HERMAN MELVILLE'S PHILOSOPHICAL TESTIMONY: STONES AS WITNESSES IN THE DESERT RESERVE OF *CLAREL: A POEM AND PILGRIMAGE IN THE HOLY LAND*

A Thesis

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ABSTRACT

After decades of relative obscurity, Herman Melville's 1876 poem, *Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land,* has been gaining much more critical attention in the last twenty years as a work of great literary significance. Recently, scholars such as Paul Hurh, Rhian Williams, Branka Arsić, and Troy Jollimore, have focused specifically on philosophical themes in *Clarel*. First, in working with Gert-Jan van der Heiden's *The Voice of Misery: A Continental Philosophy of Testimony,* this thesis continues to argue for *Clarel*'s philosophical importance by considering this poem as a work of philosophical testimony. Second, this thesis claims that *Clarel* pushes the site of testimony beyond a human voice or written account and into the desert landscape itself. In *Clarel,* it is not a human figure or written text that acts as a witness to the misery of human life, but rather the stones in the desert landscape testify to the possibilities of death, decay, and oblivion for human existence. Third, this thesis contributes to considering *Clarel* as a crucial text for bringing Melville scholarship, literary criticism, and academic philosophy into an interdisciplinary dialogue.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Since the emergence of a new critical interest in Herman Melville's works in the early twentieth century, his 1876 epic poem, *Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land*, has often been overlooked or simply dismissed by scholarship largely focused on his prose works. With the exception of someone like William Ellery Sedgwick's early appraisal of the importance of *Clarel* in 1944, many scholars were perhaps closer to the sensibility of C.L.R. James in 1953 regarding the almost 18,000-line poem: "very long and very tiresome" (James 120). With the exception of an English version published in 1924 by Constable and Company,[1] a new edition of *Clarel* would not appear until 1960 from Hendricks House, one that includes a foundational and comprehensive introduction by Walter E. Bezanson. This edition would at the very least mark *Clarel* as a text that is not merely the "late flickering of a waned imagination," and counters the claim that "poetry was a left-handed venture for Melville" (Bezanson, Introduction ix). For Bezanson, *Clarel* is more than worthy of literary scholarship and should be taken seriously by "modern" readers and critics (ix). While the 1960 edition remains a crucial text for anyone interested in *Clarel*, the Northwestern-Newberry edition in 1991, edited and with an extensive historical supplement by Hershel Parker, built on Bezanson's

[1] Bezanson seems to dismiss this edition: "The English edition, included as Volumes XIV an XV (1924) in Constable and Company's limited edition of *The Works of Herman Melville* (1922-1924), not only is out of print but present a text completely Anglicized in spelling and punctuation" (Preface p. i).

work and further established *Clarel* as a core text for Melville scholarship. In 2008, this edition would appear once again with Northwestern University Press with a new and informative foreword from Hershel Parker, and as Brian Yothers notes, is an affordable edition for the classroom ("Reading and Teaching" 1). While perhaps not comprehensive or groundbreaking in the manner of Bezanson's 1960 introduction, the 2008 edition introduces Melville's complex poem to students and newcomers in a welcoming and accessible manner, and has contributed to the reception of *Clarel* by a broader audience in the twenty-first century. Most recently, *Clarel* was included in the Library of America's (LOA) fourth and final installment of their Melville edition, *Herman Melville: Complete Poems* (2019), which celebrates the Melville bicentennial. As the first three volumes of this edition were printed between 1982 and 1985, this long-awaited edition now for the first time compiles all four books of Melville's poetry into one volume. If not already accomplished by previous editions, this LOA volume now marks *Clarel* as a decisive text in Melville's corpus, and perhaps as a canonical text for American literature at large.

As indicated in this brief account of the editorial history of *Clarel*, scholarly interest in the poem through the twentieth and twenty-first centuries developed slowly, but today, as Yothers has recently noted, "If *Clarel* is not yet one of Melville's greatest hits, it is at least far from invisible" ("Reading and Teaching" 2). After Bezanson's 1960 introduction, the first critical monographs on *Clarel* began to appear in the 1970s with Joseph G. Knapp's *Tortured Synthesis: The Meaning of Melville's Clarel* and Vincent S. Kenny's *Herman Melville's Clarel: A Spiritual Autobiography*. Three other monograph

works followed with Stan Goldman's *Melville's Protest Theism: The Hidden and Silent God in Clarel* (1993), William Potter's *Melville's Clarel and the Intersympathy of Creeds* (2004), and more recently, Laura López Peña's *Beyond the Walls: Being with Each Other in Herman Melville's Clarel* (2015). Along with these monographic studies, periodical works have likewise emerged that interpret *Clarel* through a diverse set of lenses. In the last ten years especially, *Clarel* has received more attention perhaps due to the Seventh International Conference of the Melville Society, "Melville and the Mediterranean," which convened in 2009 in East Jerusalem and which largely focused on Melville's 1856-1857 *Journal* and *Clarel*.[2] For Hilton Obenzinger, "this conference was the first to place Melville's long, brilliant poem at the center of critical dialogue: *Clarel* no longer waits on the margins of Melville studies. It is an important philosophical narrative poem, revealing deep pleasures for those with the patience to work through its quirks and complexities" ("Melville and the Mediterranean" 35).

While *Clarel* has been receiving much more attention in the last several decades from scholarship in the world of Melville studies and literary criticism, it has only recently begun to enter the world of philosophical scholarship. Melville's prose works (especially *Moby-Dick* and "Bartleby") have often been important for major figures in twentieth and twenty-first century continental philosophy, such as Albert Camus, Gilles

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[2] Several papers from this conference appeared in a special issue of *Leviathan* (13.3 October 2011) and touched on issues such as race, transnationalism, as well as "discussed *Clarel* as a major work of literature, examining its poetics, as well as the poem's engagements with politics, histories, religions, mythologies, iconographies, and more" (Obenzinger, "Melville and the Mediterranean" 35).

Deleuze, Felix Guittari, Giorgio Agamben, Slavoj Zizek, and Cornel West. Recently, new efforts have emerged to develop a dialogue between Melville studies, literary criticism, and philosophy with works such as K.L. Evans' *One Foot in the Finite: Melville's Realism Reclaimed* (2017) and David Faflik's *Melville and the Question of Meaning* (2018). Two edited volumes have also recently been published: Corey McCall's and Tom Nurmi's *Melville Among the Philosophers* (2017), and Branka Arsić's and K. L. Evans' *Melville's Philosophies* (2018).[3] In these volumes there are four noteworthy essays on *Clarel*: Troy Jollimore's "'In Voiceless Visagelessness': The Disenchanted Landscape of *Clarel*," Paul Hurh's "*Clarel*, Doubt, Delay," Rhian Williams' "'Learning, unlearning, word by word': Feeling Faith in Melville's *Clarel*," and Branka Arsić's "Desertscapes: Geological Politics in *Clarel*." These authors address philosophical themes in *Clarel*, such as epistemological and ontological doubt, aesthetic experience, the materiality of the desert, and embodied understanding.

First, as these authors provide a crucial starting point for considering *Clarel* as a philosophical text, this thesis contributes to the development of *Clarel* as a decisive text for bringing Melville scholarship, literary criticism, and continental philosophy into dialogue by approaching the text with a philosophical framework that expands the epistemological, ontological, and aesthetic insights of the previous authors, namely, that of 'philosophical testimony.' In working with Gert-Jan van der Heiden's recent work, *The Voice of Misery: A Continental Philosophy of Testimony* (2020), I argue that *Clarel*,

[3] The contributors to these volumes are a mix of professors that hold positions in English and Philosophy departments.

as philosophical testimony, gives voice to a historical, existential, and spiritual misery of human life. Influenced by Agamben and Deleuze, van der Heiden is another contemporary philosopher who attempts to bring Melville and continental philosophy together as he focuses a chapter of his book on "Bartleby" in order to discuss the role of testimony, bearing witness, and misery at the heart of Melville's short story. Second, in incorporating van der Heiden's basic elements of philosophical testimony in my analysis of *Clarel*, this thesis pushes the limits of this testimony beyond a human voice of a living character in the text and into the desert landscape itself. In a close reading of cantos 2.10 and 2.11, I will suggest that the stones in the desert, as "good witnesses" (*Clarel* 2.10.33), bear witness to the distant, silent, and perhaps forgotten voices of the past that are encountered in the desert landscape.

In developing *Clarel* as a work of philosophical testimony that focuses on the landscape itself as the site and source of this testimony, this thesis takes up the following questions: How does *Clarel* speak, articulate, or announce this testimony that it raises if it does not come from a living, human character in the text? What are the possibilities or impossibilities of this very articulation or presentation of testimony such that others are able to hear and understand this testimony? In responding to these questions, considering *Clarel* as philosophical testimony will show how its desert landscape testifies not only to the set of historical, existential, and spiritual questions at play in the poem, but more importantly, to the condition of this testimony as one of misery: the inability to fully bring into speech or language the very thing that drives this testimony in the first place.

Misery is both the impossibility of clearly resolving or answering the questions in the poem, as well as the condition of not being able to bring the inarticulate source of these questions fully into a linguistic world. As van der Heiden puts it, misery refers to "what is poor in language or what cannot enter language or cannot be said because it is exiled, banned, and removed from it, but what nevertheless concerns the very heart of human existence" (37). While in "Bartleby," this misery is encountered in the (in)human figure of Bartleby and borne witness to by the narrator of the text, I will show how the pilgrims in *Clarel* encounter misery in the external, material landscape of the desert. The many existential and spiritual questions concerning the philosophical and theological tensions within an individual emerge in *Clarel* from out of this encounter with the misery of the desert, namely, from out of those experiences of human existence that themselves seem inhuman and find themselves exiled from language. These (in)human experiences are ones that threaten the foundations of human existence itself, namely, death, decay, and oblivion: the possibility of not only death and non-existence, but of being forgotten or lost entirely to historical memory.

In the following four chapters, I emphasize key themes in recent philosophical interest in *Clarel* alongside van der Heiden's notions of misery and elements of testimony in order to argue for a philosophical testimony in *Clarel* that emerges from the material landscape of the desert itself. Beginning with chapter two, I survey recent literature on *Clarel* and its philosophical themes in order to highlight the relevant epistemological, ontological, and aesthetic considerations that operate in the text. These essays are an indication that as a new wave of philosophers turn towards Melville, and as

literary critics and philosophers turn to each other, *Clarel* is emerging as a crucial text for understanding the philosophical significance in Melville's oeuvre. In this chapter, I begin by outlining these four essays with an emphasis on several common themes that bind them together. First, each essay addresses the desert landscape in *Clarel* as representing or enacting various forms of epistemological and ontological doubt within the text. Second, each essay articulates different philosophical, theological, and political consequences that come from this experience of the materiality of the desert. Lastly, these four essays find a common ground in pointing towards the condition of misery that van der Heiden identifies in "Bartleby."

In Chapter three, I first identify van der Heiden's notion of misery and elements of philosophical testimony in *The Voice of Misery: A Continental Philosophy of Testimony* as a philosophical framework that develops the epistemological, ontological, and aesthetic insights from Hurh, Williams, Arsić, and Jollimore. First, I discuss van der Heiden's notion of misery as it appears in his opening "literary experiments," with a specific focus on his analysis of Melville's "Bartleby." Misery concerns those experiences or conditions of human life that cannot be brought into language: "In its most desolate forms, this misery might be identified with the human capacity to experience more than humans can bear, that is, to be traumatized, to encounter the very limit of their humanity, and to be brought to the very threshold of their human life" (Van der Heiden 70). After this, I discuss the four elements of testimony that appear in Melville's work: The reserve/object of testimony, the act or event of testimony, the subject or witness of testimony, and hearer of testimony. In considering how van der

Heiden identifies these four elements of testimony as they manifest themselves in "Bartleby," I suggest we can not only apply this framework of philosophical testimony to *Clarel*, but also show how *Clarel* brings the notion of testimony to its own limits. While in "Bartleby," it is from out of the human figure and voice of Bartleby that one hears the voice of misery ("I would prefer not to"), and in which van der Heiden locates the reserve of the object/reserve of testimony, *Clarel* pushes the site of misery and the reserve into the material world of the poem. In *Clarel*, the voice of misery comes not from the pilgrims themselves, but from the formless, empty, reserve of the desert landscape, marking the silent and forgotten voices of an ancient past.

In chapter four, I turn to Melville's 1856-1857 *Journal* and a close reading of two cantos in *Clarel* in order to demonstrate these four elements of philosophical testimony in the desert landscape of the text. This chapter is divided into three sections. Section one works through Melville's *Journal*, corresponding moments in *Clarel*, and relevant secondary literature to suggest that the landscape in *Clarel* can be considered a character in the text. In order to claim that some aspect of the non-human landscape in *Clarel* can be a subject of testimony, one that bears witness to the misery of the desert and performs the act of testimony for the pilgrims in the poem, I show how this landscape has its own force and agency in the text and is not merely a passive, material object. In section two, I focus on canto 2.10 in order to claim that in this particular instance the non-human stones act as subjects of testimony and prompt (in varying degrees) human figures in the text, such as Glaucon, Rolfe, and Nehemiah, to be hearers of this testimony. While stones are not human figures in the text, they are marked by

human voices and human experiences of an ancient past that, at risk of being lost forever, can only rely on such stones to act as witnesses that attempt to give voice to these impoverished or inarticulate voices of misery. Section three fills out the schema by discussing the desert in canto 2.11 as the object/reserve of testimony. If the pilgrims in the text are hearers of testimony, and the stones are the subjects of testimony that perform the act of testimony, it is the misery of the desert itself that these stones bear witness to and attempt to bring into the horizon of understanding of the other pilgrims. It is in the reserve of the desert that one encounters those seemingly (in)human truths of human existence as something withdrawn and held back, as something exiled from language, namely, the possibilities of death without an afterlife, of being utterly forsaken or abandoned, and of oblivion all together.

In chapter five, I conclude by rearticulating the main claims concerning *Clarel* and philosophical testimony, and point towards how this thesis informs both academic philosophy and other crucial issues that surround *Clarel* scholarship. Considering *Clarel* as philosophical testimony contributes to questions regarding the limits and boundaries of language in philosophical hermeneutics, existential-phenomenology, and deconstruction, and would meaningfully engage the work of major twentieth century continental philosophers, such as Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Jacques Derrida. Likewise, *Clarel* and philosophical testimony can contribute to issues concerning transnationalism and orientalism that are often taken up in *Clarel*. In looking at one particular example from Hilton Obenzinger's "Melville, Holy Lands, and Settler-Colonial Studies," I suggest how thinking through philosophical testimony in *Clarel*

may contribute to certain questions and research limitations raised by Obenzinger in settler-colonial studies.

Ultimately, considering *Clarel* as a work of philosophical testimony continues to enrich a nascent interdisciplinary dialogue between literary studies and academic philosophy on the philosophical significance of Melville's works. This thesis is a further response to the call from those at the Seventh International Conference of the Melville Society about the status of *Clarel* in Melville scholarship and American literature at large.[4] My thesis contends that considering *Clarel* as philosophical testimony continues to emphasize the status of *Clarel* as a profound philosophical text that is necessary for any serious reader or scholar of Melville and American literature generally speaking. Furthermore, considering *Clarel* as philosophical testimony brings Melville into dialogue with academic philosophy in a new and important way. While Melville and philosophy are most often acquainted through *Moby-Dick* and "Bartleby," a focus on *Clarel* and testimony will reintroduce Melville to scholars in philosophy in a manner that has largely been ignored, and make a continued case for *Clarel* as a text worthy of serious scholarship in the discipline of philosophy.

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[4] Basem L. Ra'ad's begins his paper at this conference with an impassioned plea: "Will *Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land* ever take its rightful place in the writings of the United States of America? Without understanding *Clarel* how could we appreciate Herman Melville's career in any full way" (Ra'ad 6).

