, Don Benito is considered a hypochondriac who depends upon Babo to do anything. Even being ignorant about Don Benito's real position, Captain Delano could grasp that the negro servant was stronger than the master, and the former exercised power over the latter, as Don Benito himself admits: "But it is Babo here to whom, under God, I owe not only my own preservation, but likewise to him, chiefly, the merit is due, of pacifying the more ignorant brethren, when at intervals tempted to murmurings"(11). The last perception Captain Delano has on board the San Dominick is of the intriguing scene presented by the narrator: "the Spaniard behind- his creature before: to rush from darkness to light was the involuntary choice"(48). Delano felt afraid of the darkness of the San Dominick and wanted to return to the safety of his ship. He was confused and could not realize who was indeed shadowing who.

The negro's shadow over Don Benito was so powerful that until the very last moment, it paralyzed Don Benito's movements and voice. When Don Benito was under pressure, he could not give Delano any hint of the real happenings. A strong cough debilitated him to the point of cutting off his words and avoiding any kind of communication with the American. Hence, the fear provoked by the negroes was effective to control communication on board the Spanish ship.

In addition, the negroes had control over the movements of the Spanish captain. Don Bonito's movements were also paralyzed by fear. When the negroes articulated implicit threats, Don Bonito's weakness made him faint in Babo's arms. This is the case when Captain Delano was hit by some negroes accidentally. Immediately, he used his authority to make the negroes stand back, but "suddenly the hatchet-polishers half rose, and a rapid cry came from Don Benito"(33), who know what could happen. He fainted then in his servant's arms.

Therefore, the black power was in charge of all the movements and communication on board the San Dominick.

Furthermore, the negro Babo shows his influence over Don Bonito even after he was captured. Ashore, when the negroes were dominated by the Americans, Babo continues to exercise power over Don Bonito's soul. After the episode at sea, there was a deposition in order to clarify the facts according to the law. Babo was in prison, but Don Bonito did not visit him, and did not look at him even in court. When, for once, Don Bonito was forced by the judge to look at Babo's face, he fainted. The image of the negro was still so strong in his mind that he could not control himself. After the deposition, Don Bonito did not return home to Chile. He moved to a monastery in Mount Agonia. As the name suggests, Don Bonito lived there the agony of a mind dominated by the black shadows of the San Dominick. Captain Delano tried to help Don Bonito to come back to his life: "Forgot it. See yon bright sun has forgotten it all, and the blue sea, and the blue sky, these have turned over new leaves"(69). Yet, Captain Delano does not succeed: "you are saved: what cast such a shadow upon you?" "The negro"(69), the Spanish answers. Don Bonito reveals that his own memory is deeply linked to the negro and he can not escape it. After three months at the monastery, when Don Bonito dies, he is "borne on the bier, [to] follow his leader"(70). Bonito could not forget the terror which had fallen upon his soul.

The power of the blacks is thus present throughout the story. It subjects the Spanish, and

reduces their colonial authority to panic and desperation. Don Bonito's own clothing revealed the weakness of the Spanish identity: 'that silver-mounted sword, apparent symbol of despotic command, was not, indeed, a sword, but the ghost of one. The scabbard, artificially stiffened, was empty'(69).

c. Colonial Power.

The power of the blacks pervades Melville's short story, but colonial power closes the tale as the winner of this struggle for command. According to Achebe, in colonial culture "it is important to know two things about the native: first, that the native was really quite simple and that understanding him and controlling him went hand in hand"(58)⁵⁴. Captain Delano's mind used to classify the negroes in this way. For him, they were sub-human-beings who could be nothing else except slaves. Like Captain Delano, the Spanish considered them as useful beings, since they had physical strength and could work hard for their owners. The negroes could be captured, taught, and easily controlled. Their position as human beings was never considered, instead, the fact of being black meant that they were inferior and should be enslaved. The negro is seen by the white colonizer as an animal, bad, mean, and ugly to the white eyes. Captain Delano, for instance, sees a negress breast-feeding her baby and compares her to an animal: "... a slumbering negress. . with youthful limbs carelessly disposed, under the lee of the bulwarks, *like a doe* in the shade of a woodland rock"(26). Then, he refers to the baby: "its hands, *like two* paws, clambering upon her"(26). Captain Delano relates the scene of a mother breast-feeding her baby to an animal and its young. When the mother kisses her baby, the American Captain is surprised that "pure tenderness and love"(27) could exist among such black animals.

Besides, the negroes should be servile and obedient. They should obey and serve the

⁵⁴ *The Post Colonial Studies Reader*. ed. by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin (London: Routledge, 1995) 57-61.

white European who is supposed to be superior due to his color and culture. Thus, Captain Delano erroneously judges Babo as a lovable servant who is always attentive to his master's needs. Captain Delano offers to buy the negro as if he were an object: "I should like to have your man here, myself- what will you take for him? Would fifty doubloons be any object?"(24). In colonial cultures, negroes were goods that could be commercialized. Hence, the Europeans traveled to Senegal and other African countries to capture negroes, depriving them of their freedom, their land and their family. The Europeans believed they were a superior race and that their "white blood" gave them power to enslave the black man. Captain Delano considered blood mixture problematic: if a little of our blood mixed with the African's, should, far from improving the latter's quality, have sad effect of pouring vitriolic acid into black broth; improving the hue, perhaps, but not the wholesomeness"(42).

