



Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land

Herman Melville

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Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land (1876) is an epic poem by American writer Herman Melville, published in two volumes. Clarel is the longest poem in American literature, stretching to almost 18,000 lines (longer even than European classics such as the Iliad, Aeneid and Paradise Lost). As well as for its great length, Clarel is notable for being the major work of Melville's later years. Clarel, a young theology student whose belief has begun to waver, travels to Jerusalem to renew his faith in the sites and scenes of Jesus Christ's mortal ministry. He stays in a hostel run by Abdon, the Black Jew — a living representation of Jerusalem. Clarel is initially amazed by the religious diversity of Jerusalem; he sees Jews, Protestants, Catholics, Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists walking its streets and recognizes their common faith in divinity. Clarel also senses a kinship with an Italian youth and Catholic doubter named Celio, whom he sees walking in the distance, but does not take the initiative and greet him. When Celio dies shortly thereafter, Clarel feels he may have passed up an opportunity to regain his faith.

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