CHAPTER II

RECENT ONTOLOGICAL, EPISTEMOLOGICAL, AND AESTHETIC CONSIDERATIONS OF *CLAREL*

As *Clarel* has been gaining much more critical attention in the last decade by scholars in English and literary theory, it has often been ignored by philosophers when engaging the works of Melville. As it is, critical attention to Melville as a serious philosophical thinker in continental philosophy has often focused on his major works of fiction, such as *Moby-Dick* and "Bartleby." Perhaps the most well-known essays on Melville in continental philosophy are from C.L.R. James, Albert Camus, Giorgio Agamben, Gilles Deleuze, Maurice Blanchot, Catherine Malabou, and Francois Zourabichvili. Yet given this attention to "Bartleby," as Cornel West claims, there is a questionable dearth of American philosophical focus in particular on the works of Melville: "Why do most American philosophers overlook the philosophical significance of America's greatest novelist? How do U.S. philosophers justify this monumental evasion of Melville's magisterial literary corpus? . . . What does this resounding American philosophic silencing say about the marginal status of philosophers in U.S. culture and society" (West 213)?[5] In conjunction with this "evasion" of Melville's work

[5] Interestingly, this claim from West in 2017 on a lack of attention to Melville as a philosophical writer does not seem to apply to American scholars in English and literary criticism. Several recent and forthcoming works suggest this counterpoint: K.L. Evans' *One Foot in the Finite: Melville's Realism Reclaimed* (2017); David Faflik's *Melville and the Question of Meaning* (2018), Meredith Farmer's, *Melville's Ontology* (forthcoming); Meredith Farmer's and Jonathan Schroeder's, *Rethinking Ahab: Melville and the Materialist Turn* (forthcoming).

on the side of philosophy, Corey McCall and Tom Nurmi claim a further lack of interdisciplinary work between literature and philosophy: "…there has been relatively little attention paid, in the context of Melville particularly, to the lack of direct conversation between literature and philosophy and how that silence alters the reception of Melville in both disciplines" (ix).

Two recent edited volumes have started to address these criticisms: McCall and Nurmi's *Melville Among the Philosophers*, and Arsić and Evans' *Melville's Philosophies*. These works bring philosophers and literary critics into conversation on Melville as a philosophical thinker. More than this, four essays from these volumes focus specifically on the philosophical significance of *Clarel*, suggesting that *Clarel* is beginning to emerge as a crucial philosophical text in Melville's oeuvre. In this chapter, I briefly summarize these four essays and draw out three shared philosophical points that emerge in their considerations of *Clarel* as a philosophical text. First, each essay focuses on the desert landscape as a kind of character or agent in the text that enacts epistemological and ontological doubt for the pilgrims in the text. Second, these essays trace the philosophical, theological, and political implications from this encounter with the desert in Melville's poem. Finally, I suggest this common focus on the materiality of the desert lays the groundwork for considering the desert landscape as a site of misery and philosophical testimony in the text.

There is, in fact, hardly a canto in *Clarel* in which some facet of the desert does not have an active presence for the many characters of the text. Comprised of four parts and 150 cantos, *Clarel* tells the story of a young student of theology that travels to the

Holy Land in order to find answers to his questions concerning doubt and faith. In part I, the dust of the surrounding desert often accompanies Clarel and his companion, Nehemiah, as they travel through the city of Jerusalem and visit the many different holy sites within the city walls. In part II, Clarel and his newfound fellow pilgrims travel across the wilderness of the desert to the Jordan river and the Dead Sea, during which the desert landscape challenges the physical and spiritual limitations of many of the travelers, and exposes the wide range of philosophical and theological dispositions of characters such as Rolfe, Nehemiah, Derwent, Margoth, Vine, and Mortmain. In part III, the travelers find some respite from the desert as they find their way to the Mar Saba monastery, but are still often challenged physically by its stony infrastructure and challenged spiritually by the asceticism of the monks that live there, all of which is formed by the arid and unforgiving landscape within which the monastery is embedded. Lastly, in part IV, the pilgrims continue to walk the desert landscape and find another short reprieve at Bethlehem and the Church of the Nativity. Here, some of the most heated discussions take place regarding deep philosophical, theological, and political questions of the nineteenth century. At the end of part IV, this last reprieve is over, and the remaining pilgrims travel the desert once again to return to Jerusalem at the start of Ash Wednesday. Of course, there are many ways to interpret the somewhat ambiguous ending of the poem. It is quite clear, however, that Clarel himself does not seem to arrive at any kind of definitive resolution regarding his questions of doubt and faith. In making his pilgrimage through the Holy Land, it is conceivable that it is an experience

with incessant doubt, rather than one of inspiring faith, that one properly encounters in the desert landscape.

In "*Clarel*, Doubt, Delay," Hurh marks a shift from the various "Kant-inflected epistemological dilemmas" in Melville's fiction, to the "onto-theological dilemma of doubt" in *Clarel*, "where doubt emerges from the physical nature of the world and our increasing knowledge of it" (Hurh 79). Rather than focusing on epistemological questions concerning one's own self, or the individual's capacity for knowledge, Hurh suggests that in *Clarel* doubt emerges as its own kind of substance from out of the desert landscape, external to the psychologies of the characters themselves (80). In following the work of Michael Jonik, Hurh's thesis contributes to thinking about *Clarel* as an impersonal poem that dramatically separates and alienates the individual from any kind of harmonic relationship with nature (80).

Yet Hurh is not merely focused on doubt as emerging from the natural world, but also on doubt's temporal aspect as inherently delayed and regressive. Hurh's thesis then centers on doubt as emerging external to the individual as something spatial and temporal (Hurh 81). In articulating the overwhelming sense of "deep time" that the pilgrims experience in the desert (terrestrial and celestial, geological and astronomical), Hurh claims that this exposes the characters to a sense of time that challenges religious and scriptural temporalities (e.g. the earth as 6,000 years old), bringing doubt onto the scene as its own substance (82-85). Instead of making the obvious (but still important) point about *Clarel* dramatizing the temporal distance between the figures of the poem and the events and figures of Christian scripture, Hurh points to an even more radical

temporality that the pilgrims face, suggesting "that the problem with faith is not that the nearly two thousand years since Christ is too long, but rather that it is so cosmically brief" (83-84). Hurh then claims that this bypasses the physical and temporal world of the poem as a kind of metaphor for doubt, to being the very "substantial cause" of doubt itself (85). More importantly, this displaces the doubt of human beings to a much lower position on the hierarchy of importance and concern, and instead becomes a necessary symptom of a much larger ontological claim about physical/temporal doubt: "Rather than see doubt as a human problem of facing the world, *Clarel* approaches doubt as a worldly problem, the face of the world itself" (85). This kind of doubt in *Clarel* that emerges not from the individual pilgrims but from the world or even the cosmos at large speaks to the possibility of the desert landscape being much more than a passive object that the pilgrims encounter, but having a force or agency of its own, that its own visage is one of doubt and contingency that smiles and bears down on those that travel through the landscape.

Hurh's ontological claim about doubt emerging as an object out of the physical/temporal contours of the world itself brings into new relief the impoverishment of satisfactory responses to these questions of doubt in *Clarel*. In showing that the characters are challenged not only by the space and landscape of the Holy Land, but also by the deep time that one is exposed to in this setting, the pilgrims then appear to be even further away from any kind of sublation or dialectical resolution of their competing philosophical and theological positions than previously thought. In line with many other readers of *Clarel*, Hurh emphasizes the 'process' of the poem instead of searching for a

result to the many questions that emerge in the text. Doubt is not something to be cast off as either unnatural nor inhuman. Insofar as doubt emerges from the physical/temporal world as a substance, human beings are necessarily implicated and involved in doubt. As Hurh remarks, "for the Melville of *Clarel*, living is doubting," and that when the narrator tells *Clarel* to "keep they heart," Hurh reads this as for Clarel to "keep his doubting heart . . . such that to keep doubting is to keep open the possibility of change and the maintenance of time" (Hurh 98). Doubt, as a "fundamental part of physical nature," is not only a mark of human finitude and despair, but is the driving force of human investigation, inquiry, and future possibilities (99). Hurh's comments here about doubt speak to the kinship between the pilgrims and the natural world they are embedded in as they travel through the Holy Land. Doubt, for Hurh, is not merely something external that emerges from the natural world, but intensifies the experience of doubt that is foundational to human life itself. This point is crucial for considering those encounters that the pilgrims may experience as something monstrous, terrifying, or beyond comprehension in the desert, and may yet speak directly to the core of their very humanity.

This focus on the way in which the pilgrims and the desert landscape encounter each other in the text also appears in "'Learning, unlearning, word by word': Feeling Faith in Melville's *Clarel*," where Rhian Williams discusses the role of aesthetic mediation between the pilgrims and the material world, suggesting a dialectic of affective revealing and concealing that runs throughout the poem. In taking her cue

from Melville's preamble to *Clarel*,[6] which is fraught with contingency and uncertainty about the future of the text, she asserts that while the poem often falls into silence, complexity, and obscurity, there is nevertheless a "particular mechanism of permanence" that "ignites the workings" of the poem (Williams 175). She immediately then refers to the epilogue of the poem, noted for its ambiguous optimism about the future of the figure of Clarel, to frame her focus on the poem as both "vulnerable" and "transient," but "ultimately still available for faithful experience" (176). Instead of unlocking "locked secrets" that present themselves in the poem, Williams is concerned with how the poem consistently gives rise to "communicated affect," such that one is not given answers to the deep and difficult questions of existence, but endorses a "gentle persistence" in the search for truth (176).

In addressing Melville's connection to the work of Matthew Arnold, Williams discusses the importance of aesthetic affect, perception, and poetic interpretation as crucial for identifying this theme of gentle persistence in *Clarel*. According to Williams, Arnold affirms the importance of the aesthetic above the philosophical and religious, but specifically, aesthetic affect is seen "as a means of *discerning* the emotional weight of experience, by more which means faithful feeling persists" (Williams 177). From this, Williams sets out to articulate moments of "beauty making" in *Clarel* "in the form of singing, chanting, and reading, as heuristic tools in the will to recognize relationships

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[6] "If during the period in which this work has remained unpublished, though not undivulged, any of its properties have by a natural process exhaled; it yet retains, I trust, enough of original life to redeem it at least from vapidity. Be that as it may, I here dismiss the book – content beforehand with whatever future awaits it" (*Clarel*, p. xiv).

between material presence and ineffable yet enduring affect. *There is something lingering here to be said about the way that poetry thinks about the world*" (177). Williams links these two worlds together, material presence and affect, by referring to Melville's 1856-1857 *Journal* in which he notes the austerity of the landscape and the way that it affected his spirit (179). Likewise, Williams argues that *Clarel* is a work that focuses on "the effects of history on sensibility – that it is aimed at the senses" (179). What mediates this experience between the material world and affect is poetry, which takes on an active role as mediator and interpreter of the mystery of the material world, such that we do not understand the world in all of its complexity, but as that which raises or heightens our sensibility towards the world (180).

The role of the poetic is then to be attentive to the aesthetic process at work in *Clarel*, one which is not seeking a certain, absolute, or universal truth, but one that emphasizes our capacity for aesthetic experience. This aesthetic process is defined not by any kind of certainty or mastery, but by opening oneself up to a heightening of one's sensibilities to "moments of realization" that are interspersed between the many "forlorn episodes" (Williams 182). For Williams, the work of the aesthetic in *Clarel* is not one that "stands in for something else (verifiable belief, for example) but as a process that adumbrates (both revealing and concealing) faithful feeling in and of itself" (182). The work of the aesthetic does not bring us to an unshakable truth, but vitalizes our own sensible and affective capacities. Much like Hurh's essay, Williams emphasizes *Clarel* as a "poem of process rather than goal. . . thinking rather than concluding, mediating rather than knowing" (185). In reacting to the trends of scientific, materialist,

positivistic, and instrumentalist inquiry of Melville's day, the poetics of *Clarel* emphasize an aesthetics that works on "sharpening the senses to affective knowledge" (192). In this way, doubt and uncertainty are no longer false or deceiving paths, but signal "the condition of faith" (192). In emphasizing the role of the aesthetic and increasing one's capacities for sensible experience in *Clarel*, Williams' essay points toward the crucial role that 'affect' will play later on in considering van der Heiden's notion of testimony. Properly attending to testimony requires an individual to be affected by the testimony, and not merely addressed on an intellectual or abstract level. In *Clarel*, the landscape does not present a testimony for the pilgrims in a written or spoken language fit for a distant or abstract analysis, but rather impact and impress themselves upon the pilgrims in a concrete manner. For Williams, the desert landscape in *Clarel* demands not just a heightened intellectual capacity, but an aesthetic openness and maturity in order for any of the pilgrims to undergo a philosophical or spiritual transformation.

The desert landscape as an affective and generative force in *Clarel* is likewise found in Branka Arsić's, "Desertscapes: Geological Politics in *Clarel*," where the materiality of the desert landscape takes center-stage as a character in the poem all its own, contributing to her articulation of "slow politics" and Melville's "ontology of the desert." As Arsić explains in the introductory section of her essay, the poem can rightly be read as a group of characters investigating their own faith and the veracity of Christian epistemology in the wake of competing and dominating scientific knowledge (Arsić 379). However, as the poem moves along and "the pilgrims start their walk to the

Dead Sea, the desert takes over, slowly turning into something like the main character of the poem . . . and its ashen aspect put extreme pressure on the pilgrims' theologies" (379). Similar to Hurh's essay, the desert takes on its own force in the poem as an agent of doubt, absence, and abandonment that is external to their own will and consciousness. The desert then becomes the region of "radical faith-testing" *par excellence* due to its lack of that which is necessary for this faith, namely, "empirical discernment of relics of God's presence" (380). In this withholding of all signs of life, the desert renders the earth "a wasteland in which all relics are mute with a muteness verging on the meaningless" (380). The desert likewise reveals the fact that the earth is not an inherently hospitable environment for human beings, such that instead of promoting human projects of world-building, "the earth is experienced simply as a pile of dust in different stages of dispersion" (381).

After discussing the desert as being more than just a site of an "an ecological disaster generated by human agricultural practice," the product of geological forces, the "privileged site of sacred geographies," and the "politically charged site of naming and appropriating," Arsić presents a striking analysis of the way in which the desert in *Clarel* is charged with questions concerning the memorialization and "archivalization" of the past (Arsić 390-391). Working both with passages from *Clarel* and Melville's 1856-57 *Journal*, Arsić shows Melville's interest in understanding the "stratified earth" of the desert as the result of the decay and decomposition of monuments made out of these very materials of the desert landscape. For instance, the narrator of *Clarel* suggests that the "human practices of archiving the past on stone surfaces – rendering stones

palimpsests of historical time – are in fact what remakes the earth's geology" (391). Arsić then details the ramifications of this, such that monuments become buried under the rubble of older monuments, "pulverized" in such a way that history no longer stores or preserves human memory, but now functions through the "labor of forgetting" (392). Instead of a long chain of connected events, history now becomes a series of radical breaks and ruptures, always starting over "on the burial ground of monuments it has itself eroded into dust" (392). The desert then contains an "almost systematic taxonomy" of "living rock, dead rock, arid rock, and waste" in Melville's *Journal* and *Clarel*, whereby monuments go from "testamentary" stone that still speaks, to monuments that have become "mute" and "illegible," to monuments that have become waste: "Waste is everything once cultivated . . . but now pulverized into 'shapeless stone,' pebbles, or dust and mixed in with the desert mass" (392-393). From this, as Arsić points out, the experience of this taxonomy is one that "disorients" Melville and indicates that human history is intimately bound up with the experience of ineffable abandonment (393).

Arsić suggests that this "transformation of the earth's surface" by monuments represents a "desertification of the past," a desert that is literally made of the past (Arsić 395). From this, readers learn that the desert sand suggests that no archaeological method could truly recover the past, such that "what is perhaps most world-forming – archiving and commemorating – becomes indistinguishable from a world-canceling force that extinguishes testaments and dissipates them into muffled terrestrial matter" (395-396). In this desertification of the past comes an apolitical future, where the desert

becomes “a space in which political differentiations are turned into a vertigo of indifference” and “comes to function as a post-political site” (396; 397). For Arsić, this does not mean that politics has come to an end, but rather that the desert is seen as the “possibility of new births” for political possibilities (397). The apolitical or post-political becomes a site for thinking about the political without “quarrel” (397). Similarly, an ontology of the desert is one marked by a “sheer force of happening” that never concretizes into something stable (397). The desert, then, symbolizes both “the end of history and memory,” as well as a pure force of possibility and creation (398).

Arsić’s reading of the landscape as something deeply impersonal and destructive of past worlds and memories raises a difficult question as to whether or not the pilgrims in *Clarel* can encounter and someway recover a lost historical memory. While Arsić emphasizes the overwhelming and undeniable possibility of oblivion that the stones and rocks present to the pilgrims in the desert, considering the role of philosophical testimony in *Clarel* can also show a radical possibility for stones and rocks to provide testimony that bears witness to voices of such a forgotten and ancient past. While Arsić emphasizes the futural possibilities that emerge in the decay and destruction of the desert landscape, we may not want to give up so easily on the testimonial efficacy of even the “shapeless stone” of the desert wasteland to bear witness to a buried historical memory.