Colonial power also appears in Melville's tale when the American Captain recaptures the Spanish ship. When Delano knows about the revolted negroes on board the San Dominick, he readily offers to help the Spanish, assuming the command and controlling the negroes. Captain Delano first captures Babo, who had jumped into the boat after Don Benito. Babo was bound and did not resist anymore when he was taken under deck on the American ship. Then, the American captain inquired of Don Bonito about the fire guns existing on board the San Dominick. There, the negroes had as weapons their hatches only. Therefore, the attack on the negroes happened mainly through fire guns, which was an advantage available only to the white men. Their victory is swift: "Exhausted, the blacks now fought in despair. Their red tongues lolled, wolf-like, from their black mouths. But the pale sailors' teeth were set; not a word was spoken, and, in five minutes more, the ship was *won*"(54). The surviving negroes were kept in chains until the ship arrived at the port of Lima in Peru. Ultimately, colonial power does not control the negroes by the use of intellect, as in the case with the negroes, but by the use" of force. Their strategies of war reinforced the struggle between civilization and

primitivism, the former using tactics of war, the latter struggling for survival.

The other form of colonial power happened in the court of Lima. The episode on board the *San Dominick* was under investigation, and law was used as an instrument of colonial power. The court was conducted exclusively by white men, who did not consider the negroes as human beings. Don Benito and the surviving Spanish sailors were heard, and, according to their version, the sentence was given. Babo was considered a dangerous criminal. He performed the role of Don Benito's personal servant with all the appearance of submission proper to a slave, but he was the head of the rebellion. Thus, he was treated as a monstrous killer who should be executed. Colonial power commanded all the spectacle and Babo's body was burnt, his head fixed on a pole in the plaza so that the whites could see the one who fought for such an absurd end: his right of freedom. As punishment, Babo died, teaching a lesson to any other slave who dared to dream of freedom.

Yet, even being voiceless, the negroes' tragedy do not confer absolute power to the whites. Colonial power is destabilized to the extent that the negroes' actions remain as a powerful historical lesson. Babo's head, fixed in the plaza, looks directly to the whites. Bartholomew's church, in whose vaults slept then, as now, the recovered bones of Aranda: and across the Rimac Bridge looked towards the monastery"(70) on Mount Agonia where Don Bonito died three months later.

CHAPTER IV

"BARTLEBY, THE SCRIVENER"

Melville's short story "Bartleby, The Scrivener" will be viewed under the perspective of relations of power. First, I shall concentrate on the historical sources of the story and its main criticism. Later, I shall study its relations of power as characterized by economic power of a capitalist society versus the refusal of allegiance to this system through passive resistance. The former is represented by the lawyer and the latter by his employee, Bartleby.

a. Sources and Criticism

The short story "Bartleby, The Scrivener. A story of Wall Street" was written in 1853, right after *Moby Dick* and *Pierre*. It was published in *Puntnam's* magazine in two installments of November and December. A disquieting short story, one of the most challenging in all American literature, it invites the reader to reflect upon humanity versus capitalism in the industrial societies.

In a general sense, this tale anticipates one of the greatest problems of industrial society of the 20th century: the dehumanization of the worker as he becomes a machine. The worker needs to fight to find physical and psychic space within society. The story is told by the limited first-person point of view of the narrator who is a "rather elderly" Wall Street lawyer. The narrator is considered a well succeeded professional whose moral values seemed to praise the practical and easiest way of life. The lawyer illustrates the typical thought of the American ruling class. During the story, the lawyer reveals his own values, however, he can not clarify Bartleby's conduct or inner motivation. He lacks knowledge about Bartleby, who remains a mystery. A duality of pattern is then formed between the employer and his employee. The lawyer is the personification of the conventional man: rational, conservative, well-succeeded, charitable and approachable, while Bartleby resembles a mad man who alienates himself from

social life. Melville establishes this dualism in their interaction, implying that people should understand each other to comprehend life fully.