For Troy Jollimore, this encounter with the desert landscape in *Clarel* is an encounter with the physical and material world, speaking to the necessity of interpreting the deep philosophical and theological questions in both an intellectual and embodied manner. In referring to the American pragmatism of William James, Jollimore reads

Clarel as a text that avoids a purely intellectual response to the hard questions concerning faith in the age of science and materialism, and puts more emphasis on practice and embodiment (Jollimore 5). As Melville experienced the disenchantment and disillusionment of the world during his trip to Palestine, he experienced the very silence of God, "by which we mean not only God's refusal to explicitly answer the pleas of human petitioners . . . but also the impossibility . . . of treating nature as a text the reading of which might offer satisfying answers to our deepest religious and metaphysical issues" (10). This comes out, for Jollimore, in Melville's use of "stony" imagery in his 1856-67 *Journal* and *Clarel* to describe the "harshness and lifelessness" of the Palestinian landscape (Jollimore 11). In these references, Jollimore shows how this depiction of a "sterile and inanimate world" cannot be interpreted as a text that supports the existence of God, beneficent or otherwise (12). The world presents itself as "voiceless" and "visageless," such that the absence and silence of God invokes the feeling in the spiritual wanderer of being "unseen and unheard" (13).

Clarel, and selections from Melville's other late poetry, suggest for Jollimore that questions of absence and silence must be "*felt*" instead of merely thought about (Jollimore 16). The philosophical and theological questions at play in *Clarel* are "placed in the mouths and minds of characters who are embedded in concrete situations . . . and who are meant to be seen not as mere mouthpieces for their theories but rather as solid, substantial human beings who are moved and animated by ideas" (16). The matter of religious faith is then a matter of both body and intellect, and any kind of solution must be "embodied and lived, a fleshly solution" (16). In this way, a solution to these

problems requires a "radical transformation of self" that is not merely intellectual (18). Matters of faith, doubt, or skepticism must then not only be reasoned through, but also be experienced (19). It matters less about whether or not an individual can prove the existence of God through deductive logic, but whether one experiences God's existence as a lived being in the world. *Clarel* then demonstrates not only the various competing philosophical and theological positions of the characters, but shows that in the end, the way an individual decides on a position "will not be decided by rational argument in the narrow sense; it will depend on which set of descriptions and metaphors one finds more compelling" (20). Here, once again, we see the philosophical importance of *Clarel* as one that downplays the capacity for intellectual or rational thought, and emphasizes the necessity of encountering the desert landscape in a physical, sensible, embodied way. A mere intellectual engagement with the desert landscape does not promote a philosophically or spiritually transformative experience for the pilgrims. This is an important consideration when we turn to philosophical testimony, and for discussing how the characters in the text can be hearers of a testimony that is not written or even audibly heard. As such, the pilgrims must be open to the affective force of testimony and not simply wait to be addressed in an intellectual or abstract mode of communicative transmission.

In each of these four essays, scholars demonstrate a vibrant philosophical pulse running through the text of *Clarel* that speaks to the desert landscape as a force of epistemological and ontological doubt. The pilgrims in the text are not only confronted with an inherent uncertainty in questions (let alone the answers) concerning spiritual and

existential knowledge, but also confronted with contingency, abandonment, and oblivion as constitutive of the very nature of reality, being, or the world. While these epistemological and ontological matters are central for scholars such as Hurh and Arsić, Williams and Jollimore do well to note the drama in the very act or event of experiencing these conditions of doubt and uncertainty. *Clarel* is a poem that speaks to aesthetic experience of the world as always caught up in the dialectic of revealing and concealing, one that does not arrive at some endpoint of certain spiritual or existential truth, but does the work of raising our senses and sensibility towards an affective and dialectical experience of this truth. In this way, the philosophical and theological questions at the heart of the poem are not simply matters for thought and reason alone, but also matters embedded in bodily, concrete experience. In the desert, the pilgrims experience doubt or faith, absence or presence, silence or speech, with the entirety of their being. The ontology of the desert and the desertification of the past in Arsić's essay speak to the world as a radical Heraclitean force of pure happening and becoming, whereby the past is prone to forgetfulness and oblivion as opposed to preservation that promotes a teleological progression of history. The desert is pure possibility and the possibility of impossibility. Its taxonomy can speak to both a faded past and to a meaningless muteness at the core of human history. In this way, while each author stresses the role of doubt and uncertainty in *Clarel*, they do not suggest Melville or his work fall into a kind of reductive nihilism about the world. Instead, the conditions of doubt and uncertainty can drive the characters onward, increase their sensibility to the world, and expose them to radical futural possibilities.

In emphasizing silence, absence, abandonment, oblivion, and uncertainty, while also emphasizing the role that *Clarel* plays in giving voice to these very conditions that human beings find themselves in, these scholars point to what I discuss in the following chapters: *Clarel* as a work of philosophical testimony which engages the site of misery in the desert landscape itself. As I will show, the concepts of philosophical testimony and misery signify the very limit experience of giving voice to these sets of ineffable experiences the pilgrims encounter in the rocks, stones, and dust of the desert: the experience of attempting to translate what is unspeakable into language, of bringing inarticulate existential experience into a linguistic world of understanding.

CHAPTER III

MISERY, "BARTLEBY," AND THE FOUR ELEMENTS OF PHILOSOPHICAL TESTIMONY

In articulating the broad set of aesthetic, epistemological, and ontological considerations that Hurh, Williams, Arsić, and Jollimore raise, *Clarel* emerges as a critical text for the growing dialogue between literary studies and philosophy. These authors, writing with both literary and philosophical backgrounds, offer an initial response to Cornel West's charge of "evasion" by American philosophers of Melville's philosophical significance. More than this, these authors point to philosophical questions in the text that indicate *Clarel* as worthy of serious philosophical attention. Since these essays are a starting point for addressing these philosophical themes, it is crucial to not only continue this work, but to approach *Clarel* with a philosophical framework that, as I will show, explores new possibilities regarding the various aesthetic, epistemological, and ontological considerations raised by the previous authors.

In working with Gert-Jan van der Heiden's recent work, *The Voice of Misery: A Continental Philosophy of Testimony*, I claim that considering his notion of misery and four elements of testimony adds a new philosophical contour to this recent philosophical focus on *Clarel*. While van der Heiden's work on testimony in continental philosophy scans many different "literary experiments" and speaks from out of a broad scope of philosophical traditions, his work can be considered a further installment in the dialogue between philosophy and literary studies about Melville as a philosophical thinker. Not

only is van der Heiden's work influenced by other philosophers that have written about Melville, such as Agamben, Derrida, and Deleuze, but van der Heiden himself dedicates his fifth "literary experiment" in *The Voice of Misery* to Melville's "Bartleby." In this chapter, I will develop van der Heiden's account of misery, witnessing, and testimony in order to construct a philosophical framework that both speaks to the philosophical considerations of Hurh, Williams, Arsić, and Jollimore and sets the stage for considering *Clarel* as a work of philosophical testimony. For van der Heiden, the human figure of Bartleby exudes the formless, "austere reserve" of misery, to which the narrator of "Bartleby" must confront and bear witness (Van der Heiden 95, "Bartleby" 142). *Clarel*, as I will show, pushes philosophical testimony to consider the place or space of misery beyond the human being and into the landscape itself, to the literal open and empty space of the desert, and to which the pilgrims, the narrator of *Clarel*, and even the stones themselves in the desert must bear witness.

For van der Heiden, "misery" concerns those experiences or conditions of human life that cannot be brought into language: "In its most desolate forms, this misery might be identified with the human capacity to experience more than humans can bear, that is, to be traumatized, to encounter the very limit of their humanity, and to be brought to the very threshold of their human life" (Van der Heiden 70). Misery likewise plays a central role in his four elements of testimony: The reserve/object of testimony, the act or event of testimony, the subject or witness of testimony, and the hearer of testimony. In van der Heiden's account, testimony bears witness to the misery of human life as both an object that appears in our horizon of understanding, along with its concomitant "reserve"

which is the formless reality from out of which the object appears. This notion of the "reserve" is the irreducible source from which testimony draws its strength, that allows a particular object to appear in one's horizon of understanding, as well as that which interrupts and transforms this very horizon of understanding itself. Insofar as Hurh, Williams, Arsić, and Jollimore emphasize the doubt, uncertainty, silence, absence, and oblivion that the pilgrims experience in the desert as generative force for spiritual, philosophical, and political transformation, I will show that misery and the four elements of philosophical testimony provide a framework for articulating and further developing this very transformation.

Before addressing misery in his literary experiment on "Bartleby," van der Heiden develops a general account of misery throughout his previous literary experiments. He first refers to a distinction that Aristotle makes between the articulate voice (*logos*) and inarticulate voice (*phone*), as well as Lyotard's notion of 'infancy,' in order to bring this notion of misery to bear. In *phone*, the mere inarticulate voice of the (human) animal cries out in response to pleasure or pain, instead of uttering a meaningful and complex signification from out of the articulate voice of *logos* (Van der Heiden 33).[7] According to van der Heiden, Lyotard then takes up Aristotle's notion of the inarticulate voice to inform his notion of *enfance*, or infancy, as the "non-speaking-

[7] See Aristotle's *Politics*: "Nature, as we often say, makes nothing in vain, and man is the only animal who has the gift of speech. And whereas mere voice is but an indication of pleasure or pain, and is therefore found in other animals (for their nature attains to the perception of pleasure and pain and the intimation of them to one another, and no further), the power of speech is intended to set forth the expedient and inexpedient, and therefore likewise the just and the unjust" (Aristotle 1253a8-15, 1988).

ness," the "not-speaking-meaningfully," or the "*alogos*, meaning both without reason or language and in want of reason and language" (35).[8] This inarticulate infancy, according to van der Heiden, is "marked" by "*misère*," namely, "an initial poverty to speak that marks the human" (36). Yet with this poverty comes a demand to bring this poverty into language, to speak this very impoverishment itself (36). With this, van der Heiden makes a clear statement about how misery is to be understood in his work: "The notion of misery . . . should be understood in the first place in this semantic field, referring to what is poor in language or what cannot enter language or cannot be said because it is exiled, banned, and removed from it, but which nevertheless concerns the very heart of human existence" (37). Misery, then, marks or refers to that which emerges from out of an infancy or inarticulate voice, such that what speaks can only speak from out of its very own impoverishment to speak for itself. Misery, as a crucial matter of human existence, nevertheless utters a demand to be spoken, to be said, and to be brought into language and the world of understanding.

In turning to "Bartleby," van der Heiden demonstrates how misery, as that which marks the formlessness and "austere reserve" of Bartleby, operates as a constitutive feature of the text itself. "Bartleby" tells the story of a lonely and unassuming figure, Bartleby, that appears at a New York City law office and is hired by the narrator of the story as a scrivener to copy legal documents. Though Bartleby initially completes his duties with success, at one point, he utters his famous 'formula,' "I would prefer not to,"

[8] For more, see Lyotard's "The Phrase-Affect (From a Supplement to the Differend)."

in response to a demand from the narrator. Bartleby continues to repeat this statement throughout the rest of his tenure at the law office until he is no longer completing any of the tasks given to him. Eventually, the narrator notices that Bartleby is in fact living at the law office, prompting the narrator to move his own business to a new office, and inducing the new owners of the office to have Bartleby imprisoned in the New York City Tombs. Here, Bartleby dies from starvation, as he prefers not to eat, and towards the end of the story, the narrator hears that Bartleby had previously worked at the dead-letter office, suggesting that this had most likely caused Bartleby's mysterious and depressive temperament.

In working with Deleuze's *Essays Critical and Clinical*, van der Heiden notes the crucial role of the "formless" that insists itself in the short story. The lawyer in "Bartleby," as the narrator, "bears witness to the 'formless, nonhuman life' of Bartleby, but he can only do this because he is losing his own, well-defined form because he is affected by Bartleby's formlessness" (Van der Heiden 88). The narrator, as the one who bears witness to the formless truth of Bartleby, stands at the threshold of form and formlessness, between the articulate and the inarticulate, between *logos* and *phone* (89). It is not Bartleby who is affected, but rather, it is the narrator's form who is affected by the formless. Here van der Heiden turns to an insight from Deleuze regarding the privileging of the affective power of formlessness:

> Literature is not a way of imposing a form on a certain matter, or lived experience. Literature can only be defined as the poetic enterprise that aims at bearing witness to the formless. In exactly this sense, it sides

> with the formless. Thus, we may also say that literature experiments and experiences the formlessness that precedes all forms, of which all forms are an index and to which all forms need to grant access in bearing witness. (Van der Heiden 89-90)[9]

For Deleuze and van der Heiden, what appears as 'formed' in literature only does so in reference to its own 'formlessness,' and literature speaks to this formlessness itself as both something absent from what is formed, yet is at the same time the generative and affective force behind this form. In this way, form does not manipulate and bear down on the formless, but rather, it is the formless that engenders form, that allows form to appear and to be present in the text. That which is formless, absent, or withdrawn generates that which appears or manifests itself as an object with a form. This generative capacity of formlessness is crucial for later understanding how the reserve of testimony is that which is held back from what is given in testimony, but nevertheless gives testimony its driving force.

As something with force and efficacy, this formlessness that literature bears witness to challenges and interrupts the understanding of the one who hears this testimony. Testimony, in this sense, is not meant to simply accord with our own understanding that has developed out of our own lived historical experience, but must be able to "transgress" the limitations of this understanding with something that may appear

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[9] Deleuze makes this point on the very first page of *Essays Critical and Clinical*: "To write is certainly not to impose a form (of expression) on the matter of lived experience. Literature rather moves in the direction of the ill-formed or incomplete" (Deleuze 1).

unrelatable and unbelievable (Van der Heiden 93). For van der Heiden, it is the formlessness of Bartleby that the narrator attempts to testify and bear witness to, and therefore his testimony will initially be met with disbelief (93). Bartleby's formlessness not only challenges the lived, human understanding of those around him, but rather challenges the limits of humanity itself and emerges into the horizon of those around him as "non-human, inhuman, barbarous, and so on" (93). Bartleby, in his formlessness, appears in his inhumanity, provides no "common measure" in accordance with our horizon of understanding, and is fundamentally "incommensurable" (93-94). To testify, to bear witness to this truth, Bartleby must necessarily thwart the expectations and understanding of those that hear this testimony.

This formlessness is characterized by van der Heiden with a phrase borrowed from the narrator himself in articulating his experience of Bartleby, namely, as an "austere reserve" (Van der Heiden 95, "Bartleby" 142). As van der Heiden notes, the narrator is awed by his experience of this reserve when he confronts Bartleby, such that what insists or "imposes" itself for the narrator is not the manner or appearance of Bartleby himself, but the 'that' or the 'what' that Bartleby seems to withhold in his very appearance and speech (Van der Heiden 95). Here, Bartleby's reserve "corresponds to what cannot be said in a tongue that the narrator could understand or would be able to capture," (95) and is one marked by an "empty, open space" that evokes a sense of awe from the narrator (96). In this encounter with Bartleby's formless, empty, open, austere reserve, the narrator is confronted by Bartleby's inhumanity, which interrupts his horizon of understanding. Bartleby's formula, "I would prefer not to," marks this

reserve and its effect upon the office (99). This formula has "no common measure" for all the everydayness and efficiency of the Wall Street office, deactivating "all forms of commonality, common sense, and common measure" (99). The effect of the formlessness of this formula has such an effect on the narrator, as the witness to this formlessness, that it is quite traumatic to the point of not trusting or believing his senses (99). In the narrator's paralysis to Bartleby's formula, his bearing witness to Bartleby's formless reserve is one marked in his own embodiment, rather than a calculated or reasoned response: "He is not addressed but affected by Bartleby" (Van der Heiden 100). As the story unfolds, Bartleby's formless, austere reserve has such an effect on the narrator that the narrator himself loses form and "becomes the embodiment of ambiguity, of form and formlessness" (104).

Here, in the narrator's transformation undergone in his encounter with the empty, open, inhumane, incommensurable, formless reserve of Bartleby, does he bear witness to Bartleby's misery. If misery marks that which is poor in language at the heart of human existence, as well as its demand to bring this misery into language and to speak what cannot be accounted for via *logos*, reason or language, then the narrator in "Bartleby" responds to this demand as a witness who offers testimony to this very misery. To be sure, the narrator is limited in his capacity to engage fully this misery, lest he himself descend into utter formlessness like Bartleby (104). As van der Heiden observes, this is precisely what makes him a good witness, such that he is on the threshold between the formless and form-having, between *phone* and *logos*, on the threshold of the reserve and common language itself, "on the threshold of the singularity of Bartleby and the

commonality of humanity" (Van der Heiden 104-105). As witness, the narrator gives voice to Bartleby's misery, such that humanity is then able to listen to the very demand of this misery.