Moreover, Bartleby and the lawyer's relation in the modern business world seems to be equal to that of a machine and its operator. Bartleby would be a valuable machine whom the lawyer (the operator) could not use once it refused to work. This impasse is only solved when the lawyer's reputation is in danger: Bartleby is put in prison, as if it were a social "mending place". Wall Street, the setting of the story, was well-known to Melville: that is the place where he spent part of his childhood, and where he worked in the public service until his retirement. The setting is relevant in the sense that it is the financial center of the United States, which suggests that economic power is a strong element in this tale. It reveals the impositions of a capitalist society upon the human spirit, as there is no space for humanism. The story, for instance, portrays the lack of familiar relations: no character has a visible family or any stronger emotional link. The law office in Wall Street also lacks humanity. It is described as if it were a prison with high and blank walls, especially Bartleby's place in the office. It is across from a dead and blind wall which, according to Lorant, "symbolizes the moral blindness of the law and the invisibility of the underclass on whose labor prosperity depends"⁵⁵. Inside the office, Bartleby's desk is separated from the others by a green tinted wall. The color of money symbolizes here Bartleby's inferior position, while his boss stood in a very convenient place: he could call Bartleby when he was needed, and ignore him when he wanted. The office then could be compared to a cell in which the prisoner executes the job of a scrivener which is blinding, and crushes initiative and creativity Bartleby, as well as the other employees, Turkey, Nippers and Ginger Nut are docile, obedient and hard working, receiving a small payment. Since they are useful, the lawyer tolerates their eccentricities: Turkey's difficult temper in the afternoon, Nipper's nervousness in the morning,

⁵⁴ Lawie Robertson Lorant, *Melville A Biography* (NY: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996) 333.

Ginger Nut's jokes. In the working market, the most important quality is being docile and profitable. As Bartleby refuses to do his work, the story suggests that a person may escape this pattern and resist oppression.

According to Lorant, Melville's inspiration for this tale seems to be at least in part autobiographical⁵⁶. Melville was not a well recognized author at his time. He felt very frustrated, because his literature was not accepted by publishers and readers as it was: unquieting, provocative, dense. It tended to provoke the readers questioning rather than searching for answers. Melville's refusal to write commercial books could be expressed through his character Bartleby and his refusal to copy. Melville would assume himself the tragic-comic refrain "I would prefer not to" write commercial literature.

As for literary devices, Melville's story has a symbolic structure based on walls: the street itself the walls of the office, and the prison walls. These walls are barriers to humanity. They represent the limits imposed by capitalism over human feelings which are reduced to nothingness. As Bartleby is very sensitive to the oppressive walls that encircle him, he abandons himself to total emotional dysfunction and death. Also, Melville introduces the symbol of the plaster of Paris and the bust of Cicero as well as the Pillar of Salt. Both are bloodless images which reflect the unpersonal atmosphere on Wall Street, which leads the sensitive Bartleby to his total social alienation.

The great variety of interpretations produced by reviewers point to Melville's ambivalence as a writer. However, the most relevant criticism for the present study is Egbert S. Oliver's essay "A Second Look at Bartleby"⁵⁷. He believes that "Bartleby, The Scrivener" was written based on Henry David Thoreau's ideas. For him, Melville created Bartleby as a

⁵⁶ Ibid. 335.

⁵⁷ *A Critical Guide to Herman Melville: Abstracts of forty years of Criticism* ed. James K. Bowen and Richard Vandebeets (Illinois: Scott, Foresman, 1971)90.

personification of Thoreau, analyzing thus the conditions of human beings and their life in society. Melville reveals then the conflict of mechanical work versus passive resistance, which is closely related to Thoreau's essay "On the Duty of Civil Disobedience"⁵⁸. This essay had great influence in historical movements such as Mahatma Gandhi's fight against the British colonial rule and Martin Luther King Jr.'s fight for the Civil Rights in America.

According to Egbert, "Bartleby, The Scrivener" is not simply related to Thoreau's ideas. It is a personification of Thoreau himself Thoreau declined to pay taxes, Bartleby preferred not to copy, and they both were isolated from society in prison. Both were in solitude, and refused allegiance to the social system. They both believed in civil disobedience as a way of getting rid of social injustice and tyranny. Bartleby personifies Thoreau's claim; I was not born to be forced. I will breathe after my own fashion"(264), as he does with his refusal to live in a capitalist society.

However, Egbert's essay becomes problematic when he suggests that the narrator represents Melville's own voice and which speaks against the individualism of Thoreau. In my view, the narrator represents economic power as a force of domination, while Melville simply presents the story and lets the reader himself to reach a conclusion.

Ultimately, 'Bartleby, The Scrivener' portrays the social and economic barriers that crippled the workers and which were designed to keep them subservient to the ruling class. However, flartleby does not accept such form of domination and, through his behavior, he challenges the rules of a capitalist society.

b. Economic Power.

The short story "Bartleby, The Scrivener" will be discussed in terms of social and economical perspectives, concentrating especially on Bartleby's place in society and his relation with the working market. Modern industrial society transformed the worker into an

⁵⁸ Henry David Thoreau *Walden and civil Disobedience* (NY; Harpers & Row Publishers 1965) 251-271.

object. The citizen does not have his own voice and his physical and psychic space is dictated by economic power. In such a society, the high sensitive Bartleby represents the working class. In this section, I shall discuss how the ruling class dominates the working market, first, in the relation between employer and employee, which results in the mechanization of the work; second, in the social status produced by money; and finally, in the punitive actions against resistance to the system.