In his analysis of "Bartleby," van der Heiden demonstrates the relationship between misery, bearing witness, and testimony, which points to what he calls the four "elements of testimony," and offers what I will consider as an appropriate philosophical framework for engaging the philosophical themes in *Clarel* developed by Hurh, Williams, Arsić, and Jollimore. It is first important to note, as van der Heiden himself does, that his focus on testimony is quite different from other philosophical approaches to testimony. While philosophers in the tradition of analytic epistemology are broadly concerned with testimony as a "source of the beliefs we derive from the reports of others" (Van der Heiden 125), and whether or not a person's testimony is justifiable, well-grounded, or trustworthy as a basic source of knowledge, van der Heiden's approach focuses on the "object" of testimony and how testimony "discloses" this object (126). Therefore, he notes that first, his project is concerned with an individual who bears witness "to what cannot speak for itself or what does no longer, does not, or does not yet have a voice that can speak. Bearing witness is thus in the first place giving a voice to what cannot speak so that it can be heard or understood in the first place" (126). Second, testimony here is concerned with an "object" of testimony, as the "what-is-borne-witness-to" that testimony presents to an audience (126). Testimony in this sense is not concerned with the veracity of one's claims, or whether we can justifiably believe what one is telling us, but with the 'what' of testimony and how this is disclosed.

Furthermore, testimony for van der Heiden in continental philosophy is always concerned with the exceptional quality of testimony and the disruptive effect that this has on those that hear it (128). Testimony interrupts what is familiar in one's horizon of understanding. It is what is exceptional and excessive to what one already knows (128).

While van der Heiden explores this exceptional and ontological character of testimony in "Bartleby," I suggest that this particular sense of testimony runs throughout *Clarel* as well. Lesser characters in the poem, such as Margoth or the Scottish Elder, investigate the Holy Land as if it offered verifiable or falsifiable statements. They examine the evidence and dismiss the desert landscape as a source of knowledge or testimonial relevance. Yet because of this they do not undergo any kind of philosophical or spiritual transformation. Only characters such as Rolfe, Clarel, or Derwent approach the desert landscape as offering an exceptional testimony. These characters reveal the testimonial character of the desert as having much more to do with one's disposition to the testimony being offered than with fact checking the witness. These characters allow their horizons of understanding to be interrupted and to be transformed in relation to what is being disclosed. Understanding testimony in this way likewise shifts the reader's expectations of *Clarel* towards a truth that is perhaps unbelievable, incomplete, open-ended, and yet ultimately disclosive of human misery.

To read both "Bartleby" and *Clarel* through the lens of philosophical testimony is to mark van der Heiden's four basic elements of testimony throughout each text: The reserve/object of testimony, the act of testimony, the subject of testimony, and the hearer of testimony. The first element of testimony, the 'reserve/object of testimony,' refers to

the ‘what-is-borne-witness-to’ of testimony as both an object that appears for an audience, as well as the concealed reserve from out of which this object emerges. As object, the object/reserve “enters the horizon of understanding of the hearer, and enters the discourse of the hearer” (Van der Heiden 131). As reserve, the object/reserve appears with a “shadow,” or “a reserve held in reserve in the act of testimony as the act that makes an object appear” (131). The object occupies the phenomenal and epistemological space of testimony, as that which appears and can be known by the hearer (131). The reserve then refers to what does not appear to the hearer, to the “concealment from which something is brought to presence and is, therefore, the ontological reserve with respect to the merely epistemological range of testimony” (131). This reserve, as concealment, likewise marks the formless reality of “what-is-borne-witness-to,” and undergirds that which appears and is knowable as an object to the hearers of this testimony (131). The reserve/object of testimony then speaks to this dual aspect of what-is-borne-witness-to, namely, the phenomenal, formal object that appears to the hearer, as well as the concealed, formless, yet primary reserve from out of which this object appears (131).

As we saw in his analysis of “Bartleby,” it is the ‘reserve’ aspect of what-is-borne-witness-to that is paramount in philosophical testimony, and van der Heiden puts forward four senses in which we should understand this concept of ‘reserve.’ First, reserve, from the Latin *reservo* and *servo*, suggests both a withdrawal from testimony, as well as that which is protected or safeguarded in this testimony. The point of bearing witness is to not only present something that can be heard and understood within a

linguistic horizon for others, but to also hold back and protect the misery of the reserve that is unable to speak for itself (Van der Heiden 132). Second, reserve implies the source from which testimony draws its strength in order to "interrupt and transform the horizon of understanding of the hearers" (132). Third, the reserve of testimony indicates that testimony "cannot simply and completely present what it speaks of" (132). In this way, the reserve then refers to the "misery and poverty of what-is-borne-witness-to and to its specific demand to appear and be borne witness to" (132). Lastly, reserve speaks to the "attitude" or "attunement" of the witness that offers testimony. Insofar as the witness attempts to address the particular discourse or horizon of understanding of the audience, the witness should do so "out of a reserve or reservation with respect to this discourse and horizon" such that the testimony can interrupt and thwart what is expected by the hearer of testimony (133).

If the reserve/object of testimony refers to the what-is-borne-witness-to in testimony, the second element of testimony, the 'act of testimony,' is the event itself of a 'subject of testimony' bearing witness to this reserve/object. The act of testimony then concerns the "logic" of testimony, that is, "the specific mode of the *logos* involved in bearing witness" (Van der Heiden 134). The act of testimony has to do with the way in which the object of testimony is announced to the hearer, and "concerns the *possibly irruptive* effect of the discursive practice of bearing witness" (134). The act of testimony then concerns the language or discourse of testimony such that it can intervene and open up the horizon of understanding of the hearer of testimony, and not simply address the hearer but affect the hearer. The third element of testimony, the 'subject of

testimony,' is then the "*witness* or testifier" that performs the act of testimony (135). This subject of testimony is one who, first, affirms their role as witness and their commitment to this discursive practice (135). Second, the subject of testimony is one who stands with a "particular attunement or attitude of reservation with respect to both the reserve of testimony and the general horizon of understanding or genre of discourse in which they bear witness" (135). This is to say, the subject of testimony, the witness, commits themselves to the threshold between the reserve and the hearer of testimony (135).

The fourth element of testimony, the 'hearer of testimony,' is the "hearer" or "receiver" of the testimony, namely, the one with a "language, a horizon of understanding, a (life) world, and a prevailing (genre of) discourse," that the testimony aims to interrupt and open up (Van der Heiden 136). Crucial to van der Heiden's concerns about the hearer of testimony is the necessary "faith" that is required for this hearer to in fact listen to testimony (137). If the subject of testimony speaks to something that is "beyond our horizon of understanding" or "that we simply cannot imagine to be true," such that we have no "sufficient ground" upon which to support the claim of the witness, then an act of faith is necessary "that either accepts or rejects the testimony" (137). The hearer of testimony is then always confronted beforehand with a demand to make a decision, such that the hearer "always finds themselves in the space of the *perhaps* or the *maybe*" (137). This space of the perhaps or the maybe speaks to the inherent uncertainty in the reserve/object itself: "The 'perhaps' the hearer confronts and which they decide on is grounded in the 'perhaps' of testimony's object, which I

determined as the reserve that lurks in the shadow of this object" (137). To be a hearer of testimony then requires a commitment to uncertainty and an openness to a testimony that is exceptional and challenging of one's preconceived understanding of the world.

Van der Heiden's discussion of the role of misery and austere reserve in "Bartleby," as well as his articulation of the four elements of testimony, shows how philosophical testimony operates in Melville's short story. The narrator, as the subject of testimony, attunes himself to the reserve/object of Bartleby, and allows this misery to affect and interrupt his own horizon of understanding. In doing so, the narrator, as the subject of testimony, likewise performs the act of testimony by bearing witness to Bartleby's misery, bringing this misery into a language and discourse that can intervene into the horizon of understanding of others. These others, the potential hearers of testimony, are the ones who choose to listen to this testimony, who have a horizon of understanding that is open and willing to be interrupted, and are willing to occupy the space of the "perhaps" or "maybe."

While in "Bartleby," it is from out of the human figure of Bartleby that one hears the voice of misery ("I would prefer not to"), and in which one locates the reserve of the object/reserve of testimony, *Clarel* will push the site of misery and the reserve into the material world of the desert landscape. For Hurh, ontological doubt and uncertainty seemingly emerge from the desert itself, and Arsić points to an ontology of the desert that speaks from "muteness verging on meaninglessness." Williams and Jollimore then point to the kind of effect that this experience with the desert has on the pilgrims themselves, as a raising or heightening of one's sensibilities, and of an embodied

reaction and practice towards the doubt and skepticism one encounters in the Holy Land. Here, we can already see the basic operation of testimony at work, such that the pilgrims encounter the object/reserve of the desert, which constantly interrupts their own horizon of understanding, and affects them to intellectually, spiritually, and physically to varying degrees.

If in "Bartleby" the voice of misery emerges from out of the human figure of Bartleby, in the following chapter, I show that in *Clarel* the voice of misery emerges from the desert itself. Yet this misery is not entirely without a human voice, but rather, it is the voice of a silent and unknowable past, of a human history that has been lost to the decay of time. If misery refers to "what is poor in language or what cannot enter language or cannot be said because it is exiled, banned, and removed from it, but which nevertheless concerns the very heart of human existence," there is perhaps no voice more exiled or banned from language, and no voice more concerned with the heart of human existence, that the voice of an ancient past in *Clarel*. As I will show, the extreme contingency of this voice brings philosophical testimony to its very limits, such that it perhaps requires something other than human to bear witness to this misery. In *Clarel*, I will show that at times the landscape itself can, and must, be the subject of testimony, giving stones, for instance, the odd, uncanny, and seemingly impossible discursive capacity to speak the misery of the desert, to bring the faint, distant, and forgotten voice of the past into the horizon of those who will listen.

CHAPTER IV

THE TESTIMONY OF THE STONES IN *CLAREL*

Building on recent philosophical interest in *Clarel* from Hurh, Arsić, Williams, and Jollimore, as well as van der Heiden's philosophical framework on testimony, I now turn to the text of *Clarel* itself to show how it can be considered a work of philosophical testimony. The task of considering the role of misery and testimony in *Clarel* responds to these particular philosophical contours raised by the authors in chapter two by bringing them into conversation with philosophical testimony as an emerging interest in continental philosophy. If Hurh, Arsić, Williams, and Jollimore point towards various existential themes or attitudes that emerge from an experience with the desert landscape in *Clarel,* misery and testimony help identify this condition of the text, namely, that *Clarel* is a work that bears witness to an existential dialectic that emerges in such encounters between the pilgrims and the materiality of the desert. While van der Heiden's analysis of "Bartleby" focuses on the human figures of Bartleby and the narrator as object/reserve and subject of testimony, I claim that *Clarel* pushes the site of these elements of testimony into that of the non-human, and perhaps inhuman, desert itself.

Since a crucial aspect of my claim relies on considering the desert landscape as the site of the object/reserve and subject of testimony, section one provides an account of considering the desert as an active agent or character in *Clarel*. Not only does this consideration emerge in the works of the authors from chapter two, but this is a common

suggestion in other works of *Clarel* scholarship as well. With this, I then offer a reading of several passages from Melville's 1856-1857 *Journal* and relevant passages in *Clarel* in order to highlight the efficacy of the desert landscape as a driving force in both texts. Section two then focuses on stones in canto 2.10 as subjects of testimony. While stones are not the same kind of human subjects of testimony in "Bartleby," they are marked by the silent human voices of a forgotten past and do the work of bearing witness to misery in the desert for the pilgrims in the text as hearers of testimony. If stones in the desert are considered as the witnesses, or subjects of testimony, section three concludes with an exploration of the desert itself as the object/reserve of testimony in canto 2.11. The desert, as object, presents the pilgrims with a powerfully aesthetic experience ranging from divine proximity to severe struggle and hardship. As reserve, the desert withholds what this experience is grounded on, namely, death, doubt, decay, and oblivion as seemingly inhuman but undeniable possibilities for human life. Stones, as witnesses, testify to this misery encountered in the desert, a misery that is in turn a central condition of human existence itself.

The Desert Landscape as a Character in *Clarel* and Melville's 1856-1857 *Journal*

To consider the desert landscape as the site of the reserve/object of testimony, as well as the possibility of the material world in *Clarel* to be the subject of testimony, requires an initial inquiry into thinking about the material world as an active and efficacious agent in the poem. If we consider the possibility of rocks, stones, and dust to be the 'subjects of testimony' that perform the 'act of testimony,' we need to consider

the kind of force, effect, or even voice that these objects may have, such that they can bear witness to the reserve/object of testimony. I have already noted how Hurh's notion of ontological doubt and Arsić's notion of an ontology of the desert emphasize this aspect of the desert in their essays on *Clarel*. To what extent, however, can we say that the desert itself is a character or figure in the poem on par with the other 'human' characters of the text? In this regard, Samuel Otter's "How *Clarel* Works" speaks to the role of stones in the desert that take on the "aspect" of characters themselves (471). For Otter, the repetition and prevalence of stones as both word and image in the text generate a continuous and underlying set of questions for the reader: "Are stones altars? Idols? Memorials? Weapons? Bones? Graves? Who has broken, rolled, gathered, and heaved them? Who wields them?" (471). The manifold ways in which stones appear to the narrator and pilgrims, as well as the seemingly endless set of referents to which the stones refer, force the other characters of the text to reflect on the complex issues raised in *Clarel* as a whole, such as "Palestine, America, democracy, revolution, science, God, Christ, the Jew, sin, sexuality" (472). It appears that for Otter, what it means for stones to take on the "aspect" of characters, is that Melville's stones are not mere passive material objects in the text, but in some sense, have a voice all their own. The stones, as characters, raise their own questions, or force the other characters to raise these very questions themselves.

In his chapter, "'Where wild rocks are set': Character and the Space of *Clarel*," from his book, *Herman Melville and the Politics of the Inhuman*, Michael Jonik gives a much stronger sense of agency to the desert landscape in *Clarel* than Otter, claiming that

the landscape effects a "depersonalization" of the characters themselves (Jonik 176). In following Otter, Jonik claims that "characters become stones and stones become characters," whereby *Clarel* is a text that erases the boundary between the human and the natural world (172-173). The desert space of the text is not simply the setting or material background of the pilgrims' journey, but "resonates" with the characters in "dynamic, reciprocal tension" (173). The landscape affects the pilgrims in such a way that, in Jonik's language, they become "deconstituted," "dissolved," and "ciphers for processes of dissipation or dispersion" (173). The desert landscape then does much more for Jonik than simply affect or challenge the characters, but actually breaks them down and fragments them, as if they were to become part of the rocks and stones of the desert itself. The pilgrims are not mere passers-by in the Holy Land, as subjects among many objects, but are slowly shaped and determined by the landscape itself.

A consideration of the landscape of *Clarel* as its own active or affective character, one that bears down and invokes a new set of questions for the other characters in the text, can be traced to Melville's own notes in his journey through the Holy Land. Following the many scholars (including Otter and Jonik) that refer to Melville's 1856-1857 *Journal* concerning the role of geography and geology in *Clarel*, I will likewise read Melville's *Journal* in order to consider objects in the desert landscape themselves as subjects of testimony, as that which interrupts the horizon of understanding of the characters and holds open the possibility of a transformation of this very horizon itself. When reading Melville's entries from his time in Alexandria, Cairo, and Palestine, it is clear that Melville was often greatly affected and overwhelmed by the

land and scenery. Many natural objects such as rocks, stones, and dust often invoke a profound aesthetic or reflective experience for Melville, which speak to certain historical, theological, and philosophical truths. For instance, even before Melville lands on the shores of Jaffa (the starting point for Clarel himself), he is already taken by a mere description of the landing site: "Oldest sea port in the world (some say it was a port before Noah) rocks & sands, barren & dreary look" (*Journal* 111). Not only will rock, sand, and general barrenness have serious presences in both the *Journal* and *Clarel*, but the notion of the landscape revealing a sense of deep historical time is a common theme throughout these texts as well. As already noted by Hurh and Arsić, the pilgrims' experience of temporality in *Clarel* is often overwhelming in its scope and magnitude, and perhaps speaks more to the desert's destructive implications for human existence, as well as the radical impossibilities of the pilgrims to reckon with "the end of history and memory" (Arsić 398). In both Melville's *Journal* and *Clarel*, I want to consider an encounter with a deep historical time in the desert landscape that not only accounts for, and is motivated by, the possibilities of human death, decay, and oblivion, but likewise opens up the possibilities for bearing witness to a historical memory that requires the patience, openness, and faith of a 'hearer of testimony' to engage the past. As in this case with Melville's experience at the port of Jaffa, this deep historical time is often encountered as a biblical temporality, of the possibility of listening to the literal or scriptural voices of the past, or of bearing witness to a testimony from those known and unknown figures that wandered the desert landscape so many years before.