To start with, the narrative is told in a lawyer's point of view. He is the one who has voice and holds power. As a lawyer, he is socially respected and has a good economic situation, which is clearly emphasized by comparing himself to John Jacobs Astor, who was an American millionaire entrepreneur⁵⁹. He was the healthiest landlord in New York City, and made his fortune first by trading whiskey and rifles to the Indians for skins and furs. During the depression of 1837, he consolidated his private empire by buying foreclosed properties and changing them into profitable renting buildings. The lawyer appreciates mentioning John Jacob Astor as "a name which, I admit, I love to repeat"(40)⁶⁰. The narrator thus reveals his desire for money and social recognition. As an ambitious person, the lawyer considers "the easiest way of life is the best"(40) and he does not hesitate to subject his employees to his own needs. For him, his employees are valuable only to the extent they are useful. On the first pages" of the story, the lawyer describes carefully each one of his employees: Turkey, Nippers and Ginger Nut. He makes clear that they are not important as human beings, but they are worth as much as they can work. Their allegorical names suggest that they do not deserve much respect: Turkey is the name of an animal, Nipper means 'small child', and Ginger Nut is a reference to food. They are not quite seen as human beings. The lawyer only tolerates their human failures because they are profitable: "But, with all his failings, and the

⁵⁹ Laurie Robertson Lorant. *Melville: a Biography*. (NY: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996) 332.

⁵⁹ All the quotations from this short story are from *Great Short Work of Herman Melville*. Ed. Warner Berthoff. (NY: Harper & Row publishers, 1969) 39-74.

annoyances he caused me, Nippers, like his compatriot Turkey, was a very useful man to me"(43). Concerning Bartleby, the lawyer's impression is that he was: "neat, pitifully, respectable, incurably forlorn"(46). This image presents the law copyist as easily commanded without his own initiative or ideas. Then, underestimating Bartleby's capacities, the lawyer compares his employee to the British poet Byron. The lawyer claims that Byron would never be able to do Bartleby's job since it was uncreative and boring. Bartleby, by his turn, could copy "silently, palely, mechanically"(46) because he was not considered an intelligent being. Byron, as a poet, was a superior human being and, therefore, not fit the working market.

The mechanization of the work in the industrial society aimed at keeping the employees without voice, without thinking. Hence, they would work more for less, being easily subordinated by the ruling class. In Melville's tale, the copyist's job is highly mechanized. The employees could not create anything by their own, using their intellect, instead they were obliged to repeat what the law determined, using only their docile bodies. In the lawyer's office, the employees were supposed to copy and examine the documents according to the original: when Bartleby defies the lawyer and refuses to take part in the examination, his colleagues were so well trained by the system that they considered it an offense: 'I think I should kick him out of the office.'(49) said Nippers, referring to Bartleby's refusal.

Another evidence of economic power in this story refers to the lawyer's worries with his own social status. The lawyer seems to be very concerned with his personal image: he wants to be seen as a charitable, religious, respectable and democratic member of society. Even though he claims to be against ambition, it is clear that money was very important to him. The lawyer has an extraordinary quantity of work, but, in spite of his profits, he pays his employees a miserable amount. At the same time, the lawyer acts as if he was a very democratic employer when he has problems with Bartleby. When he proves incapable of

dealing with the situation, he calls Nippers and Turkey and asks for their opinion: "What do you think of it, flippers? Would I not be justified in immediately dismissing Bartleby?" (51). Actually, the employee's opinion is not wanted at all, but the lawyer acted so in order to justify his actions as a decent man and not to assume full responsibility for his actions.

Also, he behaves as a religious person, referring to biblical passages, going to Trinity church on Sunday morning, and being visibly charitable. He considers himself a charitable person in the treatment he gives Bartleby. He thinks that his employee is a fate which was predestinated from eternity, and Bartleby was billeted upon me for some mysterious purpose of an all-wise"(65). Nevertheless, the lawyer does not keep his religious behavior too long. As soon as the local society knows about Bartleby, the lawyer gets very worried with his social position. When his clients and the other lawyers started talking about his sinister employee, he decided to get rid of him immediately: "resolved to gather all my faculties together, and forever rid me of this intolerable incubus"(66). In fact, the lawyer is afraid of perplexing society with such a lunatic person since his authority could be denied, and his reputation could be jeopardized. The lawyer then dismissed Bartleby, but he still had to deal with Bartleby's refusal to leave the office. Bartleby remains motionless and his only reply is I would prefer not to quit you"(63). In a desperate and drastic attitude, the lawyer decides to move his office to another building, as it was the only way of being free of Bartleby's phantasmagoric presence. Hence, his reputation would be intact and his place in society would be assured. The lawyer left Bartleby as "the motionless occupant of a naked room"(67), and in order to relieve his own conscienc, he gives him some money and asks God to watch for such a poor fellow: "Good-bye Bartleby; I am going- good-bye, and God some way bless you; and take that"(67). The lawyer wanted to prove to himself that he was a charitable person, even though his actions had quite different purposes. In this case, money was more important than charity and humanity.

Furthermore, the lawyer, as moved by social impositions, looks for a way of getting definitely rid of Bartleby's presence in the office building. Even being far from Bartleby, the lawyer still feels the effects of his passive resistance. The landlord and the tenants of the lawyer's old office building came to talk to him about his ex-employee. As far as they knew, the lawyer was the only one who had any contact with Bartleby. He should, therefore, solve the problem caused by his presence. They argued that Bartleby was still living there "sitting upon the banisters during the day and sleeping in the entry by night. Everybody is concerned, and the other clients are leaving the offices ... something you must do, and that without delay" (68). Thus, the lawyer returned to his old office building and tried to negotiate with Bartleby, offering to get him another job. The lawyer was not being charitable nor considering his employee as a human being in need, instead, his real preoccupation was the threat of being legally responsible for Bartleby's vagrancy. As he did not succeed in taking his ex-employee away from the building, the lawyer decides to travel in order to escape the problem and the responsibility. Bartleby is then treated as a dangerous vagrant, put in prison by the police. From that moment on, as Bartleby was removed from society's eyes, he was no longer a problem. His place was in prison, where he could regret his behavior, and be "mended" of his eccentricities. The lawyer visits Bartleby in prison and argues that it was a good place for him: "and see, it is not so sad place as one might think. Look, there is the sky, and here is the grass"(71). Yet, Bartleby is a human being who knows what freedom means: "I know where I am"(71). To the narrator, Bartleby is much less a real man than an object which is causing him some trouble. He, as representing society, never considers the possibility that human violence could place a man in such a position. Rather, society considers prison the most convenient place for people like Bartleby- it can get rid of and also punish the ones who dare to defy its laws and conventions. Society is represented as honest and just, while prisoners are seen as disturbed and dangerous elements.

Bartleby is aware of social impositions, but he does not submit to economic power. Instead, he prefers to die, as if suggesting that there is no place for humanity in a society ruled by money. In Melville's tale, there is a struggle between money and humanity - economic power defeats Bartleby to the extent that he kills a resistant human being, however, it loses to the extent that Bartleby does refuse to submit.

c. Passive Resistance

Bartleby may be considered one of Melville's most intriguing characters. He is a scrivener who works in a law office, but his behavior does not conform to the average working man in society. Instead, he is a man of singular actions, guided by high sensibility and humanity. His attitudes, however, are misunderstood to the point of being perceived as the attitudes of a mad man. This happens because Bartleby does not fit the pattern required by the market; he does not mind social conventions, ambition or money. He does not assimilate these values and refuses allegiance to economic power. Bartleby's resistance is not based on violence; it is passive, and is better understood in terms of civil disobedience.

Bartleby's passive resistance is characterized first by his refusal to work, second, by his refusal to touch money, third, by his refusal to leave the office, and by his refusal to eat, which finally causes his death.

At first, Melville describes Bartleby as a valuable employee: honest, hard working and obedient. After some days of work, Bartleby gets more and more reserved, lowering his productivity to the point of stopping doing anything. When, for instance, he was asked to examine a document with the lawyer, he replied: "I would prefer not to" (47). And so he did. His decision was irreversible: Bartleby refused to examine documents, and later, he refused to copy and to obey any order in the office. Moved by surprise and anger, the lawyer demands explanations or his return to work. However, Bartleby did not explain his refusal and did not talk about it. His behavior was very composed and calm, showing no impertinence or

impatience, but a strong passion in his attitudes. This singular behavior gave him a very strong charisma, and the lawyer felt so astonished with such employee that he could not take any action. Rather, the lawyer could finally perceive Bartleby's human side, which let him in a dilemma of expediency versus humanity. Thus, Bartleby's ordinarily humanity was a counter friction to the machine of economic power. The lawyer, as the central element of economic power, was controlled by his employee's resistance: "But there was something about Bartleby that not only disarmed me, but in a wonderful manner, touched and disconcerted me. I began to reason with him" (48). For him, a worker can not have preferences, but complete obedience, yet, the situation becomes problematic in Bartleby's case. The lawyer does not want to dismiss Bartleby, looking for reasons to justify his refusal. He thinks that Bartleby must be sick so that he can postpone any decision, Even with the disapproval of the other employees, the lawyer takes time to solve the situation. He feels somehow linked to Bartleby, therefore, he ends up accepting his refusal to work for a long period. Bartleby's passive resistance to work through the tragic-comic refrain "I would prefer not to" is very effective, since the lawyer does not know how to cope with a disobedient employee. The economic system had trained him to act rationally, yet, Bartleby destabilizes his pattern of behavior, arising questions about humanity versus the marginalization of the worker. He becomes then a powerful member in the working market because he represents a pattern of resistance which defies the rules of economic power.