In a journal entry from almost a month later after landing at the port of Jaffa ('Joppa'), Melville continues to describe this port in reference to biblical time: "The genuine Jonah feeling, in Joppa too . . . Joppa is certainly antediluvian – a port before the Flood. It has no antiquities worth speaking of – It is too ancient" (*Journal* 131). The port of Jaffa, the very beginning of both Melville's and Clarel's journey through the Holy Land, bears down on Melville here in its biblical barrenness, speaking from a past that is in fact too old and too ancient to speak in a proper and articulate voice. It speaks from a time and place before the biblical flood that washed away its own traces, before the time of Greek or Roman antiquity, but nevertheless affects Melville by generating that "old – genuine, old Jonah feeling" (132).

This notion of the "old Jonah feeling," of that which is likewise antediluvian, can be interpreted as that feeling of the oceanic abyss, of the "oceanic sense" (*Clarel* 2.11.38) which reveals the possibility of not merely death and loss, but of the pure forgetfulness of oblivion.[10] As the biblical story goes, it is Jonah who is thrown overboard, cast "into the deep, in the midst of the seas" (KJV, Jonah 2:3),[11] alone and

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[10] Jaffa/Joppa is likewise supposed to be the port where Jonah seeks a ship to escape from God and his command for Jonah to go prophesize at Nineveh: "But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD, and went down to Joppa" (KJV, Jonah 1:3).

[11] Regarding the relevance of biblical references in this chapter, I take my cue from Stan Goldman in his book, *Melville's Protest Theism*: "For good or bad, the Bible was Melville's inescapable heritage. Whether rejecting, preserving, or both, Melville made biblical images and ideas come alive in *Clarel*. Melville was an assiduous Bible reader, self-taught, and particularly sensitive to Hebraic thinking. By quoting the bible so often, Melville invites the reader to reenter the literary and theological world of scripture. To read *Clarel* is to have one eye on the Bible. In fact, I suggest that readers of this study have both *Clarel* and the King James Bible open on the desk" (Goldman 5).

out of sight from both humans and God.[12] In *Clarel*, the sea is an "inhuman sea" (*Clarel* 4.13.7), one that, as the character Derwent notes, has tempered the spirit of Agath the timoneer, who has been racked by the horrors of a life at sea and its traumatic indifference to human life. In both Melville's *Journal* and *Clarel*, the sea confronts and overwhelms humanity with a seemingly inhuman truth that strikes at the heart of this humanity, namely, the very real possibility to not only die, but to be forgotten entirely, to be lost to a past that is too old and too ancient to be remembered. In this way, the port of Jaffa is much more than its mere geologic features or use-value as a port for ships, but calls out to Melville with a force of its own, invoking the genuine old Jonah feeling, and forces Melville to reckon with the unfathomable depths of time, history, and the possibility of oblivion.

If the port of Jaffa evokes the sense of a past or history that is too old to be remembered, Melville's encounter with the pyramids in Cairo just before arriving at Jaffa speak to the vastness, mystery, and strangeness of the desert space that speaks to these same aspects of human existence. It is initially the dustiness of Cairo that catches his attention, which he refers to as the "Dust colored city. The dust of ages" (*Journal* 116), and as he enters the pyramids, he simply notes: "The Dust" (118). Dust, of course, is a prevalent feature of the landscape in *Clarel*, and carries an almost mystical agency as it follows the characters in the poem. Dust is with Clarel from the very first page of the text ("The dust lies, and on him as well - / The dust of travel") (*Clarel* 1.1.13-14) and

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[12] The Jonah story, as well as the site of Jaffa/Joppa is likewise the focus of Father Mapple's sermon in chapter 8 of *Moby-Dick*.

is silently present, even pervasive, in moments of pain and anguish. In canto 1.24, Clarel and Nehemiah must hurry to return within the Jerusalem city walls through the city gate, and the narrator mentions Clarel's reflection on the ubiquity of the dust and the desert:

> 'Twas yellow waste within as out,
> The student mused: The desert, see,
> It parts not here, but silently,
> Even like a leopard by our side,
> it seems to enter in with us-
> At home amid men's homes would glide. (1.24.80-85)

It is at this moment that the narrator then notes that Clarel hears a cry of human pain: "But hark! That wail how dolorous: / So grieve the souls in endless dearth; / Yet sounds it human – of the earth!" (1.24.86-88). The dust or sand of the desert does not simply stay in the desert as an object external to one's abode, but moves with the characters into the city walls, into one's home, gliding along with the silence and deftness of a large predatory cat. In this way, the desert dust is not merely an object that the pilgrims track into their home from their shoes, but is a present reminder of their mortality and the immanence of death, an ever present possibility always waiting in the wings and one that actualizes itself for several important characters in *Clarel* as they travel through the Holy Land. This is why the cry heard at the end of the canto is a human cry that is "of the earth," of the dust and sand of the desert that never leaves the pilgrims' sides, and

perhaps calls to mind the very creation story of Genesis: ". . . till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou *art*, and unto dust shalt thou return" (Genesis 3:19). Dust carries on and calls out to the pilgrims in a voiceless whisper to their shared origin and kinship to each other. The mysterious, ever-present dust exudes the uncanny, yet incontrovertible mortality of human life.

For Melville, it was not only the dust of the pyramids that affected him, but their sheer vastness and immensity as an object made of stone: "Pyramids still loom before me – something vast, undefiled, incomprehensible, and awful . . . *The Pyramids*. The lines of stone look less like courses of masonry, than like strata of rocks . . . It is not the sense of heigth [sic], or breadth or length or depth that is stirred, but the sense of immensity that is stirred" (*Journal* 119, 123). There is something both human and inhuman about the pyramids for Melville in his description. While they are a human creation, something built with stones by human hands, they bear down on Melville in their impenetrability, as something not able to be understood by the human mind, and ultimately as something terrifying. The layout of the stones does not appear to be the work of human masonry, but speaks more to the materiality of the rocks themselves, to their unfathomable immensity that is not something that can be measured by the human intellect.

There is a vanity, for Melville, in attempting to take the measure of these stone creations:

> Its simplicity confounds you. Finding it vain to take in its vastness man has taken to sounding it & weighing its density; so with the pyramid, he

> measures the base, & computes the size of individual stones. It refuses to be studied or adequately comprehended. It still looms in my imagination, dim & indefinite. (*Journal* 123)

The pyramids, though a human creation, impose themselves before Melville as something that is impenetrable to human thought, calculation, or understanding. They speak in their silence and "simplicity" to Melville of something "awful" about humanity, namely, that even such a 'monumental' achievement, such as the pyramids, is not enough to bridge the communicative chasm between the past and the present. The past, especially the ancient past, is only present to Melville in its very incomprehensibility.

In *Clarel*, we see Melville's critique of those that attempt to understand the world by way of measurement and calculation in the character of Margoth, the German-Jewish geologist that the pilgrims encounter at Mount Quarantania. This holy site, where the devil is supposed to have tempted Christ after his forty days in the wilderness, is treated with reverence by many of the pilgrims and most notably by the figure of the Syrian Monk, who is driven by the "sin of doubt" to spend his own forty days upon the hill (*Clarel* 2.18.38). The Syrian Monk has his own vision of Christ's temptation and is racked by questions of doubt and faith. During his meditative practice leading up to the vision, the Syrian Monk picks up and holds a stone in order to maintain focus upon his purpose:

> But thought
> Would wander. Then the stone I caught,
> Convulsed it in my hand till blood

Oozed from these nails. Then came and stood

The Saviour there – the Imp and He: (2.18.75-79)

The significance of the stone and desert landscape for the Syrian Monk is one of religious and meditative importance. Margoth, however, is the champion of science and geology and for whom the landscape and stone are merely natural objects devoid of any non-material significance:

"Now, now, yon hight –

Come, let it not alarm: a mount

Whereof I've taken strict account

(Its first geologist, believe),

And, if my eyes do not deceive,

'Tis Jura limestone, every spur; (2.19.60-65)

For Margoth, there is nothing to fear and no vision to be had. The stone is not an object to be picked up and encountered for the purposes of meditative practice, but is to be weighed, measured, and classified as Jura limestone.

The Margoths of the world may weigh, measure, or compute the physical features of the pyramids, but cannot in the same manner or method account for the 'looming' effect of the pyramids upon the mind of Melville, and of the sense of a mysterious immensity that is evoked: "It has been said in [panegyric] of some [extraordinary] works of man, that they affect the imagination like the works of Nature. But the pyramid affects one in neither way exactly. To the imagination Man seems to have had as little to do with it as Nature" (*Journal* 123). While Melville then points

specifically to the pyramids as an indication of humanity's ability to conceptualize a transcendent God, it is, in any case, the sense of something unnatural and non-human that emerges from the pyramids into the mind of Melville. The pyramids then invoke an effect upon Melville that is on the threshold of the human and inhuman, and of life and death itself: "Line of desert & verdure . . . An instant collision of alien elements. A long <billow> of desert [forever] hovers as in act of breaking, upon the verdure of Egypt. Grass near the pyramids, but will not touch them – as if in fear or awe of them" (*Journal* 119). Here, the pyramids in the desert, in their "dead calm of masonry" (123), distinguish themselves from the vegetation and organic life of Egypt and the Nile. Yet Melville's "theory" is that the pyramids are a "defence against the desert" (119). They are both made and constituted by the inhuman desert and the human hands of masonry, a monument on the threshold between the flourishing life of Egyptian civilization and the lifeless dust, stones, and rocks of the desert landscape.

This seemingly contradictory effect of desert materiality having both human and inhuman features, or invoking the dual phenomenon of life and death, is something that Melville runs into frequently as he makes his way through the Holy Land. In his notes during the time of travelling from Jerusalem to the Dead Sea, Melville mentions the bitterness that emerges from the high levels of mineral salts, sulphur, and bitument of the waters and pervades both his own sense of taste and his own thoughts: ". . . carried the bitter in my mouth all day – bitterness of life – thought of all bitter things – Bitter is it to be poor & bitter, to be reviled, & Oh bitter are these waters of Death, thought I" (*Journal* 136). Instead of this body of water being a welcoming source of vitalization and

refreshment amidst the "*Barrenness of Judea*" (137), it offers a meager source of assistance to the thirsty traveler: "Drank of brook, but brackish" (137). In *Clarel*, it is the figure of Mortmain, the dreary and melancholic Swede, who "undeterred the wave he scooped, / And tried it – madly tried the gall" (2.34.65-66), and would suffer the brackish aftertaste throughout the rest of his journey. Mortmain is a character that embodies the bitterness of life, having taken part in violent revolutionary activity in Europe and becoming disillusioned with the modern world and shattered utopian ideals. Mortmain has experienced both the zeal of idealism, the promise and hope of a better future for humanity, and the bitterness of defeat and corrosive doubt in this very same humanity. What Melville underscores in his encounter with the barren nourishment offered by the Dead Sea (which includes "Sodom apples") is that each traveler "must bring your own provisions, as well, too, for mind as body – for all is barren" (*Journal* 136-137). While it is more than possible for questions of doubt and faith, life and death, and moral and philosophical truth to emerge from out of one's experience with the desert landscape, one cannot rely on this landscape to provide answers or even a clear articulation of the questions themselves. For Melville, we must ultimately rely on ourselves.

If the Dead Sea suggests the presence of death and malnourishment in the guise of that which normally promotes life and rejuvenation, Melville reverses this emphasis when he notes the layout and structure of the tombs in Jerusalem that are "excavated in the perpendicular faces of living rock" (*Journal* 143). The reference to "living rock" appears to be at least slightly more than a catchy turn of phrase to note the particular

structure or formation of the terraced tombs, and suggests something living or life affirming about the rocky tombs themselves. As Melville notes, these particular tombs are not occupied by the dead, but by the living: "Living occupants of the tombs – household arrangements. One used for an oven. Others for granaries" (143). Though seemingly critical of such a quotidian, and perhaps irreverent, usage of these tombs, Melville's comment brings into relief this often-forgotten everydayness of life that occurs in Jerusalem. Not only is it a site for visitors, tourists, or pilgrims, but it is home to many individuals who need use of an oven and a place to store their grain. Melville likewise notes the tombs of Absalom, Zachariah, and St. James that are "cut out of live rock in Petra style . . . The grave stones project *out* from the side-hill, as if already in act of resurection [sic]. At distance hardly tell them from natural rock which lies profusely around" (144). Not only can live rock remind us of those currently living out their lives in the city, but can also invoke a return to life, a resurrection of the dead, a sensation or effect that clearly distinguishes this kind of rock from the 'natural' or common rocks and stones strewn about the land. This resurrecting, live rock intensifies the presence of the dead as a constant reminder of a past, history, or tradition that is still very much alive. This can be, on the one hand, a rich and fulfilling encounter with a living historical memory, or on the other hand, this can emit the sensation that Jerusalem, as a city surrounded by cemeteries, is a "city besieged by army of the dead" (144). The dialectic of life and death from out of the living rock can be one of a transformative conversation, or paralyzing antagonism.

While ‘rocky’ imagery is quite prevalent in *Clarel*, there is at least one moment in which “living rock” is specifically mentioned in relation to a stone carving of a knight that Derwent observes in the Mar Saba monastery:

> But for a shield of marble nigh,
> Set in the living rock: a stone
> In low relief, where well was shown,
> Before an altar under sky,
> A man in armor, visor down,
> Enlocked complete in panoply,
> Uplifting reverent a crown
> in Invocation. (*Clarel* 3.22.18-24)

In this depiction, it is as if the knight becomes alive and present in the room, charming Derwent “by the marble’s quiet mood / Of beauty” (3.22.41-42), and bringing to life a figure that is supposed to be “Long centuries” old (3.22.74). Once again, the ‘living rock’ brings to life an unknown figure of the past, resurrecting him for Derwent as he wanders through the Mar Saba monastery.

In weaving together these passages from *Clarel* and Melville’s 1856-1857 *Journal* on the port of Jaffa and the genuine old Jonah feeling, the dust and stony immensity of the pyramids, the bitterness of the Dead Sea, and the living rock of the tombs of Jerusalem, I aim not only to continue a tradition of scholarship that considers the materiality of the desert in *Clarel* to be a character all its own, but also to situate a reading of *Clarel* that considers the landscape to be a subject of philosophical testimony

that performs an act of testimony in the text. In all of these encounters, there is a misery that attempts to find a voice and to be made known to those who are willing to listen. The port of Jaffa and the pyramids in Cairo disclose an unfathomable sense of deep time or temporal orientation. The genuine old Jonah feeling provokes an antediluvian contemplation of a world that can exist and simply be forgotten. Much like van der Heiden's analysis of the figure of Bartleby, the pyramids exude an incommensurability with our own attempts to determine their meaning by way of measurement and calculation, and they are terrifying in their vastness, ancientness, and impenetrability. The encounters with the Dead Sea and the living rock in Jerusalem continue to demonstrate the affective capacities of the landscape, but underscore the unreliability of the landscape itself to provide a clear and unequivocal message or truth. The Dead Sea and Sodom apples cannot provide the nourishment we need for our existential or intellectual investigations, and if we are paying attention, the rocks themselves can come alive and resurrect our engagement with a living tradition. In each instance, the material objects impress themselves upon Melville and characters in *Clarel*, they "loom" and "affect the imagination" of those around them.

With this, I suggest that these objects gain their affective force from out of their misery, that is, from a forgotten, inarticulate, impoverished human voice. Each object is marked by humanity, yet speaks from out of a reserve and whose voice is perhaps silent or muted. Like the figure of Bartleby, these objects do not 'address' Melville or the characters in *Clarel*, but 'affect' them. It is not the language of a written text, but the language of the stones, rocks, and dust that calls out to those who will listen. These

objects occupy the threshold between the human and the non-human, and speak to something 'inhuman' about humanity itself. They are material objects marked by a human voice that speak to the impenetrable phenomena of death and annihilation without a supernatural guarantee of survival, to the necessary possibility of our own impossibility at the heart of humanity itself, and to remind us, as Jacques Derrida will do: "Oblivion is always possible" (Derrida 107). These objects push, urge, and insist themselves upon Melville and the pilgrims, yet they do not, as Jonik suggests, utterly "deconstitute" or desolate their subjectivity. Instead, the horizon of understanding for several characters is opened up, and the possibility for transformation is held open.

Stones and Philosophical Testimony in *Clarel*: A Reading of Canto 2.10

As many have noted, stones and rocks play a curiously powerful role in *Clarel* and are a constant fixture in the imagery of the characters' journey. From the very first canto, in which Clarel overlooks a hill of houses that are "All stone – a moor of roofs" (*Clarel* 1.1.143), to the penultimate canto in which Clarel laments the loss of Ruth: "'They wire the world – far under sea / They talk; but never comes to me / A message from beneath the stone'" (4.34.51-53), stones accompany not only Clarel but other minor characters as well in moments that speak to death and misery. In canto 1.2, Abdon explains to Clarel that the "dark slab stood upright / Against the wall" (1.2.66-67) is his own "rude grave-stone" (1.2.67) which he brought with him to Jerusalem in order to die and be buried underneath it:

"Under Moriah it shall lie –

No distant date, for very soon

Ere yet a little, and I die.