Furthermore, Bartleby does not submit to economic power through his refusal to touch money. In a capitalist society, money represents social power. In marxist terms, bourgeois society believes that money confers individuality to a person; if one cannot produce or does not have money, he is nothing to society, that is, the person has no value in the economic system. Bartleby does not accept to live under such conditions. He simply wants to be a human being who does not depend on social impositions to live. Thus, he refuses to take part

of a society ruled by economic power. He was a worker who received a "minimum wage" previously designated by his boss. The ruling class provided a minimum wage that would assure the worker only the basic means of subsistence and would also keep him through all his existence as a mere laborer. Therefore, society could perpetuate the domain of a class oppressing the other. Bartleby, through passive resistance, defies this pattern of domination. In the story, there are two moments in which Melville makes clear Bartleby's problematic relation with money. First, the lawyer is surprised when he finds out that his employee does not spend his salary: "It was an old bandanna handkerchief heavy and notted. I opened it, and I saw it was a saving's bank"(55). The lawyer can not understand Bartleby's refusal to use his money. He feels sorry because Bartleby does not enjoy the little pleasures society permitted him, such as eating in a good restaurant or drinking a beer as the other employees used to do. Yet, soon his pity changed into social fear. He thinks that Bartleby could be mentally disturbed because of his unusual behavior, which could be a source of problems for the lawyer's firm. Another evidence of Bartleby's refusal to touch money happens when the lawyer dismisses his employee, gives him his payment and some extra money. Again, Bartleby does not accept the money: "You have not even touched that money yet"(63) says the lawyer in despair. Indeed, the lawyer, as a representative of economic power, thinks that Bartleby is not reasonable living without money or a steady job. In a capitalist society, one can only be happy if he or she has money. As Bartleby does not fit this pattern, he becomes a dangerous example to the other workers. They could adopt this behavior and refuse to cope with the capitalist system. Then the relation of oppressor and oppressed could be questioned and resistance would be effective.

Besides, Bartleby reinforces his passive resistance through his refusal to leave the office. As Bartleby refuses to work, the lawyer gives him six days to leave his office, however, he does not quit the job nor leaves the office. The lawyer can not control such situation and feels

unable to take any decision, as he concludes: "But again obeying that wondrous ascendancy which the inscrutable scrivener had over me... I could not completely escape.. "(62). The lawyer is in conflict with his moral and religious values versus the values of a capitalist system. He feels like following his religious beliefs as he recalls the bible: "A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another"(64). He thinks of Bartleby as a brother whom he should take care of but such humanitarian considerations do not last long. Threatened by the rules of economic power, the lawyer tries desperately to remove Bartleby from his office. As he fails, he decides he himself will move out.

Bartleby's resistance is strong enough to affect the lawyer as well as the lawyer's office as a whole. The lawyer, frightened by his employee's resistance, decides to move to another building in order to get rid of him. After leaving the building, he is still haunted by Bartleby's presence. The people who lived in the building demanded that he should do something about his ex-employee. The lawyer tries to remove Bartleby from the building, but he fails: "at present, says Bartleby, I would prefer not to make any change at all"(69). Indeed, Bartleby's resistance goes beyond his refusal to leave the office. He refuses to live in society again. For him, that office with its blind and dead walls seemed to be a much more secure place than the struggle for survival in a capitalist society. In the building, he would not have to submit to any rules, and he could live freely.

As society is stronger than the employee, he is taken to prison. There, Bartleby continues to fight against social impositions. He refuses to eat, and, consequently, to live in such a place. He is aware that the prison is a place for social punishment. when Bartleby was put in prison, the lawyer feels sorry and visits his employee. As to relieve his conscience, the lawyer uses his influence and money to guarantee better living conditions for Bartleby. He talks then to the grub man, who was paid to give better food for the prisoners, revealing that in prison as well as in society money help those who have it to live under better conditions. The lawyer

pays the grub man so that Bartleby would be well treated in prison: "Well, then, said I, slipping some silver into the grub-man's hand... I want you to give particular attention to my friend there"(71). Yet, Bartleby refuses to take part in this society corrupted by money: "I prefer not to dine to-day. It would disagree with me."(72). He does not accept anything from the lawyer, and the lack of food seems not to affect him. In fact, Bartleby had refused to eat since he was at the office. He used to eat only the ginger nuts his colleagues left there. In prison, he stops eating in a silent but definitive refusal to live in society.

As he was considered harmless, he was not put in a cell. He was permitted to walk freely, especially in the gardens. There, he used to stay alone, quiet, facing a high wall and refusing to talk to anyone. When the lawyer visits him again, he finds Bartleby lying on the base of a wall. It seemed that he was sleeping but his open eyes and his cold body announced his death. The lawyer closed his eyes and murmured: "Ah Bartleby! Ah Humanity!".(74). Only when the lawyer sees him dead, he notices that he was a human being who could have been treated differently. The lawyer then finds out about Bartleby's past as a clerk in the Dead Letters Office in Washington who was dismissed due to changes in the administration. The lawyer, representing economic power, could not deal with human feelings such as pain, anguish, depression. For a system where money is more important than human beings, paying attention to a suffering soul would be a waste of time.