From Ind to Zion have I come,

But less to live, than end at home.

One other last remove!' he sighed,

And meditated on the stone," (1.2.69-75)

Here, "the stone," as a grave stone, offers a reflection on the immediacy and certainty of death, as well as this stone's possibility for being a marker or testament to one's life. In 1.25, the narrator describes the homes of those suffering from leprosy as "stone huts" (1.25.1) that "face the stony wall" (1.25.1) on a "stone lane" (1.25.14). Surrounded by stone, these individuals are isolated and scorned by those around them with their very humanity in question: "But crouch here? / Have these been men? these did men greet / As fellows once?" (1.25.15-17). These are individuals that lack a meaningful voice of their own, and require the charity and attentiveness of others for their own survival. In canto 2.3, Glaucon suggests purchasing trinkets from local vendors that are cut from, among other things, "Dead Sea stone" (2.3.35). The Greek banker, the future father in law of Glaucon, tells him to avoid evening naming such a stone:

"but for that stone –

Avoid, nor name!

. . . . . .

With that ill word

Whose first is D and last is H,

No matter what be in regard,

Let none of mine ere crape his speech,

But shun it, ay, and shun the knell

Of each derivative." (2.3.36-37, 50-54)

A stone can be both a mere keepsake to remember a journey, as well as a mark of death. It is a cipher for that which, according to the Greek banker, should remain unspoken and unnamed. Even in these peripheral examples, stones attempt to speak or provide a voice for that which lacks articulation or meaningful expression. They mark, and are marked by, an unutterable misery in human existence, namely, the possibility and actuality of death as inseparable from life itself.

The most intense and direct treatment of stones in *Clarel* is in canto 2.10, "A Halt," in which many of the pilgrims, including the unnamed narrator of the poem, speak to the kaleidoscopic set of meanings, references, and effects that stones have in the desert landscape, and as I will show, demonstrate stones in the desert landscape to act as subjects of philosophical testimony. As we recall, a subject of testimony is one who performs the act of testimony, which involves the discursive manner in which the object of testimony is brought forth to those willing to be hearers of testimony. This discursive practice is one that is irruptive for the hearer and breaks through the hearer's horizon of understanding. Instead of merely addressing the hearer, this testimony affects the hearer. Moreover, the subject of testimony, as witness, commits themselves to this irruptive discursive practice and to the threshold between the articulate and inarticulate voice, between the withdrawn reserve and hearers of testimony. This, of course, suggests that

the subject of testimony has both some kind of 'will' to choose and affirm such a commitment, as well as the ability to discursively affect the hearer of testimony. In section one of this chapter, I discussed both a certain provenance of thinking about the desert landscape as a character all its own in the text, as well several instances in which this landscape has strong affective capabilities for both Melville in the Holy Land and the pilgrims in *Clarel*. While we might say that this affective quality of the landscape indicates some level of agency for the landscape, it would be too much to claim that material, non-human objects in the text, such as rocks and stones, can make any kind of willful or intentional commitment to language. However, in cantos 2.10 and 2.11 in particular, I will show how such objects are marked by a human, yet inarticulate, voice of misery, which reveals the limit situation of testimony itself. It is a silent or muted human voice of a forgotten past, looming and bearing down on the hearer of testimony through the very materiality of the landscape itself. The commitment to language is then perhaps not found in the stones or rocks themselves as mere material objects, but from this voice of misery that marks and impresses themselves on these objects as witnesses. The contingency and fragility of such a testimony suggests that the living, present, human voice is in some way unable to be the subject of testimony that testifies and bears witness to these forgotten voices, and that in the Holy Land, in Melville's "barrenness of Judea," the pilgrims of the text can only be 'hearers' of such a testimony that emerges from the stones.

The discussion of stones in this canto is often traced back to a particular passage in Melville's 1856-1857 *Journal* in which he discusses the seeming omnipresence of

stones in the Holy Land. The fact that rocks and stones make a common appearance in biblical scripture is no surprise to him as he observes the stony landscape of the Holy Land himself: "Judea is one accumulation of stones – Stony mountains & stony plains; stony torrents & stony roads; stony walls & stony feilds [sic], stony houses & stony tombs; stony eyes & stony hearts. Before you, & behind you are stones. Stones to right & stones to left" (*Journal* 152). He notes that many attempts have been made in vain to clear away these stones: "the removal of one stone only serves to reveal there [are] stones still larger, below it" (152). They lack uniformity and leave their mark upon the feet of those walking among them: "The toes of every one [sic] shoes are all stubbed to peices [sic] with the stones. They are seldom a round [kind] of an stone; but sharp, flinty & scratchy" (152). The only smooth kind of stones are the ones on the main roads, such as those leading to Jaffa, that "have been worn smooth by continuous travel" (153). The origin of these stones is unknown, and only theories can be posited for their abundant presence (153). In taking note of the "stony landscape" of the hillsides, he explains yet again the deep sense of the past that these stones and rocks evoke: "Everything looks old. Compared with these rocks, those in Europe or America look juvenile" (153). Stones are pervasive and irremovable. They constitute the many paths upon which the travelers walk, both showing the way and stabbing their feet at the same time. The landscape is a stony abode, welcoming the travelers with seemingly no comfort and hospitality. They once again invoke in Melville a sense of biblical time, of a time before Europe and America, as if the stones themselves carry the experiences of ancient biblical

figures, attempting to give voice to these experiences for those that encounter them in the modern world.

Canto 2.10 begins with just such an examination of stones exuding a biblical presence and the many ways in which stones have exhibited a force of their own in "hallowed Writ" (*Clarel* 2.10.2). The narrator tells us first that stones cover the mouth of wells, act as "altar stones, idols of stone, memorial ones, / Sling-stones, stone tables" (2.10.3-5). Stones act as a material medium between the human and the divine, as an alter for making offerings to a god that is not physically present or as an idol to worship as a symbol of divine presence. Stones can be memorial, marking a memory, occasion, or covenant. In the next lines of the poem, this memorializing aspect of stones appears in the background as the narrator refers to the biblical Jacob, who "under starry sky, / On stones his head lay – desert bones" (2.10.6-7). This specific passage refers to Genesis 28, in which Jacob turns this stony pillow into a consecrated pillar to honor God. However, stones were of course much more for Jacob than pillows and pillars. In Genesis 31, Jacob gathers stones to mark a covenant between him and his uncle, Laban:

> Now therefore come thou, let us make a covenant, I and thou; and let it be for a witness between me and thee. And Jacob took a stone, and set it up for a pillar. And Jacob said unto his brethren, Gather stones; and they took stones, and made an heap: and they did eat there upon the heap . . . And Laban said, This heap is a witness between me and thee this day. . . And Laban said to Jacob, Behold this heap, and behold this pillar, which I have cast betwixt me and thee: This heap be witness, and this pillar be

witness, that I will not pass over this heap to thee, and that thou shalt not pass over this heap and this pillar unto me, for harm. (Genesis 31:44-52)

As Stan Goldman details in *Melville's Protest Theism*, Jacob, especially as the figure who wrestles with God in Genesis 32, is of utmost importance for Melville. Jacob's gathering of stones to be a witness to a covenant would of course not be lost on Melville as he is writing about Jacob sleeping on stones under the starry sky in the desert. In this passage, the collection of stones not only act as a witness to a covenant between Jacob and Laban, but as witness, occupy a boundary or threshold between the two figures. The heap of stones stands in as both a union between the two figures, as well as a demarcation or limitation to ward against transgression. As witness, they affirm a new relationship and commitment between two people or parties, and at the same time they mark a boundary between these two. In this union, something must be held back and excluded that pertains to each person or party and that gives the notion of a covenant its gravity. A covenant can always be broken or remain unfulfilled.

This witnessing power attributed to stones comes forth explicitly just after his reference to Jacob in 2.10. As the narrator notes, stones provide a bedrock for biblical testimony itself:

> Moreover, as a thing profuse,
> Suggestive still in every use,
> On stones, still stones, the gospels dwell
> In lesson meet or happier parable. (*Clarel* 2.10.23-26)

A gospel, etymologically speaking, refers to an announcement of good tidings, and 'the gospels' are often interpreted as the message, teaching, or even biography of Christ himself. They are, in a sense, a testimony to the life, death, and teachings of Christ. However, as written documents, the gospels are often dated to several decades after the death of Christ, and as Michael G. Reddish claims, the persons responsible for the gospels as written documents were "almost certainly" not themselves eyewitnesses to the life and death of Christ (Reddish 13). There is a certain question here that arises about testimonial provenance and the veracity or trustworthiness of these written accounts. It is a question that Melville's narrator in *Clarel* responds to without explicitly raising the question itself: On what are we to base the truth, message, or story of the gospels and biblical scripture if not on the written accounts themselves? In *Clarel*, it is not a 'who,' but a 'what,' that offers a testimonial grounding for this written testimony:

> Attesting here the Holy Writ –
> In brook, in glen, by tomb and town
> In natural way avouching it –
> Behold the stones! And never one
> A lichen greens; and, turn them o'er –
> No worm – no life; but, all the more,
> Good witnesses. (2.10.27-33)

What avouches, or guarantees, the truth of the written word is not another more accurate or verifiable written text, but the "natural way" of the stony landscape that any traveler

can still experience on their pilgrimage through the Holy Land, an experience that verifies itself without reference to something external to itself.

Unlike a written text, the stones do not 'address' the other characters in a clear, articulate, intelligible voice that can be abstracted and reconstructed for further analysis, but 'affect' them both physically and spiritually as a force that speaks with an inarticulate human voice of the past. This voice is faint and contingent, uncertain and inscrutable. It is perhaps the voice of Christ, the gospel writers themselves, or the many unnamed and forgotten individuals and wanderers of the biblical and historical past that all encountered the stones of the Holy Land. Perhaps this is why the narrator tells us to "behold the stones" instead of "behold the man," a curious play on the famous *Ecce Homo* of Pontius Pilate in presenting Christ to the angry crowd before his crucifixion. In *Clarel*, an encounter with the lost voice(s) of the past is not in the written, biblical text, but in an encounter with the landscape. It is in an encounter with the landscape that one experiences the misery of this past to make itself heard or to bring itself into language. These voices are so impoverished, that their only hope to speak is in silence and muteness through the stones of landscape. In this way, the only way to behold the man is to behold the stones, for they are "good witnesses," and perhaps the only witnesses able to bear witness to these voices of the past.

As the narrator indicates, there is something about the very lifelessness of the stones that make them good witnesses. In turning over these stones, we will not find any hidden vegetation or insects crawling away upon the disturbance of their resting spot. The lifelessness of the stones, however, is not to indicate that these stones have no

connection or relation to life at all. The stones, as the narrator suggests, are "desert bones." They are pieces or fragments of geological skeletal remains, pointing to a past that has been dead, or forgotten, for a long time but nevertheless still leaves traces of itself behind. Right after Melville states the "barrenness of Judea" in his *Journal*, he continues to speak to this barrenness with anthropomorphic language, unable to fully remove this desert landscape from at least some semblance of humanity: "bones of rocks . . You see the anatomy – compares with ordinary regions as skeleton with living & rosy man. – So rubbishy, that no chiffonier could find any thing all over it. – *No moss as in other ruins – no grace of decay – no ivy – the unleavened nakedeness of desolation*" (*Journal* 137). The landscape, with its boney rocks and stones, exudes an anatomical or skeletal nakedness in comparison to the lush and vibrant landscape of, for instance, Thoreau's Walden Pond. The stony landscape is stripped down to the barrenness and nakedness of material existence, in which humanity is overwhelmed and thrown back upon its own possibilities for decay and desolation. Here, the lifelessness of the desert asserts its kinship with humanity, and speaks to the possibilities of lifelessness and non-existence inherent to human life itself. To behold the stones is to behold the man, namely, to behold this human truth of death and oblivion, which is exactly what makes the stones good witnesses. As witnesses, they are on the very threshold of life and lifelessness, of the living and the dead, as a skeletal monument to a past that is simply "too ancient" to comprehend. They bear witness to this misery of the past by affecting and interrupting those that they encounter, and especially those that are willing to listen and be hearers of their testimony.

After the narrator in canto 2.10 finishes describing the many uses and meanings of stones, as well as their fitness for witnessing, the pilgrims begin to engage in dialogue as they respond as possible hearers of testimony to the testimony of the stones. As we recall, the hearer of testimony is one who must have faith in the testimony, such that the individual is open to what this testimony bears witness to, as something that is perhaps beyond their horizon of understanding and challenges the limits of their imagination for what could possibly be true. Faith, in this sense, does not mean to simply affirm the testimony as 'true' or 'certain,' but to treat the testimony as possible to either accept or reject, and to occupy this position of the "perhaps" or "maybe." In 2.10, it is first the character of Glaucon that encounters the stones, though he will turn out to be a poor hearer of testimony, if at all. In the text, as the horses begin to have trouble walking on the stones, Glaucon remarks:

> "Alack the stones!
> Or be they pilgrims' broken bones
> Wherewith they pave the turnpikes here?
> Is this your sort of world, Mynheer? (*Clarel* 2.10.37-40)

Immediately after this comment, Glaucon breaks into a lighthearted and seemingly irreverent tune. The character of Glaucon, as Walter Bezanson notes, "symbolizes IRRESPONSIBLE AND HAPPY YOUTH, atheistic in attitude if not in belief. His deliberately rakish manner is emphasized by his light songs and his flippant remarks about the Holy Land" (Bezanson, Characters 539). For instance, in canto 2.3, Glaucon is seen attending to the stones and rocks of the Mar Saba cemetery and the Dead Sea as so

many trinkets or small items with monetary value, as opposed to revering these stones as physical symbols of great religious or spiritual importance. Yet, in 2.10, there is a moment before he breaks out into song that shows the stones having some kind of effect on him that is not superficial or lighthearted. This moment presents Glaucon with the possibility that the stones are not merely stones but the shattered and scattered bones of dead pilgrims that have come before them. In this moment, it is unclear if these "desert bones" are human or nonhuman, if they intimate the very kind of mortality that the Greek banker wants to avoid mention of, or if they are merely a symptom of a desolate and arid landscape. More than this, the stones present Glaucon with the possibility of reflecting on historical transmission, that he is one among many pilgrims from the past that has walked and suffered through the landscape, that the stones are the bones of other pilgrims from ages past and that they might literally pave the way for their journey in the present moment. Given the air of superficiality ascribed to the character of Glaucon, it should then not be surprising that the possibilities for such a disclosure foreclose themselves the instant they appear for him.

To be a hearer of testimony in this case requires the seriousness and attentiveness of someone like Rolfe, who is affected by the stones in such a way that brings about a biblical and historical reflection from the traveler. Before Rolfe's dialogue, the narrator notes a certain agency of the stones as that which attempts to "beguile" Rolfe like it did for Glaucon: "Rolfe likewise, if in other style, / Here sought that hard road to beguile" (*Clarel* 2.10.61-62). While Glaucon could not be receptive to such beguilement, Rolfe is not deterred by the various possibilities of what the "hard road" has to say. Initially,

Rolfe considers stones in their capability for biblical violence: "'The stone was man's first missile; yes, / Cain hurled it, or his sullen hand / Therewith made heavy'" (2.10.63-64).[13] While stones can be witnesses to the misery of death and oblivion at the heart of human existence, they are also considered in their practical use as a tool of death. This point was already raised by the narrator earlier in the canto:

> death too by stones
> The law decreed for crime; in spite
> As well, for taunt, or type of ban,
> . . . . . .
> By stones died Naboth; stoned to death
> Was Stephen meek: and Scripture saith,
> Against even Christ they took up stones. (*Clarel* 2.10.9-11, 20-22)

While Cain kills Abel perhaps out of envy or jealousy, stones can likewise be used to end the life of another due to some sort of legal, moral, or sacred violation. Stones can be crucial to the act of transgression as well as to the punishment for that transgression. In matters of death and violence, stones register across a wide spectrum of forms and motivations.

Rolfe, however, as a character that rarely narrows and holds himself in conversation to a one-sided point or position, continues to consider the figure of Cain as

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[13] In the King James version of the Bible, there is no mention of Cain using a stone or any other implement to kill his brother Abel. This is most likely an instance of one of Melville's characters filling in or supplementing the biblical narrative, much in the same way that Father Mapple does for the book of Jonah in *Moby-Dick*.

more than merely the bible's first killer, but as one who still affirms and historically influences a sense of divine reverence:

> Cain, confess,
>
> A savage was, although he planned
>
> His altar. Altars such as Cain's
>
> Still find we on far island-chains
>
> Deep mid the woods and hollows dark,
>
> And set off like the shittim Ark. (*Clarel* 2.10.65-70)

Rolfe carefully reminds his listeners that Cain is not solely defined by his one transgression, but is a figure who also set up his altar and made an offering to God before his act of violence. He still understands the importance of worship, sacrifice, and reverence before God, even if he has transgressed. Rolfe indicates that it is not only the lesson of divine punishment from Cain's killing of Abel that is passed down in history, but the importance of reverence itself before that which we hold to be divine or sacred. Not only do we find acts of violence repeated throughout history, we also find altars and places of worship in all corners of the world. Altars, of course, are on the list of 'stony' items that the narrator mentions in the opening lines of the canto. Stones then, for Rolfe, mark this variability of violence, retribution, and worship; as an agent of transgression, punishment for this transgression, and space of sacrifice and offering:

> Refrain from trespass; with black frown
>
> Each votary straight takes up his stone –
>
> As once against even me indeed:

I see them now start from their rocks

in malediction. (2.10.70-74)

As protectors or wards of what is sacred, such votaries, monks, or priests not only worship at their stone altars, but take up stones and rocks in defense and punishment for any kind of sacrilegious act or trespass upon what is held sacred.

Rolfe is closer here to a proper hearer of testimony than Glaucon in that he is able to hold open the possibility that the stones have something profound to bear witness to, and is not a mere inconvenience on the path they have to travel. Rolfe is open to the challenge of what Stan Goldman calls "dramatic *agon*," namely, "a dialog of oppositions, a deliberate intellectual and theological test of our ability to hold contesting ideas in the mind at once, rather than coming down hard in an absolutist way for any single voice or opinion" (Goldman 15). Rolfe is a character who is always thinking and conversing in transition and always in the process of working through opposing viewpoints. If the stones are witnesses that "attest" the "Holy Writ," Rolfe receives this testimony by reflecting on one of the oldest figures in biblical scripture, Cain, and the stone that was present, or at least implicated, in both his offering and transgression before God. This particular stone is not mentioned in scripture yet offers testimony to the truth found in the written account. In this instance, Cain is a voice from the biblical past, whose misery is borne witness to by the stones in the desert, and this testimony is heard by Rolfe on their pilgrimage in the present moment. Rolfe hears and articulates this misery in the form of death, violence, transgression, reverence, and the underlying

continuity and possibility of transmission between the present moment and a deep historical past.

Rolfe's complex faith as a hearer of testimony of the stones, his willingness to maintain many different viewpoints that can challenge one's own horizon of understanding, is perhaps best contrasted with the kind of rigid faith that Nehemiah displays in his reaction to the stony landscape. After some discussion between Rolfe and Derwent, Glaucon alarmingly notes that Nehemiah is clearing away the endless stones from the path:

> "Look, is he crazy? see him there!"
> The saint it was with busy care
> Flinging aside stone after stone,
> Yet feebly, nathless as he wrought
> In charge imposed though not unloved;
> While every stone that he removed
> Laid bare but more. (*Clarel* 2.10.188-194)

Nehemiah, perhaps more than any of the other pilgrims, has faith in the landscape of Holy Land. Yet this faith is not one that is open to challenging truths that go beyond his horizon of understanding. The landscape here never fails or interrupts the expectations that Nehemiah has as a Millenialist about Christ and the second coming. For instance, in canto 2.24, as the pilgrims reach the Jordan River Nehemiah drinks from the brackish and bitter waters and declares: "'As sugar sweet!'" (2.24.70), much to the confusion of Margoth. Nehemiah's faith is not open to the doubt, dejection, and physical stress that

the stones and desert landscape offers to some of the other pilgrims, such as Rolfe, Clarel, Vine, or Derwent. The rough edges and bitter trials of the Holy Land are smoothed out for him, and even by him, in his attempt to clear the stones to make way for Christ's return.

However, the presence of the stones is just as relentless and unyielding as Nehemiah's faith. While this is sometimes a trait that the other pilgrims respect and admire, it is what leads him to his death at the end of part II of *Clarel*. The brutal materiality of the desert ultimately wins as he is "O'erwrought by travel, long he lay / In febrile musings, life's decay" (*Clarel* 2.38.8-9), and sleep walks and drowns in the Dead Sea as he dreams of "New Jerusalem" (2.38.42). It is once again Rolfe who is able to observe Nehemiah as he clears away the stones in 2.10 and speaks to the irresolvable tension raised by his actions:

> "And shall we say
> That this is craze? or but, in brief,
> Simplicity of plain belief?
> The early Christians, how did they?
> For His return looked any day." (2.10.229-233).

Nehemiah displays both the kind of conviction and belief that Clarel desires for himself, as well as the apparent craze, delusion, and physical/psychological consequences that come from this conviction. To Rolfe, Nehemiah opens up the question for the pilgrims about the disposition of the "early Christians" that wandered the very same land as they do in their own journey in their present moment, and whether or not Nehemiah is

fulfilling the very same lived experience of pilgrims past. Does Nehemiah perhaps hear, understand, and engage these voices of the past in a way that the others cannot, or has he simply become ossified in his own belief? In any event, it is clear that Nehemiah cannot be a hearer of testimony, but rather, he is consumed by testimony. Unlike Rolfe, Nehemiah is not capable of receiving testimony in a way that challenges his belief or presuppositions about the very landscape he walks on. Instead of Glaucon's indifference or avoidance, or Margoth's unbelief, for Nehemiah, there is no possible way in which the testimony of the stones could be false. For him, there is no position of the 'perhaps' or 'maybe.'

As witnesses that give voice to a human misery that is found in the non-human world, the stones operate in the text as more than merely passive material objects that the pilgrims encounter in the desert landscape. In canto 2.10, they call out to Glaucon, Rolfe, and Nehemiah with the voice of misery. Though this voice is silent and muted, it has a discursive capacity in that it effects a dialogue between the characters of the text. As I have shown in sections one and two, the material world of *Clarel* is highly charged in its ability to affect the sensibilities of those that wander through it. To be a hearer of testimony then means that an individual is not only willing to engage this testimony on an intellectual level, but also more importantly open to the concrete and embodied experience of this testimony. To have this disposition of openness towards the material world is to understand the kinship between the human and the non-human in *Clarel*, that the stones, as desert bones, give voice to a misery that pertains to both the pilgrims and the desert landscape itself: death, decay, oblivion, as well as doubt, abandonment, and

forsakenness (as we will see in canto 2.11), all emerge from out of the non-human desert reserve and are borne witness to by the stones as a truth at the core of human existence. To treat the stones and the material landscape of the desert as mere objects in the natural world is to be no better than Margoth, who disenchants the material world as something void of all spiritual and existential traces. For Melville, those that walk through the desert are not subjects that observe material objects from a distance, but are human beings that are bound up and implicated in the desert landscape that was walked and encountered by generations and individuals both known and long forgotten. The stones, as subjects of testimony, give voice to this human misery encountered in the desert landscape since time immemorial.

The Desert Reserve: A Reading of Canto 2.11

After discussing the role of stones as the subject of testimony that performs the act of testimony, and the figures of Glaucon, Rolfe, and Nehemiah as a possible hearer of testimony, there remains a question as to what constitutes the last element of testimony in this schema, namely, the object/reserve of testimony. As subjects of testimony, to what exactly to these stones bear witness? Throughout this chapter I have suggested that this reserve involves the forgotten and silent human voices of the past that are so fragile and ephemeral that only these non-human stones are capable of testifying to their misery and linguistic impoverishment. Yet if this is the reserve, as what is held back, withdrawn, and unseen in its very presentation, what is the object of this object/reserve? In this last section of chapter four, I suggest that in reading canto 2.11, it

is the "waste space" of the desert itself that is the phenomenal object of the object/reserve that the stones bear witness to. In van der Heiden's account, the reserve is that from which both this phenomenal object appears, and from which testimony draws its strength. In this instance, stones, as witnesses in the desert landscape that the pilgrims encounter, gain their testimonial intensity and affect from out of this desert reserve/object. In "Bartleby," the formless, "austere reserve" of the titular character is marked by a misery that is exiled from language. In *Clarel*, the reserve/object of the desert waste space is likewise marked by a misery that is unable to bring itself into language. The stones in 2.10 attempt to give a voice to the misery that emerges out of the desert, first as a phenomenal object that appears to the pilgrims, and second as the reserve that conceals and withholds itself in the presentation of the object.

The desert as a reserve/object of testimony begins in Canto 2.11 with an account from the narrator about the dual experience of joy and forsakenness that an unnamed pilgrim can experience in the desert over the course of a single day. In the early hours of the morning, a pilgrim in the desert undergoes a profound aesthetic experience with the raw elements in the desert:

> Tho' frequent in the Arabian waste
> The pilgrim, up ere dawn of day,
> Inhale thy wafted musk, Cathay;
> And Adam's primal joy may taste,
> Beholding all the pomp of night
> Bee'd thick with stars in swarms how bright (*Clarel* 2.11.1-6).

A pilgrim in the desert, in the "Arabian waste," wakes up to a primordial experience that stuns the senses. One breathes in the strong odor of the desert air, tastes an original joy that calls back to the first biblical human, and sees the visually overwhelming brightness of the stars in their morning glory. What initially presents itself as an object for this pilgrim is the desert in its temporal and spatial fullness, harkening back to the joy of the first human, and the immense majesty of the cosmos. In this moment, it is a powerful feeling to be connected in such a way to the divine, to Adam, the first born created in God's image, and the universe, created by God himself.

However, the narrator's tone quickly changes as the pilgrim's day continues:

> Tho' brisk at morn the pilgrim start,
> Ere long he'll know in weary hour
> Small love of deserts, if their power
> Make to retreat upon the heart
> Their own forsakenness. (2.11.8-12)

The invigorating human experience of the divine in the morning is quickly followed by divine abandonment. As the sun rises and the heat of the day takes hold upon the traveling pilgrim, weariness sets in and majesty is replaced with loneliness. What remained concealed behind the incredible experience of a proximity with the divine, is a concomitant forsakenness. What remains hidden, as reserve, behind the desert that appears to the pilgrim as divine object is in fact the misery of abandonment. First, this misery marks the desert itself as forsaken. Though it is the Holy Land where figures known and unknown of the biblical past were supposed to have walked and encountered

God, the desert itself, like Christ on the cross, has since been forsaken by God. It is the "power" of the desert that lends itself towards a "retreat upon the heart" and to be open to the possibility of not only God's abandonment from the desert, but that humanity itself is likewise forsaken and alone, and that perhaps it has always been this way. The forsakenness and abandonment in the desert reserve speak to the misery of humanity: the mortality of humanity without the promise of an afterlife, that our bodies will decay and our bones will become indistinguishable from the stones in the desert, and that we will be forgotten entirely to any historical memory.

This "power" of the desert, I suggest, can refer to the testimonial power of the stones of the previous canto as witnesses to this misery of the desert reserve. Their affective and discursive capacity in offering testimony to the pilgrims in *Clarel* is necessary for the possibility of interrupting their horizon of understanding and allowing them the opportunity to be hearers of testimony. In this particular schema, where stones are the subjects of testimony, and the desert is the object/reserve of testimony, it is telling that canto 2.11 does not offer any comments or dialogue from the pilgrims in *Clarel*, but only from the quasi-omnipresent/omniscient narrator of the poem. While the stones, as subjects of testimony in canto 2.10, affect and generate conversation about their meaning and presence in the desert, canto 2.11 focuses on the desert itself. In 2.11, the desert appears as a phenomenal object for the lone unnamed pilgrim, but lacks the necessary intermediary of the stones to take up the threshold between the engaged pilgrims in *Clarel* (hearers of testimony) and the misery that marks the reserve of the desert.

This misery of abandonment and forsakenness presents itself as a mysterious doubt in the desert that ushers forth a plea for testimony and the demand that one hears this testimony:

Darwin quotes

> From Shelley, that forever floats
> Over all desert places known,
> Mysterious doubt – an awful one.
> He quotes, adopts it. Is it true?
> Let instinct vouch; let poetry
> Science and instinct here agree,
> For truth requires strong retinue. (*Clarel* 2.11.13-19)

This reference here to Shelley's 1816 poem, "Mont Blanc," runs as follows in the original: "None can reply – all seems eternal now. / This wilderness has a mysterious tongue / Which teaches awful doubt" (Shelley 3.75-77). In *Clarel*, 'the wilderness' is often a reference to the desert landscape of the Holy Land and is the title of part II of *Clarel* during which the pilgrims travel from Jerusalem to the Jordan River and the Dead Sea. In both passages, an awful, mysterious doubt seems to be inherent or native to the desert itself. This doubt, as mysterious, is doubt in a profound sense, in that one is perhaps not even sure of that which one doubts. The wilderness itself speaks with a mysterious tongue about a doubt that is just as mysterious. What speaks is exiled or banned from language, whose voice is inarticulate but nevertheless demands to be heard. In response to the question posed by *Clarel*'s narrator, "Is it true?", there is no clear

answer but a further call to attend to the question itself, for which the narrator suggests a "strong retinue" of instinct, poetry, and science. Shelley's poem, after these lines about the mystery of the wilderness, has a similar response: "not understood / By all, but which the wise and great and good / Interpret, or make felt, or deeply feel" (Shelley 3.82-84). In each instance, *Clarel*'s narrator and Shelley's "Mont Blanc" call for the virtues of a proper hearer of testimony, one who is aesthetically, intellectually, and existentially open to the irruptive capacity of testimony.

This mysterious effect of the desert as something that can invoke an aesthetic experience of both exhilarating joy and the dread of doubt is a tension the narrator in 2.11 will continue to investigate as a primary source of irresolvable questions for those that wander the wilderness in the Holy Land. It is in such "waste places" which exude "A charm, a beauty from the heaven / Above them, and clear air divine" (*Clarel* 2.11.21-22), that likewise imbues the "oceanic sense" (2.11.37) from the "Pillars of sand which whirl about / Or arc along in colonnade" (2.11.39-40), and that descends upon a caravan of wanderers as if they were "In crippled disaster of retreat / From battle" (2.11.47-8). The charm of the desert is often grounded in danger and disaster, a common theme that Melville will explore about the ocean in *Moby-Dick*, for example. The narrator then offers a few examples of desert lands that continues this theme of charm and destruction. Sinai, for instance, is the biblical location where Moses is supposed to have received the ten commandments from God and is a site of awe before such divine revelation. Yet it is also a site that strikes terror in those that approach such divinity too closely:

> Ever a terror wrapped its crown;

Never did shepherd dare to draw

Too nigh (Josephus saith) for awe

Of one, some ghost or god austere–

Hermit unknown, dread mountaineer. (2.11.50-54)

The relevant passage from Flavius Josephus' *The Antiquities of the Jews* reads: ". . . nay, indeed, it [Mt. Sinai] cannot be looked at without pain of the eyes: and besides this, it was terrible and inaccessible, on account of the rumour that passed about, that God dwelt there" (Bezanson, Explanatory Notes 596). Sinai, then, is marked by a divine terror that both draws pilgrims towards its divine majesty yet repels them at the same time with its overwhelming magnificence. Though only a "rumour," no one doubts the existence or magnitude of a divine presence in the desert. Similarly, in reference to the Egyptian desert and pyramids, there is a seemingly undeniable presence of an ancient historical moment:

Thou shadow vast

Of Cheops' indissoluble pile,

Typ'st thou the imperishable Past

In empire posthumous and reaching sway

Projected far across to time's remotest day? (*Clarel* 2.11.57-61)

If we recall Melville's own comments about the pyramids as something incomprehensible and incommensurable, as something that seems both human and inhuman, these lines suggest that this impression emerges from something imperishable and everlasting. The immensity of the "indissoluble pile" of stones that constitute the

pyramids is undeniable, and is a monument to a past historical moment that will seemingly never be washed away. Though it reaches "time's remotest day," this permanence of the "Past" demonstrated by the pyramids is nevertheless shrouded in mystery.

These examples, however, are different from the desert of the Holy Land in that they have a "redeeming" quality of an undeniable presence of a divine, magnificent, or profound meaning: "But curb. – Such deserts in air-zone / Or object lend suggestive tone, / Redeeming them" (*Clarel* 2.11.62-64). In the wilderness between Jerusalem and the Dead Sea is a desert that does not admit of the same holy presence:

> For Judah here–
> Let Erebus her rival own:
> 'Tis horror absolute–severe,
> Dead, livid, honey-combed, dumb, fell–
> A caked depopulated hell (2.11.64-68).