Ultimately, Bartleby defied this system by showing that a person is much more than a cog in the economic machinery. Using passive resistance, Bartleby could challenge the capitalist convictions of an old lawyer who was also a victim of economic power. Melville describes him as a nameless character, referring to him as "the lawyer of Wall Street" throughout the story, so as to show that he was not a person but only a profitable worker to society. Bartleby, on the other hand, is much more a person than a worker. Society ultimately defeated the person, but only at the price of acknowledging the possibility of resistance.

CONCLUSION

"Billy Budd, Sailor", "Benito Cereno" and "Bartleby, The Scrivener" portray relations of power in terms of domination and resistance, Foucault's concept of power is instrumental for the comprehension of these relations of power since throughout these short stories, power functions as a positive device. It does not have a single holder, but it is spread out in the multiplicity of Melville's characters. Billy Budd, Babo and Bartleby, for instance, are powerful to the extent that they are able to resist, and, consequently, they can affect their oppressor's behavior, Billy's charisma, Babo's intellect and Bartleby's persistence made them able to resist the domination they were exposed to. Power then moves away from the oppressor's hands and destabilizes absolute domination.

In the short stories "Billy Budd, Sailor", "Benito Cereno" and "Bartleby, The Scrivener", Melville's characters are individually different from each other, but, at the same time, they reveal similar characteristics. In both stories, there is a struggle between good and evil. Also, the characters Billy, Babo and Bartleby are silent, they resist social judgement and they are socially sacrificed. Finally, humanism is confronted to social expediency. The differences in these short stories show the different kinds of domination that Billy, Bartleby and Babo are exposed to, and, consequently, their different ways of resistance.

The first similarity among these three short stories refers to the struggle of good versus evil. In "Billy Budd, Sailor", Billy is essentially good-natured, very naive and helpful, He is contrasted then to the antagonist Claggart who is pure evil and malice. In "Bartleby, The Scrivener", Bartleby has pure feelings and is very honest and sensitive. He is confronted with the society he lives in, which is full of ambition and individualism. In "Benito Cereno", the struggle between good and evil becomes problematic. The negro Babo seems to personify evil itself even though, he is nothing more than the result of an unjust colonial society. The

colonial society is thus responsible for the evil present in the negro slaves. In his stories, Melville makes his readers to reflect upon the nature of human beings and their weaknesses. Besides, the main characters Billy, Bartleby, Babo as well as Benito are silent. They communicate mainly through their actions. Billy Budd is a very lively and friendly person who enjoys social interaction, however, he is condemned to silence due to a vocal defect. When Billy is under stress, his voice changes into a stuttering attempt to speak. Besides his stuttering, he lacks knowledge to verbalize his feelings and to defend himself being thus condemned to silence, Bartleby, in his turn, is a man of few words, avoiding any personal involvement, He chooses silence to express himself; showing therefore a passive way of manifesting his refusal to join any social interaction. Similarly, Benito Cereno is voiceless, even though he can speak. He is silent due to the fear of being killed by the negroes. Babo, on the other hand, uses his silence to threaten and impose fear over the Spanish. He does not reveal his intentions clearly, but his silent behavior is an implicit way of exercising his power. Both characters, in spite of being silent, reinforce their resistance in remarkably short sentences. Billy's last words "God Bless Captain Vere" are decisive to change him into a hero. The pureness of his soul made him to bless the one who killed him. Hence, his attitude revealed by his last words made all the crew conscious of the injustice practiced: captain Vere killed an innocent man. In "Benito Cereno", the negro Babo uses the words "Follow your Leader" to exercise his power over the Spanish. The skeleton of Don Arandas and such words were enough to prevent any Spanish reaction, and also to keep the Spanish under control. In "Bartleby, The Scrivener" the tragic-comic refrain "I would prefer not to" repeated by Bartleby throughout the story is the ratification of his passive resistance. He used this refrain as the only way to communicate to society. The characters do not speak much to express their feelings or to explain their actions. They communicate through their behavior.

Furthermore, all characters in these short stories resist social judgement. Bartleby, who

lives in Wall street, resists social judgement imposed by the capitalist system. He stops acting according to social conventions through his silent refusal to act. As a result, he is put in prison. There, he refuses to eat and dies. Bartleby strongly resists the system and commits suicide. Billy Budd, who lives aboard a war ship, resists human envy present in social life. He does not accept a false charge against him, kills the master at arms, and is condemned by martial law to be hung. Billy, however, is weaker in his resistance and accepts being hung because he is too naive to rebel against disciplinary rules. In "Benito Cereno", the negroes led by Babo do not accept being enslaved by the white European. They fight for their freedom using tactics of terror. They overtake the Spanish ship and control it for some time, exercising great influence over Don Benito even after the end of the rebellion. In both cases, the characters are not seen as human beings who make part of a community and who have the right of self-expression, but as objects of social systems. When they do not accept being manipulated, they become dangerous. Society then must eliminate such resistant members.

Similarly, Billy Budd, Babo and Bartleby resist social judgement and are sacrificed. Billy Budd, even being recognized as innocent of murder, is condemned to die through hanging because he broke disciplinary rules and attacked the superior master at arms. In military society, a superior has the power conferred by law, therefore, human ethics and justice are not really considered relevant because they are perceived as external to the rules of the military system. This system requires men to be servile objects instead of human beings. Discipline and duty are thus the only options that men like Billy have. In "Benito Cereno", Babo also ends up being sacrificed. As he was the leader of the negro rebellion, he was judged and condemned to die. In a colonial society, the negro Babo would represent a pattern of defiance against colonialism. As such, he should be killed. Otherwise, negroes would claim for their rights, which would be both economically and socially inconvenient.

Melville also presents the dilemma of humanity versus social expediency in these three

short stories. In "Billy Budd, Sailor", Captain Vere is extremely touched by Billy's innocence. He is moved by sudden humanitarian feelings, considering that he himself could be Billy's father. Even when he is dying, he reveals his feelings for Billy as he calls his name. Yet, Captain Vere has to deny any personal involvement and act according to the rules of military discipline. He condemns Billy to be executed due to military expediency, which is stronger than his personal feelings. Likewise, the lawyer has a special relation with Bartleby. The lawyer, even representing economic power, recognizes the human condition of his employee. Then, a conflict between human justice and the rules of capitalism is established. The lawyer seems to consider Bartleby as a brother and tries to help him, recalling biblical lessons. But capitalism is more powerful than religion and the lawyer can not save his employee from his fatal end. Again, social expediency is stronger than the lawyer's humanitarian feelings. In "Benito Cereno" , the relation of humanism versus social expediency is not strongly emphasized. However, it is present in Don Benito's relationship with Babo, Babo controls the Spanish Captain during some time, but, at the end, colonial society controls the rebellion and kills the negro. Yet, Don Benito does not feel satisfied with the victory of colonial power. Instead, he cannot forget Babo's image and feels sad and depressed.

Finally, all the stories portray a reflection upon the human side of the characters confronted with social injustice. Captain Vere, the lawyer and Benito could have helped Billy, Bartleby and Babo. They feel they should do so, but they obey a system which directs their actions even against their will. The lawyer submits to capitalist society, Captain Vere submits to the duty of military system, and Benito is an agent of colonial power. Hence, these social systems do not oppress only Billy, Bartleby and Babo. They oppress everyone who dares to follow humanitarian feelings. Billy, Bartleby and Babo are different from the other social members due to their uncommon reaction to social power: they resist domination, Nevertheless, in these short stories, the characters also have many significant differences among them. The short

story "Billy Budd, Sailor" happens in a military context, "Benito Cereno" reflects the reality of slavery in a colonial society, and "Bartleby, The Scrivener" takes place in a capitalist system. In the military system, discipline and obedience are extremely important requirements. The person must be transformed into a docile body, and can not have a will. All men are trained to subject their bodies and souls to the military system. In the economic system, the person must be productive and profitable. Money dictates all the rules of social interaction. Human beings are worth what they are able to produce, therefore, having possessions becomes more important than being a person. In colonial society, the white European treated the African negroes as goods and not as human beings. Negroes should be servile and productive. Having no right of self-expression, they were completely subjected to their masters' will.

These different forms of power had, consequently, different ways of resistance. In the military context, the character Billy Budd resisted through his natural power which was characterized by his charisma and physical strength. He used his physical strength to answer back to a false charge against him, killing Claggart. Besides, his charisma changed him into a hero right after his death. As he was loved by all the crew, his unjust death made him a symbol of resistance against military oppression. Bartleby, in his turn, resists economic power through passivity. He simply refuses to do anything. His only words "I would prefer not to" emphasize his effective passive resistance. Silently, he resists economic power by sacrificing his own life: he stops eating and dies. His suicide would be an answer to the oppressive system he lives in. In "Benito Cereno", there is strong resistance on the part of the enslaved negroes. They resist being taken away of their home country and, when they are aboard the ship, they plan a rebellion. In their struggle for freedom, they use their intelligence and control the Spanish through tactics of terrorism and violence. Their resistance is successful because they are able to control their own masters and change them into their

servants.

Summing up, Melville's literature shows that relations of power are never absolute. Where there is domination there is resistance. Melville's characters Billy, Bartleby and Babo are victims of social domination. The social system requires them to be not human, but cogs in a social machinery. When they refuse allegiance to the social system they live in, they challenge domination, creating patterns of resistance, which are characterized by Billy's natural power, Bartleby's passive resistance and Babo's tactics of terrorism. All these characters lead then the readers to question the nature of power in human interaction. Human beings must be the subjects of their own history and not objects of domination.

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