Instead of a feeling of terror or awe in the face of something supernatural, here one experiences an unusual mix of horror, anger, and silence in a dead and depopulated landscape that reminds one more of hell than of heaven or a New Jerusalem. If such a landscape were created by a supernatural being, it was one created with a "visage in significance / Of settled anger terrible" (2.11.70-71). A world created and formed out of a terrible anger and stamped with a severity that suggests a world that was not created for humanity to flourish in. It is the thought that this particular landscape is one of death

instead of life, and one of meaningless pain and struggle instead of the fulfillment of a covenant between God and humanity, one that shakes each pilgrim in "horror absolute."

Given the intensity of this experience of horror and doubt in the Holy Land, the narrator poses the irresolvable question as to why this particular desert landscape is considered holy at all:

> But why does man
> Regard religiously this tract
> Cadaverous and under ban
> Of blastment? (*Clarel* 2.11.78-81).

This desert corpse that seems to only reveal its own death and barrenness, is yet still considered sacred and worthy of protection and reverence. The narrator attempts to provide a mythological analogy to this contradictory position:

> Nay, recall the fact
> That in the pagan era old
> When bolts, deemed Jove's, tore up the mound,
> Great stones the simple peasant rolled
> And built a wall about the gap
> Deemed hallowed by the thunder-clap.
> So here: men here adore this ground
> Which doom hath smitten. 'Tis a land
> Direful yet holy–blest tho' banned. (2.11.81-89)

For the narrator, this hallowed worth ascribed to harsh and devastating landscape is as old as mythology itself. In this instance, when the earth is torn up by a divine, immortal force, the mortal human relies on the stone to cover over this now holy place. In this way, the stone becomes the witness to this devastating power and occupies the threshold between the human and the divine, attesting to the reserve of this God-like strength to mere mortals who cannot approach such power without their own destruction. As the narrator suggests, it is likewise the case here in the desert of the Holy Land. This land that is destroyed, razed, and almost uninhabitable for humanity is still considered to be a site that bears a blessing from God. Instead of one great stone that is rolled over the desert, the desert is inundated and showered with rocks and stones of all shapes and sizes. These desert bones, whether they are altars, monuments, or the living rock, scour the land and continue to attest to what is held in reserve in the desert itself.

As I have suggested throughout this chapter, what is held in reserve in the desert, what is borne witness to by the stones, is the misery of death, decay, and oblivion as an existential truth of humanity itself, and which are spoken from out of the silent voices of a forgotten past. In all three sections of this chapter there is an intimacy that develops between a pilgrim in the Holy Land and the materiality of the landscape itself. The dust, stones, and rocks in the desert blur any kind of sharp distinction between the human and material world. These objects are not reduced to a crude materiality, but follow, speak to, and inform the pilgrims with a truth about human finitude that appears as something both human and inhuman. What seems inhuman about one's experience in the desert is the possibility of death and non-existence. More than this, it is the possibility to be

forgotten in the memory of following generations, and for the pilgrims in *Clarel*, to be abandoned or forsaken by God who can no longer guarantee some kind of universal truth or life after death. The port of Jaffa, the pyramids, the living rock, the infinite stones in the desert are all witnesses, perhaps the last and only witnesses, to an inarticulate voice of the past and to a misery withheld in the desert reserve.

It is these voices of the past, biblical or otherwise, that disturb and terrify the characters in *Clarel*. It is the possibility that this misery is not a new misery of the modern world of the nineteenth century, but rather the same misery that those individuals encountered in their own time. Death, decay, doubt, and the possibility of oblivion is, and has always been, the misery encountered in the desert landscape, attested to by the stones, and heard by those who are willing to listen. This misery attested to by the stones is the possibility that such a brutal and direful world was created out of anger and is not suitable for humanity, or that there is not, and never was, a divine presence in a land considered holy and sacred by the world's major religions. The many debates between the pilgrims in *Clarel* regarding faith, religious creed, democracy, sexuality, science and Protestantism, are all modern iterations of a misery that is as old as dialogue itself, namely, the crisis in the possibilities for truth and meaning in a world that presents itself as meaningless, abandoned, and forsaken; where creed and tradition can simply be destroyed or forgotten throughout the ages. This cry of misery is perhaps the oldest and most ancient misery that emerges from out of an incomprehensible past, but at the same time, it is a misery that is buried in the heart of human existence itself. These voices of misery that are both present and withheld in the desert can no longer be attested to in a

human voice or written text, but can only be witnessed by that which has remained since the very beginnings of such misery, namely, the stones. It is the materiality of the landscape itself that must take up the charge of bearing witness to this misery, and it is the responsibility of those that wander through this landscape to be hearers of this testimony, allowing the stones to interrupt one's horizon of understanding, and to have faith in the disclosive possibilities of this testimony. This is perhaps one way to interpret that last lines of canto 2.11 about the status of the desert as both blessed and direful: "But to pure hearts it yields no fear; / And John, he found wild honey here" (*Clarel* 2.11.90-91). Here, in a reference to Mark 1:6, John the Baptist is no stranger to life in the desert: "And John was clothed with camel's hair, and with a girdle of a skin about his loins; and he did eat locusts and wild honey" (Mark 1:6). As a hearer of testimony, one should stay open to all possibilities of intellectual and existential nourishment in this barren landscape, from death bringing locusts to the sweetness of wild honey.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

In considering Melville's *Clarel* as a work of philosophical testimony, this thesis continues to affirm *Clarel* as a crucial text not only for literary studies and Melville scholarship, but for continental philosophy as well. In focusing primarily on *Moby-Dick* or "Bartleby," contemporary philosophers run the risk of avoiding Melville's philosophically rich and mature text in *Clarel*. As Melville scholarship and academic philosophy continue to develop an interdisciplinary relationship with edited volumes such as *Melville Among the Philosophers* and *Melville's Philosophies*, *Clarel* will become a text that scholars in philosophy can no longer ignore. In bringing the works of Hurh, Williams, Arsić, and Jollimore together with van der Heiden's analysis of "Bartleby" and elements of philosophical testimony, this thesis pushes the notion of philosophical testimony into the desert landscape of the poem, and attempts to push *Clarel* further into the scholarly landscape of academic philosophy and literary studies.

As a great philosophical thinker, Melville's prose and poetry have always engaged the deep ontological and epistemological questions at their borders and edges, exposing both the drive for philosophical truth or universality, and the failure to ever achieve it. He is, as Nathaniel Hawthorne writes, a man who

> will never rest until he gets hold of a definite belief. It is strange how he persists – and has persisted ever since I knew him, and probably long before – in wandering to-and-fro over these deserts, as dismal and

> monotonous as the sand hills amid which we were sitting. He can neither believe, nor be comfortable in his unbelief; and he is too honest and courageous not to try to do one or the other. (Hawthorne 432-433)

As an uncompromising writer, Melville's *Clarel* is the very epitome of this struggle to continue to navigate irresolvable philosophical and theological positions. This struggle is a common theme identified in monographic works of *Clarel*. In Joseph G. Knapp's *Tortured Synthesis: The Meaning of Melville's Clarel*, it is the "mystery of endurance" that Clarel learns at the end of his journey, one that is not caught up in "acquiring new truths" but begins in the lessons learned by suffering and experience, namely, that we are all cross bearers: "The cross may be a torment to the heart, but to the head it is meaningless and absurd, and that is why the lessons learned from endurance are infra-conceptual and infra-verbal. They cannot be learned from books or from others; they can be learned only in the experience itself" (Knapp 113). This emphasis on experience is likewise central to Stan Goldman's notion of "protest theism" that emerges in *Clarel*. For Goldman, the only kind of faith that is present in *Clarel* is not a doctrine or dogma, nor the affirmation of only one true belief, but rather protest theism is an "experiential faith" concerned with the "actual human experience of faith" (Goldman 130-131). For Goldman, what is opposed to this faith is "heartlessness" or an "unreceptive, callous human nature" (164, 160). This callousness is akin to how William Potter, in *Melville's Clarel and the Intersympathy of Creeds*, describes the monomaniac character of Nathan: "Nathan's ferocious retreat into orthodoxy becomes a means to escape the overwhelming complexities and ultimate meaninglessness of the contemporary world" (Potter 81).

Potter's articulation of the theme of the "tempered heart" is one that requires each believer "to both face and endure the hardships of the world" (82). Like Knapp and Goldman, the tempered heart is one that must undergo the "crucible of experience," and cannot be reduced to "Nehemiah's blind faith, Margoth's dogmatism Mortmain's defeated resignation, and Derwent's 'easy skim'" (97).

If the mystery of endurance, protest theism, and the tempered heart, all speak to the role of experience that is necessary for any kind of spiritual or philosophical transformation, my thesis claims that this experience is first, an experience with the materiality of the desert landscape, and second, that this experience is one of philosophical testimony that bears witness to the human voices of misery from out of a forgotten past. In chapter two, I showed how the desert landscape itself is crucial for these authors as a source of epistemological and ontological doubt, one that pushes the more receptive characters in the poem into an irresolvable dialectical struggle that does not result in any kind of absolute or certain truth. By introducing misery and testimony in chapter three, I showed how this particular philosophical framework can shed light on how the characters in *Clarel* experience or encounter the desert landscape in its radicality. In chapter four, I claimed that *Clarel* then pushes this notion of testimony to its limits in considering the subject of testimony and the act of testimony to be in the desert landscape itself, in the stones, and not in any particular 'human' character in the text.

The misery encountered in the desert, as the reserve/object of this testimony, is borne witness to by the stones. This testimony of the stones, however, is not something

utterly devoid of human traces. As I have claimed, they are marked by forgotten voices of an ancient past that likewise encountered the stones and misery of the Holy Land. The stones have always been there, before any written account, and are the only possible witnesses to the misery of the desert. Because this voice of misery that emerges from the stones is not a living, breathing, human voice of one of the pilgrims in the text, the testimony of the stones becomes much more precarious and contingent than the kind of testimony of the narrator in "Bartleby." The stones speak in a language that is silent and unwritten, and bear witness to an impoverished and inarticulate voice that is always on the precipice of oblivion. In this way, it is a testimony that must be experienced and undergone without mediation and must be heard with the faith of a proper hearer of testimony.

Bringing van der Heiden's work into conversation with *Clarel* then contributes to several important questions in contemporary continental philosophy. Influenced by thinkers such as Jacques Derrida, Giorgio Agamben, Jean-François Lyotard, Paul Ricouer, Martin Heidegger, and Hans-Georg Gadamer, van der Heiden engages themes that are central to philosophical hermeneutics, existential-phenomenology, and deconstruction. In each of these areas of philosophical research, there are a set of crucial questions that revolve around the role of language for interpreting and understanding ourselves and the world around us. For Heidegger and Gadamer, language is that which allows for interpretation and understanding to take place at all.[14] For Gadamer

[14] Key texts that speak to these concerns on language in philosophical hermeneutics include Heidegger's "Letter on Humanism" and Gadamer's *Truth and Method.*

especially, to think of something that is 'prelinguistic' is something that cannot, or has not, been brought into the world of language and understanding. In this way, to consider the stones as subjects of testimony pushes the boundary of what can be considered linguistic or communicative, as well as brings the question of prelinguisticality into new relief for philosophical hermeneutics.

For Derrida, coming out of a structuralist and post-structuralist background, language is often fraught and even grounded in its own impossibility and continual state of deferment. *Clarel* is likewise grounded in doubt, uncertainty, and even impossibility. Yet it is likewise grounded in hope and faith for philosophical, theological, or existential meaning to emerge or fulfill itself, even if this meaning is one that is not certain or absolute. Even in the face of oblivion, the stones as subjects of testimony still bear witness to an inarticulate voice of the past. In this way, they continue to hold open the possibility that the present can still encounter these voices of the past, even if those voices speak from out of their own linguistic impoverishment. Oblivion is always possible, but perhaps this very possibility is what is borne witness to by the stones in the desert, and is the voice of misery from out of the past that calls out to every traveler and pilgrim in the Holy Land to attend to.

Aside from its implications for contemporary philosophical research, considering *Clarel* as a work of philosophical testimony contributes to other crucial considerations surrounding *Clarel* scholarship. Some scholars, such as Bryan C. Short and Samuel Otter, have written influential essays focusing on Melville's poetic form and craft in *Clarel*. Others, such as Nina Baym and Warren Rosenberg, have focused on questions

of gender and sexuality in the poem. Perhaps the most dominant themes in periodical studies of *Clarel* in the last twenty years concern questions of race, ethnicity, transnationalism, and cosmopolitanism in the poem. Most notably, Hilton Obenzinger's *American Palestine: Melville, Twain, and the Holy Land Mania* and Malini Johar Schueller's *U.S. Orientalisms* read *Clarel* as both inheriting orientalist prejudices and subverting them, and consider Melville as a figure that was challenging various imperialist and expansionist assumptions of his time (Yothers, *Melville's Mirrors* 162).

One particular example in which philosophical testimony is relevant for these emerging interests in *Clarel* scholarship can be seen in relation to Obenzinger's 2011 article, "Melville, Holy Lands, and Settler-Colonial Studies." In this article Obenzinger explores questions surrounding "culturally imposed limitations" involving interpretations of *Clarel* and as well as "other books inspired by travel to the Middle East" ("Settler-Colonial Studies" 153). These questions include:

> How do we understand the authenticity of shrines and conflicting archaeological claims? What was the texture of actual lives of the people? What of travelers to Jerusalem from Muslim countries, from Mecca, Baghdad, and Marrakesh? How was the local economy affected by the growing American and European travel business? It is possible to answer such questions only if research were to expand to include archives in libraries, churches, mosques, and synagogues in the region, studied by scholars with knowledge of Arabic, Turkish, and Hebrew. Such research requires us to cross borders that today are blocked by unresolved

> conflicts; we need to develop cross-cultural understandings of American literature and its role in the Middle East by also understanding the development of Arabic, Turkish, and Hebrew histories and literatures. It means collaboration with scholars from the region and the U.S. without the orientalist assumptions still ingrained in American culture. (153)

These questions and affirmations of methodological concerns speak to the very principles one finds in philosophical testimony. Obenzinger's call for research and collaboration requires not only the knowledge, skill, and practical wherewithal to engage many different languages and cultures, but demands a disposition or attunement of reserve and reverence in the face of perhaps unfamiliar social/economic/political/religious landscapes, languages, literatures, and both written and personal testimonial accounts. It requires the 'faith' of a hearer of testimony, such that one allows one's horizon of understanding to be interrupted, for something to appear beyond one's beliefs or preconceptions about the world, and to occupy the space of the 'perhaps' or the 'maybe.' Likewise, what is implied in this call for scholarly research is not merely an intellectual engagement, but one that calls for the kind of concrete and embodied experience that is emphasized in both philosophical testimony and the text of *Clarel*. For Obenzinger, it is necessary to learn and speak a new language and live within in a particular community, to go and study in their archives and libraries, to perhaps worship in their churches and mosques, and to even cross borders and boundaries that hold back flourishing conversation. It is a very real call for a pilgrimage that not only requires intellectual skill and ability, but to cast off the "bookish vapors"

(*Clarel* 1.1.68), to encounter these worlds through one's own lived experience as a hearer of testimony that is willing and open to undergo both an intellectual and existential transformation.

As a work of philosophical testimony, *Clarel* marks the importance of lived, concrete experience that is crucial for scholars across philosophical and literary backgrounds that engage the philosophical contours of Melville's poem. From the ontological and epistemological doubt that emerges in the works of Hurh and Arsić, and the role of embodied and aesthetic experience in Williams and Jollimore, to the mystery of endurance, protest theism, and the tempered heart of Knapp, Goldman, and Potter, scholars have always pointed to Melville's emphasis on a very real, material encounter with the world and others in *Clarel*. To consider *Clarel* as a work of philosophical testimony not only shares this insight, but brings into relief the possibilities and impossibilities of language to mediate this experience. With philosophical testimony, to encounter the philosophical significance of *Clarel* is to encounter the limits of language itself and its capacity to account for the misery of human existence. To bear witness to the possibility of death and oblivion that emerges from the voices of an ancient and forgotten past requires a physical encounter with the landscape. The stones, as good witnesses, are the ones that attempt to give voice to this misery, and invite the pilgrims to hear this unwritten, inaudible testimony. Reading *Clarel* as a work of philosophical testimony then calls for current philosophical and literary scholarship to take into consideration what is unspoken and unwritten, of what is held in reserve in the text itself,

as that which informs and generates the many questions and concerns that emerge in the poem.

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[i] While the most recent publication of *Clarel* appears in the Library of America's *Herman Melville*: *Complete Poems* (2019), I will cite and refer to the 1991 Northwestern University Press/Newberry Library edition due to its extensive editorial appendix and current authoritative status amongst scholars. As indicated in the introduction of this thesis, other editions include: *Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land.* Edited by Hershel Parker. Northwestern University Press, 2008; *Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land.* Edited by Walter E. Bezanson. Hendricks House, 1960; *The Works of Herman Melville.* Constable and Company, 1922-24; *Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land*. G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1876.